Education and Training as Factors that Affect
Recruitment and Retention of Staff in
Early Childhood Care Programs

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Introduction

There are several research studies that confirm what has been known in the early childhood field for many years - that the early childhood educator is the key influence in the quality of the relationship and interactions with the children. Quality of care is a direct result of quality relationships and interaction, and quality relationships and interaction are a direct result of having trained, qualified early childhood educators, therefore, the quality of a child care service is a direct result of recruiting and retaining qualified early childhood educators. Turnover in staff of early childhood centres is therefore a critical concern because of the direct disruption in the care and the relationships that the children experience when an educator leaves her/his job. Therefore the challenge to attract and retain suitable and qualified educators is of utmost importance to the level of quality that a child care program can offer. This paper will explore the factors that relate education and training in the early childhood field to the issues of recruitment and retention.

Qualifications affect the quality of care-

You Bet I Care! (2000) states, “Research has shown that both overall levels of education and Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)-specific training are among the most important variables - if not the most important variables - in the provision of quality child care” (p. 49). Citing literature in Canada and United States in addition to their own findings, Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange, and Tougas found, “adults who have post-secondary education tend to be more responsive with children and to provide them with stimulating activities that are appropriate for their developmental level. Research also demonstrates that these desirable teacher behaviours are even more likely when the individual’s post-secondary education includes course work related to child development and early childhood education. People with this type and level of educational background know how to plan appropriate educational and caring environments for young children. They use the kinds of questioning, listening and reflecting strategies that facilitate children’s expressive and receptive language development. They understand children’s social, emotional and cognitive development and are able to recognize and exploit ‘teachable moments’” (p. 36).

Educational institutions play a key role in preservice and inservice educational opportunities in early childhood care and education. The findings of these studies indicate that the intended outcomes of college and university programs that offer Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are positive i.e., that individuals demonstrate the knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to support learning and caring environments, are positive. In particular, in You Bet I Care! (2000) Goelman, Doherty, Lero, LaGrange and Tougas found that staff who worked with preschool-aged children who had more years of ECCE specific education were more sensitive toward the children (p. 77). They also found that those working with all age groups who had ECCE specific education, contribute significantly to a program’s level of quality (p. 62). However, at the same time that the overall educational levels of staff have increased to 70.8% in 1998 from 58% cited in Caring for a Living (1991), there still remains “more than a quarter of teaching staff (28.6%) with less than a two-year credential” (Doherty et al., p. 39). According to Alan Pence and Sandra Griffin, two Canadian experts, “the development of entry-level competence to work in child care requires at least two years of post-secondary ECCE training” (Doherty et al., p. 36).
With the importance of qualified teaching staff in child care programs established, early childhood care programs are challenged by the current retention and recruitment crisis that is present in most of our provinces and territories. There are several factors within training and education that interact together from both the field perspective and the institutional perspective that may play a role in the issues of recruitment and retention. This paper will explore:

- entrance requirements for recruitment of new students to training programs;
- accessibility of educational opportunities and cost of tuition;
- prior learning assessment and recognition;
- complexity of the curriculum;
- field practice and mentoring;
- core and general education - transferability of skills to a variety of settings, transferability of credits, career mobility;
- compensation for qualifications; and
- contextual factors: recognition of qualifications, government regulation, professional support.

Entrance Requirements for Recruitment of Potential Students to ECCE Programs

Recruitment of new students into post-secondary ECCE programs is a key consideration in the child care field. In *Current Trends and Issues in ECCE Training* (1997), a report based on 14 key informant interviews from college faculty across the country, admissions policies were considered a serious, ongoing issue. J. Kunderman stated that the trend is to determine some measure of “human talent” and commitment to working with young children prior to acceptance, in addition to secondary school completion (p. 12). Although the institutions generally implement a “first-come - first served” admissions policy, faculty who were interviewed felt an obligation to the profession to process candidates through personal or group interviews, orientation sessions, volunteer hours in a child care setting, or some evidence of their writing skills.

Saracho and Spodek (1983) state,

“There exists a wide variety of complex attributes which support personal suitability when selecting candidates for teacher preparation. These include: warmth, sensitivity, effective interpersonal communication skills, a love of learning, enthusiasm, patience, high motivation and the ability to enjoy and encourage children” (p. 12).

Howie and Strom (1987) raise a further consideration for educational programs relevant to the issue of effective selection based on their experience

“the formulation of criteria for selection must include consideration of relevant and accurate factual information about: a) the specific personal qualities which appear to be related to effective, humane teaching; and b) the modifiability of these qualities in education programs”(p. 2).

The majority of educators in the child care system hold diploma-level education, a two year program which is not a very long time to bring about significant change in personal characteristics and is therefore an important element in the recruitment and selection of new students into ECCE programs. The educational institution has responsibility for ensuring fair, equitable access to programs, yet in its preparation of students to work in early childhood education, it has a dual responsibility to the field to ensure that the students who are selected for entrance into programs will also demonstrate appropriate
attitudes toward children and families while placed in college-determined practicum sites during their studies.

In the report, *Our Child Care Workforce, From Recognition to Remuneration* (1998), some supervisors, managers and owners of centre-based child care facilities stated that not all ECCE graduates have the appropriate attributes for working in the occupation. Concern was expressed that some students do not adequately appreciate the nature of the work and do not have the personal characteristics necessary for working in child care - particularly a child orientation and respect for children and their families. Key informants in this study suggested that student screening processes are lacking and that a system is needed for filtering people who apply to post-secondary ECCE programs, based on both academic and personal criteria (p. 105).

Nationally, the administration policies of colleges and universities are determined autonomously and vary considerably within programs, institutions and in provinces/territories. Most post-secondary educational institutions require secondary school completion as a minimum academic requirement with allowances for mature students to be accepted with some form of demonstrated equivalency on a standardized achievement test. Students who have previous post-secondary education at the college or university level are generally given some level of exemption from course work or practicum relevant to their previous studies. Students with work experience may be able to access prior learning assessment that can result in demonstration of entrance criteria, and in many cases credit level competence. Nationally, the administration policies of colleges and universities are determined autonomously and vary considerably within programs, institutions, and in provinces/territories.

There are two main groups of students in post-secondary ECCE programs:

- *preservice students* who complete secondary school and view early childhood education as a career choice either because they feel that they have the personal suitability, or because they feel that they have enjoyed caring for children informally and feel that it is a job at which they can be successful; and
- *continuing education students* who are currently practising in the field and want to upgrade and/or formalize their qualifications. These two groups of students apply for entrance from very differing perspectives and would require different considerations around delivery and field practice/practicum.

In *Our Child Care Workforce, from Recognition to Remuneration* (1998) students reported that they had learned about ECCE program opportunities in haphazard ways and that early childhood education is presented as a career option only if there are no other possibilities (p. 105). In one college experience, the student counselor introduced the ECCE program to secondary school students and followed it with a comment, "It’s a great program if you like little kids and don’t mind earning minimum wage when you graduate (followed by a laugh)." These are indications that educational institutions, professional child care organizations, and governments must work together to ensure that systematic information is provided to potential students. The secondary school is a place where efforts should be made to have accurate and attractive information for both students and counselors on the career opportunities and income levels, personal suitability, and the complexity of the course work. As well, they need to know about practicum demands of the diploma level program and characteristics about the work of child care. Students who
Students who need special supports for learning in ECCE programs also need to make informed decisions about their potential to enter and be successful in the work force beyond their education. More effective information to students as well as improved screening processes for colleges would likely impact positively on the recruitment of individuals who have both personal and academic suitability for successful completion of the program and entrance into the workforce.

Students who are already practising and are returning to school would be familiar with the demands of working in child care and the income levels that they may expect. Entrance information that they require to participate successfully include:

- cost of tuition and books;
- evening or distance education course offerings;
- the amount of support they can expect from faculty;
- the logistics of completing practicum since they are employed full-time; specific application and registration information; and
- approximately how long it will take to complete their studies.

Educational institutions have an important role in supporting part-time students and this may be a key factor in the issue of retention in the early childhood field.

### Accessibility of Educational Opportunities and the Cost of Tuition

Accessibility has been a major concern for potential students and educational institutions in general and more specifically has been cited as a barrier to educational attainment for early childhood educators (Doherty et al. (2000); Beach, Bertrand & Cleveland (1998); Canadian Child Care Federation (2001); Brown & Morris (1999). Accessibility for the most part refers to the access that students have to study at the post-secondary level through alternative delivery methods that meet their needs and are also affordable. For full-time ECCE programs, tuition fees have increased substantially and the cost of obtaining early childhood qualifications is beyond the means of many potential students, reducing the overall number of students entering programs. Federal and provincial government decreases in funding for educational institutions were cited as contributing factors in Our Child Care Workforce, From Recognition to Remuneration (1998). It was found that reduction in funding has resulted in:

- overall reductions in program financing, which have resulted in reductions in faculty, larger class sizes and less faculty/instructor time allocated to field supervision;
- restructuring initiatives;
- changes in federal-provincial funding arrangements;
- constraints on public spending;
- privatization;
- demographic fluctuations; and
- increases in students tuition fees (p. 67).

Faculty in full-time programs have reported an increase in the number of students who live well below the
poverty line and an increased number of emergency financial situations that students are experiencing. This kind of pressure on students is leading to discontinuation of their education, attrition rates in ECCE programs and fewer graduates to meet the ever increasing demand for qualified staff.

In *Current Issues and Trends in ECCE Training* (1997) key informants indicated that part-time students have experienced the largest hike in tuition with colleges' continuing education departments having to offer courses on a cost recoverable or profit-making basis. In locations where web-based courses are available, tuition fees are reported in some cases to be higher than regular offerings, which would only add to the problem of a low-paid sector accessing affordable education. On-site evening courses are also often more expensive than per course full-time offerings, which is further exacerbated in several provinces, Nova Scotia being one, where continuing education grants are not available. The trend toward increased reliance on student loans continues to grow in a field where low wages make loans very difficult to pay back. These factors all contribute to an ever-growing challenge to meet the educational needs of potential students.

In one province, Newfoundland and Labrador, the government is supporting the implementation of new regulations and certification standards within the regulatory system by offering subsidized tuition for those who are upgrading, increased opportunities for prior learning assessment through the college system, and annual educational supplements (compensation) based on the level of certification attained. This inclusive approach is based on the belief that specific education in early childhood education positively affects the quality of care that children receive and that the college as well as the individual practitioners need funding supports in order to participate in this objective. This initiative is supported by the findings of the study *You Bet I Care!* (2000), which state that the factors that determine quality child care are the same no matter what the jurisdiction. Higher quality child care is found where there are good regulations (such as child care specific educational requirements for child care centre staff and family child care providers), higher levels of remuneration for centre staff and providers, and good caregiver supports. If we want high quality child care, other governments need to make follow the example of Newfoundland and Labrador and make a strong commitment, and back it up with funding and coherent policies. This is one example where retention is a crucial component of an initiative and at the same time the initiative will likely impact on retention.

Students studying on a part-time basis in early childhood education are primarily female (98.3% of respondents in *You Bet I Care!* are female), and 62% are under the age of 35 years with 29.8% of them with children under the age of 12 years living at home (Doherty et al., 2000). The majority are working in the field and are studying part-time to upgrade their qualifications. As cited in *Our Child Care Workforce, From Recognition to Remuneration* (1998) out of the 20,000 students enrolled in ECCE college programs in 1995-96, 12,000 attend through continuing education and distance education (p. 65). Evening courses offer opportunities for them to attend classes outside of work time and offer desirable interactions with other students who are also working in the field. Distance education courses are chosen by some because of the flexibility to manage studies around work and family responsibilities, and reduce or eliminate the need to leave home and have to arrange for child care of their own in order to attend class. Distance education is chosen by many across Canada because there is no on-site delivery for them to attend. Distance education as a viable delivery method is currently being studied by the Canadian Child Care Federation.
and was recommended for examination in the sector study, *Our Child Care Workforce, from Recognition to Remuneration* (1998). The outcomes of the study are expected to further inform educational institutions and students about best practices in distance education delivery in early childhood care and education programs. Affordability and accessibility to education and training have a significant effect on the credentials of staff, and hence, the quality of care provided. These factors also greatly address the issues of retaining qualified staff that can continue their education while working in child care programs.

**Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition**

Educational institutions offering PLAR contribute to the retention of early childhood educators. Particularly upon the implementation of new standards for certification or for practice in licenced programs, PLAR is a route for many experienced educators to return to education in a non-threatening and encouraging way. The experience of Manitoba during the 1980s and Newfoundland in the 1990s demonstrate that implementation of new standards can threaten currently practicing educators and a key element of any new system being implemented successfully is when these educators can be retained and can be supported to upgrade to meet the new standards. In the process, educators advance their career ladder as they continue to gain experience and academic qualifications they have the potential to reach increased levels of professional competence.

In *Research Connections Vol. 3* (1999) Marilyn Morrice defines prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) as the process in which individuals have the opportunity to obtain credit for college-level knowledge and skills gained outside the classroom and/or through other educational programs. The focus is on what learners already know and can do (p. 33). Most provinces have some form of PLAR available to students who enter their post-secondary education with considerable work experience. British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Ontario and Quebec have implemented province-wide initiatives in PLAR. In other provinces, particular colleges have implemented PLAR programs. Knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired through work/life experiences are assessed in relation to learning outcomes for courses within the diploma program, and students may be granted either a credit or an exemption for a course where a specific level of equivalency is demonstrated. Policies vary considerably across the country and within educational institutions. The college system in Canada has taken a lead role in the expansion and development of PLAR methods.

The most common forms of assessments include portfolio, documentation, interview, challenge test, or practice evaluation. The strength of the PLAR process is that students with considerable work experience may be awarded advanced standing in the diploma program which reduce the amount of time they will spend completing their studies. Students in college programs who have accessed PLAR processes are motivated by the fact their previous knowledge is recognized concretely. College faculty report that students in early childhood programs who complete portfolios often experience critical reflection through the analysis and evaluation, which sometimes leads to reconsideration and often reaffirmation of their practice. Students will often regard their portfolio as a professional manuscript of their career experiences and take great pride in demonstrating their knowledge and practice.
Complexity of Curriculum

ECCE diploma level programs are intended to ensure entry level preparation into the workforce. As Goelman et al. (2000) state, “the nature of child care work, however, demands that professionals develop skills and knowledge beyond those taught in these introductory programs” (p. 43).

To best prepare their graduates for successful employment in the field college programs across the country have been juggling curriculum content. As government regulations change, and research findings inform knowledge and practice, faculty at educational institutions respond by adding more subject areas to what is already deemed as “core” curriculum. Several faculty, as key informants (1997), expressed concern that diploma programs were overloaded and still felt it necessary to add more. What started as basic training now includes specialization areas as part of the basic training. For example, courses in infant/toddler care, inclusive care for children needing special supports, administration and management, and school-age child care which were once viewed as “post-diploma” have been added as part of the diploma level qualification.

There is great pressure from the field to have graduates with competencies in all of these areas. However, practically and realistically, students need a solid knowledge base as the foundation for early childhood practice from which they can participate in additional professional development in some of these specialized areas. While educational institutions are continually experiencing cutbacks in funding it is difficult to demonstrate the need to expand ECCE offerings to include post-diploma studies other than through continuing education.

The very issue of an overloaded curriculum has an effect on retention of students in ECCE programs. Students must be academically strong, have good time management and organizational skills, and be able to effectively synthesize theory and practice in order to be successful in ECCE diploma programs. Students who are not as strong tend to fall behind in their course work that inhibits them from registering for courses and/or practicum that have prerequisites. Students who underestimated the depth and complexity of course material drop out of programs leaving spaces that remain unfilled until the end of the two-year cycle. Accurate entrance information and a reasonably balanced curriculum are both issues that need to be addressed in order to prevent high attrition of students in ECCE programs.

In Our Child Care Workforce, From Recognition to Remuneration (1998) researchers identified the following areas as gaps in caregiver skills such as; guiding children with behaviour challenges; culturally sensitive practice; inclusive care for children with special needs. This study went further to describe that the expectation of college programs is that their graduates should be able to work with all young children and their families from diverse communities. It is expected that they can work with infants through school-age and that programs be expanded to be more inclusive of home-based care as well as centre-based care. It was recommended that a family-centred approach be taught so those graduates will view child care as collaborative effort between families and caregivers. Graduates identified that they felt unprepared to work with children from diverse backgrounds, and that there is a need to recognize, accept and integrate values, knowledge and practices from non-mainstream cultural contexts into ECCE curriculum.

So again we see the squeeze that colleges are feeling in finding an appropriate balance between meeting the needs of the field and providing a curriculum that ensures entry level skills into the workforce.
Broad agreement on a set of occupational standards of practice may help to inform and shape a set of learning outcomes for early childhood education diploma programs. This work is currently underway by the Canadian Child Care Federation as part of a national project, “Training for the Delivery of Early Childhood Development Learning and Care Services in Canada: Accessibility, Portability and Career Advancement” (2001).

Field Practice and Mentoring

An integral part of early childhood education programs is field practice, during which students are supervised in child care settings. These “real life” experiences offer students the opportunity to put into practice the knowledge they are learning in the classroom. In two-year diploma programs, the total number of hours dedicated to field practice ranges from 500 to 1,000 (Beach et al., 1998). According to Katz and Goffin (1990) the complex nature of an appropriate curriculum for young children requires that teaching practica (in early childhood teacher education) should constitute a greater portion of the total preparation program. The focus on interactive skills suggests the need to better conceptualize and integrate the clinical component in teacher preparation programs (p. 203). The wide range of hours noted above might reflect a number of issues facing college faculty including the following two which directly impact on student retention in early childhood programs:

- Cutbacks in faculty time to supervise field placements, which diminishes the opportunity for effective learning experiences that link classroom theory and practice. When faculty time for supervision is reduced, greater pressure is placed on center staff for supervision and guidance of students. Students needing extra supports do not have faculty resources available to them;
- Shortage of placements for students due to: geographical location, lack of high quality centres, centres where there is enough human resources to supervise and guide student educators, and linguistically appropriate placements (Morris, 1997, Beach et al., 1998).

College of the North Atlantic in St. John’s Newfoundland has implemented a mentoring program to support and further strengthen students’ experiences while on field placement. The program involves staff members of child care settings, who are educators responsible for supervising students in field placement. Two free thirty-hour courses in mentoring which include mentoring strategies, adult development and reflective practice are offered. Students and mentors are paired and students complete two field placements with the same co-operating educator. In a recent evaluation report, “Incorporating Mentoring: Early Childhood Studies Field Practice Program Evaluation, College of the North Atlantic” (2001) Ferguson reports 85% of respondents to a questionnaire felt that mentoring had enriched the field placement experience for students/proteges and field practice supervisors/mentors. Held as part of the evaluation process, focus groups reported that, over time, mentoring would increase the number of practitioners attracted to the field and decrease the numbers leaving the field. Respondents to the questionnaire indicated that 55% stated that mentoring had somewhat to greatly lowered turnover and was effective for recruitment. Students commented that mentoring had facilitated communication in a non-threatening manner, which increased proteges’ comfort in identifying areas for improvement and reflecting on alternative ways to enhance their practice. Field placement supervisor/mentors stated that mentoring had supported their relationship with college faculty, to develop and strengthen through their regular contact and through ongoing discussions.
Students studying the program through distance methodologies require several considerations around field practice in order to be successful. As described earlier in the report, part time students are most often working and upgrading or gaining their qualifications on a part time basis. The amount of time that they are out of the workforce while on field placement directly impacts on wages. For an already low-paid sector, some individuals cannot bear the loss of income for any length of time and decide to discontinue the program. Others use their vacation time which means they do not get their annual break from the work environment. In addition, college demonstration site placements can result in costs for travel, accommodations, and in some cases child care for their own children. Educational institutions need to balance these challenges for this whole student body with the responsibility to ensure that its graduates meet all of the outcomes of the diploma program. Some suggestions are to:

- grant some exemption of field placement hours or placements in whole;
- structure a practicum in a student’s place of employment;
- arrange part-time placements over a period of time;
- arrange for placements during summer months in order to facilitate students’ use of vacation time;
- switch places of employment with another student scheduled for field placement thereby continuing to receive wages;
- or some combination or extension of these ideas.

Students completing their studies on a part-time basis must be supported for them to be retained in the child care field. Providing supervising staff of centres with mentoring training and support may be an effective way to strengthen field practice in distance education as well.

**Core contrasted with General Education** -

Transferability of skills to a variety of settings, transferability of credits, career mobility.

In the report of the sector study, *Our Childcare Workforce, From Recognition to Remuneration* (1998) the results of an analysis of course calendars for ECCE diploma and certificate programs offered by Canadian colleges showed that key curriculum content categories include:

- child development,
- curriculum development,
- behaviour guidance,
- legislation and administration,
- interpersonal communication,
- family/parent involvement,
- observation and assessment,
- health/safety/nutrition,
- children with special needs,
- diversity and advocacy/professional development.

Based on key informant interviews with faculty, Morris (1997) reported that there has been a trend in college programs to have general education courses in addition to those courses considered “core” for
ECCE education. In some cases these courses have been offered as electives and in other cases general education courses have not been offered or have been reduced by the need to expand courses in what is deemed as core to early childhood practice. There is a constant challenge to offer a breadth of education, but in the time frame of a two-year diploma, the need for depth in ECCE-specific courses have outweighed the ability to offer more general courses.

Faculty describe the ECCE program as an intense specialized education. The extent to which education is specialized can be a strength for its graduates who pursue employment in child care centres primarily. The drawbacks to this specialization is the extent to which diploma programs can be articulated into degree programs, and the mobility that graduates have within the child care field such as working with with infants and toddlers, in school-age child care programs, in family child care homes, as resource staff for children needing special supports, and family resource programs. Recruitment into the field is enhanced by the potential for a variety of work settings upon graduation, and subsequently retention of those in the field could be encouraged by greater mobility within employment options.

Educational institutions would need to consider the extent to which preparation for specialized settings or positions are possible within the diploma program, or whether these are greater indications that post diploma programs are in demand by the field. Post diploma studies are likely to be part-time through continuing education departments which could result in high costs of tuition, or through distance education that will require appropriate curriculum development using a variety of technology.

Transferability of credits between educational institutions would greatly facilitate career advancement in early childhood education. Currently the ability to transfer credits between college and university programs is limited to particular agreements between specific programs and as reported by Beach et al. (1998) universities are selective about credit transfers from community colleges, and few colleges accept course credits from family child care programs. It is further recommended that closer coordination of training programs and acceptance of shared national guidelines for program content and delivery is likely to lead to establishing common standards of practice which, in turn, would facilitate the transfer of credits from one institution to another, both within and between jurisdictions. Work by the Canadian Child Care Federation on the establishment of National Guidelines for ECCE Training (1994), the accompanying Self-Assessment Guide, and the document Standards of Practice (2000), will be furthered to facilitate discussions about articulation and transferability in their current national project. (From key informant interviews with faculty, most agreed that there is a desperate need to establish career paths in the field of ECCE, otherwise it will become a dead end for graduates (Morris, 1997)

Compensation for Qualifications

Recruitment and retention are greatly affected by the extent to which individuals can earn a “living wage” and the study, You Bet I Care! (2000) clearly demonstrates the severity of the problem in the field of early childhood education. For educational institutions, it poses serious concerns for recruitment of academically strong students into diploma programs when so few gains have been demonstrated since 1991 Caring for a Living study. With a national average salary of $22,717, three provinces paying below poverty line
wages, annual salaries $7,000 less than licensed practical nurses and equivalent wages to parking lot attendants, there is no doubt that wages are unacceptably low for a field that requires a minimum of two years of post-secondary education, ongoing professional development and faces recommendations from You Bet I Care! (2000) for educators to have university degrees by 2010. There is not likely another post-secondary program whose graduates are paid so low, and in some provinces, paid no differently than co-workers who have little or no formal education. Educational institutions, child care organizations, and governments must establish fair and reasonable salary scales that are not dependent on parent fees. Parent fees cannot cover the cost of fair wages and benefits, neither should the child care workforce subsidize the true cost of child care delivery.

Related fields such as primary education attract ECCE graduates as assistants in the classroom, working with children needing extra supports and resources, and family resource programs attract ECCE graduates by the nature of relevant work with children and families. These two fields are, for the most part, publicly funded and therefore pay higher wages than the current system of child care. This attraction away from the field of child care adds considerably to the problem of retention. As ECCE programs struggle to hire qualified staff, graduates as well as long-time staff in child care choose to work in such related fields where they can make a “living” wage.

Contextual for Educational Institutions:

Recognition of qualifications, Government regulation, Professional support.

Education is only one factor that contributes to the issues of recruitment and retention in the child care field. It is, however, quite an influential factor because it is possible to enter the child care workforce in most provinces and territories at many different levels - with no or little post-secondary education, after completion of a certificate or diploma, or with a university degree. Preparation for early childhood educators in Canada is primarily at the certificate and diploma levels in community college systems. Some universities offer degree level programs that specialize in Early Childhood Education or Child and Youth Care. Government regulation determines the requirements for licensed child care settings to have staff components that meet certain standards. One problem in making changes nationally to the ECCE specific educational requirement is that child care is governed by provincial/territorial regulation. At this time Ontario is the only province requiring a diploma-level educator with every group of children in a licensed child care centre. In comparative types of work in teaching kindergarten and nursing, degree level requirements are required by all practitioners across the country in order to meet provincial/territorial and national standards for certification. Child care professional organizations offer support to educators through provincial/territorial systems of certification, networking, and conferences, however, until national certification is available, requirements for practice and for recognition vary considerably.

Conclusion

Educational institutions need to work closely with child care organizations, governments, educators and
employers through advisory committees and community forums to ensure that ECCE programs are doing all that is possible to attract strong individuals into the field. As well, they need to offer educational programs in a variety of methodologies to support the ongoing advancement of the field and to decrease the rate of turnover and attrition from the child care workforce. Education plays a major role in setting standards for practice and can be instrumental in both recruitment of new people into the field and retention of staff who have chosen early childhood care and education as a career. In order to validate this role and to seek out other contributing factors related to education and training, the following questions may be posed for further discussion, research and development:

1. What measures could be put into place at the secondary school level in order that school guidance counselors and prospective candidates are accurately informed about ECCE as a career choice?

2. What would facilitate colleges and universities in establishing entrance requirements and screening procedures that are fair to individuals applying for acceptance and appropriate to the field for which they intend to work after graduation?

3. What methods of delivery are available and what needs to be developed to support the ongoing education and professional development of currently employed staff?

4. Where could funding be sought to ensure reasonable tuition fees both for full-time and for continuing education opportunities?

5. How could prior learning assessment and recognition be promoted and implemented so that experienced educators could demonstrate their acquired knowledge and practice for the purposes of advanced standing or for certification?

6. What mechanism needs to be created to assist faculty of colleges to ensure that Acore ECCE knowledge and practice comprise the two-year diploma, and to determine the elements of this type of education that could become post-diploma study, specialization and/or professional development? This needs to be considered in the context of employment opportunities upon graduation as well as on a continuing education basis.

7. Field practice is an integral component to ECCE education. In what ways could mentoring strategies be used to assist in strengthening this experience? In what ways could field practice be structured for currently practising educators who study on a part-time basis? How can faculty be supported in field supervision to ensure that adequate time is provided for observation, coaching, reflective conferencing, and evaluation?

8. In what ways can post-secondary ECCE programs ensure an adequate level of specialized preparation for child care, at the same time provide some level of liberal arts education for the student?

9. What mechanisms or initiatives could be developed to facilitate transferability of credentials to other educational institutions and to other jurisdictions for certification?

10. What role can education play in establishing a case for higher wages and a means by which graduates and practitioners will be compensated at appropriate levels?

11. If governments, child care organizations, employers, and educational institutions worked together, what are some of the potential outcomes to address recruitment into the field and retention of those already employed?
References


