

# What Happened to Everything I Learned in College?

## Examining experienced early childhood educator's ideas about professionalism in PEI

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### Purpose

Despite common policy moves in a growing number of countries to raise quality and visibility of early years services through the introduction of national curricular frameworks (Oberhuemer, 2013; OECD, 2011), conceptualisations of early childhood professionals remain distinctly variegated (Harwood, Klopper, Oberhuemer, 2005; Osanyin, & Vanderlee, 2012). Recent research suggest that there has been a heightened shift in the expectations of early childhood educators qualifications and education with an increasing emphasis on the ability to be creative within a play-based pedagogy, and to situate their practice within 21<sup>st</sup> Century theoretical frameworks that did not learn about in training (Kilderry, 2014). There is a suggestion that in light of significant policy changes and perceived shift in demands on educators in Prince Edward Island, educators may be experiencing severe imposter syndrome leading to feelings of uncertainty about their profession (Bruno, Gonzalez-Mena, Hernandez, & Sullivan, 2013). **The purpose of this project** was to conduct a thorough research review; and to unpack the professional experiences and notions of professionalism that seasoned educators in the field hold as a result of this policy shift over the past ten years in PEI.

### Theoretical Framework

This project was informed by socio-cultural theories of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that suggest that creating learning communities is a useful way to engage in professional learning (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008). Similar theories of professional learning suggest that professional learning must be relevant, context based, and have a practical focus to be effective (McGregor, Hooker, Wise, & Devlin, 2010). In addition, research suggests learning communities have additional benefits, such as a revived sense of positive professional identity and a decrease in feelings of isolation (Le Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Roach O'Keefe, 2010).

### Methodology

The intent of this project to examine what themes emerged from a professional learning community that was cultivated as a workshop series and subsequent in-depth interviews Data was generated for analysis in two phases: (1) through a professional learning workshop where an interview matrix was used to gather a large amount of information from participants in a short amount of time; build dialogue, and explore notions of professionalism and funds of knowledge; (2) using the results from the interview matrix, an in-depth interview protocol was developed and conducted with 11/12 educators using purposive sampling. Member checking occurred twice, after each phase (see Figure 1. Methodological Process). Analysis includes a content and thematic analysis (Babbie, 2010; Neuendorf, 2017) for information gleaned from the interview matrix, in-depth interviews, as well as the researchers' field notes and journals.

Figure 1. Methodological Process



### Educational Significance

In the short term, the findings from this project will inform (1) the design of innovative professional learning opportunities for early childhood educators in Canada; and (2) contribute to the literature on occupational stress for early childhood educators (Wagner et al., 2012). In the long term, the findings from this project will add to the body of research that has been funded by the ECDA and contribute to the knowledge surrounding professionalism of early childhood educators in Prince Edward Island and Canada.

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