



Child Care Connections  
Attracting and Keeping Qualified Staff in Child Care Project

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# Attracting and Keeping Qualified Staff in Canadian Child Care: The National Environmental Scan

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**Note:** Since the child care sector is predominately women the feminine is used.

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# Attracting and Keeping Qualified Staff in Canadian Child Care: The National Environmental Scan

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## Introduction

Across the country, child care organizations and entire communities are faced with the challenge of attracting and keeping qualified early childhood care staff. In the *Retention and Recruitment in Child Care In Nova Scotia Project*, Ferguson and Miller (2000) identified the factors that contributed to Nova Scotia's shortage of qualified early childhood care staff and grouped them into five broad areas. These areas are training, policy, standards, workplace, and attitudes that contribute to the outcome of "not enough qualified staff to meet the demand". Ferguson and Miller also noted that these areas interact with each other, influencing the efficacy of any interventions in one area and affecting those in other areas. One of the most effective approaches to the challenge of developing action plans to address the crises of retention and recruitment in the child care sector is to begin with a broad definition of the problem. In 2002, with funding support through Human Resources Development Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program, Ferguson and Miller extended their investigation beyond Nova Scotia to the provinces and territories of Canada. This paper provides an overview of the results of that investigation.

Five discussion papers<sup>1</sup> (described below) were commissioned on each of the cause areas identified in the Nova Scotia project. Twenty environmental scan animators<sup>2</sup> were then trained to conduct environmental scans in provinces and territories and in francophone communities outside of Quebec. A variety of methods was used to conduct the scans, ranging from reviews of existing studies and reports to consultation within the sector and with other stakeholders in the given province or territory. Material was both statistical and anecdotal. Prior to conducting the scans, the animators read, reflected upon and discussed the discussion papers, so they would fully understand the range of possibilities that might underlie the causes of any child care recruitment and retention issues in their respective provinces or territories. The animators then designed a plan that built on existing resources within their province or territory, addressed the issue within the historical and cultural context of their province or territory, and facilitated actions to address the issue.

A case study approach was used to examine the issue in Manitoba and Quebec. These provinces were recognized as being beyond the problem definition phase regarding retention and recruitment, and were well into developing and implementing comprehensive plans.

In February 2003, the animators got together along with their case study colleagues to hear about each other's findings. Representatives from the Child Care Human Resources Round Table, the Provincial/Territorial Directors of Child Care/Early Childhood Development Services group, and the Nova Scotia Child Care Association also attended. An additional paper was commissioned at this time to examine the issue from a labour perspective, and to explore additional means of addressing the problem.

This intensive examination of the challenge of retention and recruitment in child care in Canada has

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<sup>1</sup> These papers, along with the Nova Scotia report, were published as "Reflections upon Attracting and Keeping Qualified Staff in Child Care" (2002) and can be accessed along with the Manitoba and Quebec case studies and a labour perspective at <http://pages.istar.ca/~cccns/index.html> .

<sup>2</sup> Animators were recruited from Newfoundland and Labrador (2), Prince Edward Island (2), New Brunswick (1), Ontario (2), Saskatchewan (2), Alberta (3), British Columbia (2), Yukon (2), North West Territories (1) and Francophones outside of Quebec (1).

provided the material for this paper. It offers a pan-Canadian perspective on retention and recruitment and is presented for reflection. It is intended as a basis for discussion and further action within the unique context of the child care sector.

## The Retention and Recruitment Discussion Papers

The recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood care staff has been identified as one of the greatest challenges facing the Canadian child care community<sup>3</sup>. In fact, many describe this issue as reaching crisis proportions. In Nova Scotia, the *Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Early Childhood Care Staff in Early Childhood Care Centre Project, April 2000*, identified “five broad areas of causes for the lack of qualified early childhood care staff to meet the current demand... training, policy, standards, workplace, and attitudes” (p.3). To examine these areas in depth, five discussion papers were commissioned and have been published in *Reflecting on Attracting and Keeping Qualified Staff in Child Care* (Ferguson, Ed. 2002). They are available in their entirety for review<sup>4</sup>.

### Workplace

*Workplace Causes in the Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Child Care Staff*, by Gillian Doherty, Ph.D. This paper reviewed the results of the *You Bet I Care!* Study (Lero, Doherty, LaGrange, Goelman and Tougas, 1999) to provide an overview of the individual provinces and territories and their workplace issues. Although there are some variances across the country, certain key issues affect the child care workplace everywhere. They are:

- low wages and poor benefits (with the possible exception of Quebec)
- increasingly stressful workplace (i.e., inclusion of children with special needs; increasing numbers of people whose mother tongue is neither English nor French; family stress; long and extended hours of care)
- advancement limitations within the field
- aging workforce
- fewer people entering the profession

### Standards

*To Be or Not To Be - Professionalism in Early Childhood Care and Education*, by Sandra Griffin, MA. This paper examines the role of professional status and the effects professional recognition and professional practice have on the retention and recruitment of qualified early childhood care staff. The key points in this discussion are: there is...

- an ongoing struggle to define the profession and to create a means to support the infrastructure (i.e., self-regulation, certification procedures, accreditation of training institutions, code of ethics, etc.)
- an identified need for the work environment to be supportive of the individual practitioner’s professional approach to her work
- a need for strong and competent directors to organize and guide the work climate
- a need for increased and sustainable funding to support quality ECC services.

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<sup>3</sup>Lero, D., Doherty, G., LaGrange, A., Goelman, H., and Tougas, J. *You Bet I Care!* The most pressing issues facing child care centres, paper posted on Child & Family Canada Web Site [www.cfc-efc.ca](http://www.cfc-efc.ca), Ottawa: CCF, 1999.

<sup>4</sup> <http://pages.istar.ca/~cccns/rmntro.htm>

## Societal Attitudes

*Babysitters or Professionals? The Role of Social Attitudes in The Recruitment and Retention of Child Care Workers*, by Evelyn Ferguson, Ph.D. This paper looks closely at the prevailing Canadian and North American societal attitudes that have an impact on the recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood care staff. The key points are:

- caring for children is not considered “work,” but rather is considered to be natural and instinctive for women, and part of their unpaid role in the family
- caring for children is considered a private family matter, randomly sustained by low income subsidies, operating grants, parental fees, and child care staff
- child care is seen as a commodity to be purchased
- child care is considered a substitute service for working mothers, and the educational value of these programs is not considered or valued
- children are not considered citizens in their own right, but as “chattels” of their parents
- the belief that child care is best delivered in small home settings leads to a work environment that is isolating and inflexible.

## Policy

*Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Educators and Caregivers: The Policy Factor*, by Connie Miller, B.A. This paper takes a broad look at liberal ideology, which is the cornerstone of public policy in Canada, and how this impacts the recruitment and retention of childhood education and care staff. The key points are:

- liberal ideology is based on individual choice and individual responsibility; such thinking encourages policy makers to avoid universality and government intervention
- child care policy in Canada reflects the notion that child care is the individual responsibility of families; it is a marketplace commodity; government assistance comes in the form of subsidies, tax breaks, and targets “at risk” children
- a patchwork of policies leads to a fragmented child care sector which makes the workforce focus on individual or local concerns; this makes child care staff identify more with the place in which they work than with the work they do; collective solidarity becomes difficult if not impossible
- patchwork policies also lead to a blurred training standard with great variances from province to province; training costs tend to be high, with little financial assistance
- women’s nurturing work is particularly undervalued; this coupled with resistance to universality leads to a grossly underpaid and disrespected child care work force
- liberal ideology stresses individual choice; however, individual choice is limited by government policy that only subsidizes child care for low-income families (i.e., back-to-work programs) and tax breaks for working women (i.e., remain at home or look for less expensive unregulated care).

## Education

*Education and Training as Factors that Affect Recruitment and Retention of Staff in Early Childhood Care Programs*, by Joanne Morris, MA. This paper recognizes that quality child care is directly linked to trained, qualified educators. It then explores the factors that relate training to recruitment and retention issues. The key points are:

- not all ECCE graduates have the appropriate attributes for working in the occupation (i.e., varied university and college entrance and admissions policies; varied screening procedures; lack of appropriate information made available to students)

- accessibility and cost are two major factors for students as well as universities and colleges (i.e., post-secondary institutions are faced with increasing training standards that increase costs, which are downloaded to students who have little or no financial assistance)
- the curriculum is complex and overloaded and still there are gaps in curriculum that are not being addressed; yet with educational institutions continually facing funding cutbacks, it is difficult to justify increasing the time requirements for the programs; also lengthier programs mean more cost to students, making it a less attractive program of study
- practicum experiences for students vary from 500 to 1000 hours during a two-year diploma program; while more practice hours are recommended, it is difficult to accomplish due to time, finances, faculty restraints and cutbacks, geographical locations, lack of high quality centres, and lack of mentoring programs
- limited ability to transfer credits between educational institutions
- difficult for educational institutions to attract students to ECCE studies while the wages and benefits for ECCE staff remain low.

Animators used these papers extensively in conducting their environmental scans. Each animator gathered information from her own province or territory and placed this information into the context of the five areas, determining how each area impacted this issue in the assigned region. Where there were some variances, there were also many similarities from one region to another, leading to the conclusion that retention and recruitment of qualified child care practitioners is a problem all across Canada.

# Retention and Recruitment in Canadian Child Care: The National Environmental Scan

This section provides a pan-Canadian look at the five broad causal areas and the impact they have on the recruitment and retention issue. As previously stated, the provinces of Quebec and Manitoba were not included in the environmental scan process. Both of these provinces were beyond the stage of defining the problem and were well on the way to developing and implementing comprehensive plans to address it. Case studies were conducted in these provinces<sup>5</sup> and were published in the spring of 2003 - *More Reflections Upon Attracting and Keeping Qualified Staff in Child Care -2003*<sup>6</sup>. The information provided in these case studies, as it pertains to the five key areas, is included here to illustrate how two provinces have begun to address these issues. As well, information is used from an additional discussion paper, *The Union Advantage in Child Care: How Unionization Can Help Recruitment and Retention*<sup>7</sup>. This paper explores the role that unions can play in addressing these same concerns.

The discussion in this section will look at the broad causal area, summarize what was found in the provincial/territorial scans and look at how the approaches used by Quebec and Manitoba and a labour perspective could address the issues raised in each of the causal areas.

## Workplace

### National Scan

Across the country, the response to the workplace/workforce causes in the environmental scans was the same, and reiterated the findings in Nova Scotia<sup>8</sup>. Child care personnel earn low wages and have few, if any benefits. They are working long hours and are facing increasing amounts of time in each week spent doing unpaid work. There are few, if any, breaks in the day's routine and, in many cases, staff is sent home without pay on days that child enrolments are low. An interesting point from the Northwest Territories was that it is "...evident that many staff did not seem aware of their rights as employees, and/or whether or not their program had wages and benefits structures in place" (NWT Report, p.7).

When this situation is coupled with an underlying sense that early childhood care is not valued as an occupation, and that staff members are not valued as workers and professionals, a general sense of malaise and overall low staff morale is created. The Alberta animators described the impact of low morale:

"The child care workforce can be its own worst enemy. We accept rather than stand up for ourselves. We deserve better, and most of us know it, yet we complacently allow societal attitudes to prevail and impact on how we view ourselves and others see us." (Alberta Report, p.22)

These workplace factors, low wages, few benefits, poor morale, etc. are suspected as having a negative effect on recruitment of new staff, but are most assuredly having a damaging impact on the retention of current staff. Most reports indicate that there is a general out-migration of qualified staff to both related and unrelated occupations. For example, in Saskatchewan, it is described like this:

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<sup>5</sup> Manitoba Case Study was written by Debra Mayer, and Quebec Case Study by Camille Garipey.

<sup>6</sup> <http://pages.istar.ca/~cccns/rrntro2.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Jamie Kass and Bozica Costigliola (2003), *The Union Advantage in Child Care:How Unionization Can Help Recruitment and Retention*, Halifax: Child Care Connections

<sup>8</sup> . Ferguson,E. and Miller, C.(2000) *Attracting and Keeping Qualified Staff in Nova Scotia Child Care*. Halifax: Child Care Connections.

“Trained and educated staff leave for better positions.... both within and outside of the child care field. Most often, in conversation with people who have left, they state that their stress levels have decreased dramatically and their pay has increased. .... [Saskatchewan] government and society is beginning to realize the importance of the early years. In response, new programs [other than child care] are opening almost daily. This has created animosity among the child care field ... as these new programs are mirroring what child care programs are already doing and good, trained staff are leaving to go to these programs.” (Saskatchewan Report, p. 12)

Prince Edward Island reports a unique cause for out-migration of trained, qualified staff. This is precipitated by... “the implementation of publicly funded kindergarten...the ability to increase yearly earnings by more than \$1100.00 per year causes staff turnover.” (PEI Report, p. 18)

Several of the provincial and territorial scans reported that there is a current need for qualified and experienced directors and supervisors to administer the child care workplace and workforce. This problem seems to be related to out-migration of staff, retirement, burnout, minimal opportunities for advancement, and limited training opportunities for administrators. Ontario describes the problem like this:

“There are very few opportunities for advancement within the field, and an ECCE assignment/qualification is not transferable into any field other than that of child care. Add this to the lack of qualified directors and supervisors, and the stage is set for a lack of leadership and a strong sense of isolation.” (Ontario Report, p.20)

All of the reports indicated that the workforce generally experienced some form of isolation, which adds to the high stress levels, burnout and out-migration. Gender isolation is consistently cited as problematic. This encapsulates the idea that child care is woman’s work and child care should come naturally to all women, making it not a true occupation. In addition to this, though, there are other kinds of isolation that have surfaced in these reports. Child care practitioners generally feel isolated from other professions, as their work is not perceived as comparable to other professionals. There are feelings of isolation that come from the child care delivery methods. There are tensions between the non-profit and commercial programs; tensions between group centre child care and the family child care services; tensions between child care centres and publicly funded kindergartens; tensions between workers within centres where there are no structures or procedures in place to mediate concerns; and the feeling of isolation that may come with providing care in one’s own home without the constant support of other workers. The Acadian and francophone communities outside Quebec, Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon, all indicated that they had isolation concerns that were particular to their context/regions.

For the Acadian/francophone communities, the issue is one of culture and language isolation. It is difficult for these communities to access French language training and curricula, for both pre-service and in-service programs. This makes recruiting and retaining qualified staff extremely difficult for these communities. Additionally, this report indicates that francophone communities are experiencing increased difficulties since the implementation of Quebec’s new child care policy. French speaking ECE’s are either moving to Quebec or tend to be staying in Quebec as the wages and benefits there have greatly increased, and far exceed those that can be offered in Acadian and francophone communities elsewhere. (Acadian/ Francophone Report, p.3)

Northern regions express isolation concerns for the workforce. Generally there is not enough trained staff to meet even the current demand, and training opportunities are scarce, expensive and often inaccessible. Nunavut reports that most staff are untrained, and none have training in special education, although their

programs are integrated. (Nunavut Report, p.1). Additionally the northern communities face the issue of higher costs of resources that come with living in geographically isolated communities.

Across the country staff turnover is high and the jobs are reportedly stressful. Nunavut describes it as follows:

“There are all kinds of stressful jobs in the world, and we find day care to be most stressful because we not only deal with the children but also the parent/guardians that bring their children to the centre, and the community itself.”(Nunavut Report, p.1)

## **Addressing the Retention and Recruitment Issue**

### **Manitoba**

The Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA), founded in 1974, is over 2900 strong in membership, and has played an instrumental role in assisting this province to address many of the concerns raised in this section. They have delivered workshops and information sessions for both practitioners and policy makers, developed “tools such as job descriptions and contracts, and ongoing study and research of this long standing issue” (Manitoba Case Study, p.8). The organization surveys centres regarding training needs, and has sponsored and co-sponsored many training events to address these needs. The MCCA also documents workforce shortages, advocates for better wages and benefits, organizes the workforce to work in solidarity, and promotes a high standard of training and education for staff. The efforts of the MCCA and its work with the NDP government helped increase wages in the sector quite dramatically during the seventies and eighties. Under the Conservative government regime of the nineties wages fell by up to 13%, due to the repeal of Salary Enhancement Grants. The MCCA used this setback as an opportunity to re-examine the Salary Enhancement Grant process and quickly recognized how vulnerable the sector would remain under a singular grant system of funding. This prompted the MCCA to design and propose a unit funding model<sup>9</sup> that would provide sustainable funding sufficient to cover the true costs of quality, based on the fair wages for the staff. The current NDP government recently adopted this model.

The cutbacks of the nineties and subsequent loss of salaries, had a negative impact on both the recruitment of new people to the profession and the retention of the existing workforce. The Manitoba Government and General Employees’ Union (MGEU) has been actively campaigning to recruit early childhood educators to its membership, as a means of assisting with the recruitment and retention issue, and “to date, 39 centres have signed on with the MGEU.” (Manitoba Case Study, p.9). Also, “the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba, a broad based organization of labour, women’s, anti-poverty, child care and social justice groups,”(Manitoba Case Study, p.9) has come out in support of addressing the workforce needs of the early childhood education sector.

With the support of such groups as those listed above, and with the return of a more supportive government to office, the MCCA met in December 2000 to re-address the workforce issues and to work towards a plan for future improvements. From this meeting a “Labour Market Strategy concept emerged” (Manitoba Case Study, p.10) and with it came recommendations to address the needs of the workforce and “a systematic plan for the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators to the child care system”(Manitoba Case Study, p.10).

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<sup>9</sup> The unit funding model recognizes the differential costs of providing care for different age groups, and harmonizes the provincial operating grant to create a uniform revenue for each ‘unit’ of children. It is founded solidly on the numbers of trained staff required per unit, according to Manitoba’s regulations.

Within the Labour Market Strategy are recommendations that attempt to address all five key factors that affect the recruitment and retention issue. One recommendation to improve the situation in the workplace is to implement a mentorship model whereby qualified and experienced child care and education practitioners can mentor new ECE practitioners. This mentoring model will be expanded so licensed family child care providers working towards their credentials are also mentored, and new directors can receive mentorship from more experienced directors, etc. (Manitoba Case Study, p.15). This strategy also calls for remuneration for experienced ECE's participating in the mentoring process.

Currently, the Manitoba government has begun to implement some of the workplace strategies recommended in the Labour Market Strategy. They have "...recruited and completed training of new Mentors from the field (including rural and northern mentors) and are targeting say those with outdated or non-recognized credentials as per the report's recommendations" (Manitoba Case Study, p.15). Additionally, in April 2002 the Manitoba government announced a five-year plan that included the following:

"The plan identifies three major areas to be addressed over the next five years: quality, accessibility and affordability. The first year has a continued emphasis on supporting increased salaries for child care workers and a funding increase of \$2.35 million designed for improved childcare worker supports and additional spaces." (Manitoba Case Study, p.17).

## **Quebec**

In 1997, the Government of Quebec implemented a new Family Policy, which led to major reform of [early childhood education and care] services (Quebec Case Study, p.5). This reform included the introduction of \$5.00/day child care for all children and families, along with the promise to have enough spaces in licensed facilities to accommodate all children by 2004. The demand for child care spaces created an immediate and precarious recruitment issue, as there was not enough trained staff to fill these spaces. It became equally important to retain those who were trained, and those who were experienced but in need of training or education. "On May 21, 1999, the government announced important wage increases for all child care staff members and family care providers in Quebec... [making] the average increase more or less 30 percent" (Quebec Case Study, p.9). Benefit packages, including pension plans, were upgraded and implemented. Also, with the new policy in place, "the number of supervision, support and human resource development positions has mushroomed" (Quebec Case Study, p.11). With the increase in the number of early childhood education and care positions, coupled with the newly created positions, a career ladder emerged, which now offers early childhood educators real opportunity for advancement and promotion.

It is pointed out, however, that this did not happen easily, or overnight. It took a great deal of advocacy, determination and debate to bring these changes about. Still, the government of the time was open to debate and invited concerned organizations, professional associations and unions to participate in discussions and consultations. The work of two unions in the province, the CSN and the CSQ, helped to ensure that the new family policy would include improved wages and benefits for workers. Bringing their bargaining experience, these unions "have greatly contributed to forcing the hand of the Quebec government and obtaining unprecedented wage increases starting in 1999" (Quebec Case Study, p. 16).

Quebec still has some workplace concerns to deal with.

"The progress made in wages, a more positive social recognition for the profession, and better opportunities for promotion are already having an impact on the issue of recruiting and retaining staff. The system now needs to deal with other work conditions, the

organizational environment, and quality of life in the work environment. Since they cannot be standardized, due to their close relation to the managerial competence of the executive staff, it is the managerial competence itself that needs to be improved” (Quebec Case Study, p.12).

Since the case study was written (January 2003), Quebec has experienced a change in government that may have profound effects on the support of the early childhood education and care system. Already, starting in January 2004, the child care fee of \$5,00/day is going up to \$7,00/day. The goal of having enough spaces in licensed facilities to accommodate all children by 2004 has been pushed to 2006. Other elements of the family policy are at this time unchanged but on the table for review. Stakeholders, early childhood educators, and unions are active in lobbying and advocacy to protect the gains that have been achieved since 1997. Even before the change of government, many aspects of the policy were still not implemented to the satisfaction of all parties. For instance, some child care providers working at home under the supervision of Centres de la petite enfance (CPE) were trying to have their self-employed status legally revised in order to allow union certification. They have recently obtained a judgement of the court in their favour. The current government is now appealing this court decision.

### **Labour Perspective**

Citing the *Unionization and Quality in Early Childhood Settings* study (Doherty, 2002), the paper on the labour paper provides the following information:

“...unionized centres pay substantially higher wages than non-unionized ones (8.3% higher for child care teachers). Unionized centres are more likely to provide benefits that have a positive impact on the daily working lives of child care providers, such as paid preparation time, compensation for meetings held after hours and a staff room. A higher proportion of unionized centres provide staff with benefits such as disability insurance, extended health care, life insurance, employee top-up of Employment Insurance, maternity leave benefits and pensions” (Labour paper, p.2).

With better wages, benefits and pensions, unions have made a positive contribution to the retention of qualified staff by reducing turnover rates. Directors of unionized centres have less difficulty in recruiting staff. Unionization also gives individual workers a voice and a sense of empowerment and the ability to “gain some control over their working lives”(p.3). Four key reasons why unionized centres are able to do this are (p.3):

- unions exist to help workers collectively improve their lives;
- unions have been front and centre in the push for government funding to child care;
- unions representing public sector workers believe part of their mandate is to preserve and improve services;
- unions believe that a complementary and fundamental approach to improving services is to ensure that the workforce is treated fairly and well supported.

## **Standards**

### **National Scan**

Echoing issues raised in Nova Scotia; there are five key points that all of the environmental scans unanimously raised that are related to the standards and profession causes:

- there is no formal career structure to relate job descriptions, wages and benefits to training, education, qualifications and experience;
- child care work is not recognized as a real and valued occupation by other

professions/professionals;

- there is a general lack of understanding of the complexity of the work and demands of the job;
- there are no universally accepted standards/guidelines of practice;
- there is no universal, unified voice to speak or advocate on behalf of the child care occupation/profession.

What becomes apparent from the reports is that these factors leave the child care sector isolated from other professions and fragmented within itself. This sense of disconnection is not conducive to a healthy work environment and contributes dramatically to the field's inability to retain child care staff. It also affects the sector's ability to attract new recruits. One of the ways this plays out is in the expressed concern with the lack of professional associations to monitor the child care profession and professional, and the lack of funds to sustain what associations that exist. For example, in Alberta they describe the problem as follows:

"Currently child care associations in the province are membership-driven. Funding is limited to Association fees so there is no money to create a sustainable infrastructure. Boards are volunteer and receive very little training and due to the nature of "boards" they change hands every 1-2 years leaving gaps in consistency." (Alberta Report, p. 7)

Despite the existence of professional infrastructures and codes of ethics nationally (CCCF) or provincially/territorially, without an adequate means of collectively addressing and representing the child care workforce, there is little means of making the entire workforce aware of them (Ontario Report, p.4). For the Acadian and francophone communities outside Quebec, language and geographic barriers are an additional concern with regards to Professional Associations.

"In Nova Scotia, Ontario and British Columbia, Acadian and francophone professional associations exist. A bilingual association is also present in New Brunswick. However, these associations are not recognized by government and receive little or no funding and solely depend on the child care workforce to maintain their existence." (Acadian/ Francophone Report, p.2)

The Newfoundland scan produced an interesting comment with regards to the profession and standards issue. They say; "Some Early Childhood Educators who took part in this scan seem to feel that the lack of public awareness and recognition of the child care profession puts a strain on their ethics as an educator" (NF Report, p.6). What this means then, is that some ECE's are experiencing conflict, when forced, due to lack of public support and resources, to make compromises in the delivery of what they know to be quality early childhood education and care experiences. Trained, educated, and knowledgeable staff may well be leaving the profession because they cannot live with the ethical dilemma in which they find themselves.

## **Addressing the Retention and Recruitment Issue**

### **Manitoba**

The Manitoba Child Care Association (MCCA) is an association whose members are early childhood education and child care system personnel. It is funded solely by membership fees, and has currently over 2900 members. Since its inception its goal is to promote child care as a profession and a service. As such, it offers workshops, professional development events and conferences year round and in most parts of the Province. In addition to these professional development opportunities, the MCCA also offers its members such things as "reduced training fees, access to a resource centre, a group benefit plan, employee assistance program, group registered retirement savings plan, a quarterly journal, and affiliate membership in the Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCF)"(Manitoba Case Study, p.10). It does much to

bring the child care sector together and to promote the profession both within the field, and to the broader community. As discussed in the previous section, MCCA has a voice and some influence with the provincial government(s).

However, the MCCA does not control entry to the field, nor does it have the authority to classify those who are working in centres. This right falls completely to the provincial government, and “once initial classification as an ECE or CCA is granted, there is no license renewal requirement and classification is rarely revoked” (Manitoba Case Study, p.11). The MCCA, in its Labour Market Strategy (previously mentioned) will explore legislative recognition as one way to promote the profession (Manitoba Case Study p.11) . The establishment of a College of Early Childhood Educators as a “...long-term strategy to professionalize the field and improve the wages, status and working of early childhood educators...” is recommended. (Manitoba Case Study, p.17). MCCA plans to begin this process in 2004.

With regards to standards, and their impact on recruitment and retention, there are two more key recommendations in the Labour Market Strategy. One is for the Manitoba government to make regulatory or legislative changes that would clearly define, outline, and mandate a career path for ECE's, based on “...progressive qualifications and a classification system with a more clearly differentiated role for the untrained assistant and the trained early childhood educator.” (Manitoba Case Study, p.15). Secondly, it is also recommended that the government include in its legislative changes an entry-level requirement for the field. This would be considered the “...beginning point for the apprenticeship model, [and include] the development of an entry-level universal course with set learning outcomes as the prerequisite for all centre staff and licensed family child care providers.” (Manitoba Case Study, p.16). Successful completion of this course would equate to “...the first progression of the salary scale.”(Manitoba Case Study, p.16).

## **Quebec**

From the previous discussion of Quebec's response to the Workplace issue, four of the five key factors that the rest of the country is experiencing have been addressed. Enhanced guidelines and regulations for licensing of centres and family home providers in Quebec seems to demonstrate a better understanding of the complexity of the work and the demands of the job. There is now a formal career structure, with corresponding job descriptions, wages (salary scale) and benefits, and a universally accepted standard of practice.

The concern of having no universal, unified voice to advocate on behalf of the child care occupation/profession, has also been addressed in Quebec. As mentioned in the previous section, the two unions (CSN and CSQ) that represent many child care providers in Quebec have been very successful in promoting the interests of the child care sector and impacting government policy. Additionally, the CIRCPEQ and the FCPEQ, which are “special interest and advocacy organizations, have had a great impact on recent policy decisions... and continue to play a recognized leadership role at the provincial level.” (Quebec Case Study, p.15). These two groups are now merged into the AQCPE (Association québécoise des centres de la petite enfance). This association is regularly posting on their website valuable information to keep current with the recent evolution of child care policies in Quebec ([www.aqcpe.com](http://www.aqcpe.com)).

The issue of having child care work regarded as a real and valued occupation by other professions/ professionals is not fully addressed in the Quebec case study, and it is probably too soon to know or to measure if there has been an improvement in this regard. However, with the acceptance of the new Family Policy and the implementation of improved wages and benefits, it may well be that increased recognition by others will follow.

## Labour Perspective

Unions foster and support professionalism in recognizing that collective bargaining is the key to “achieving the characteristics of professionalism for all who work in the sector” (Labour paper, p.4). Labour lists four key factors in their definition of professionalism in the child care sector:

- education/training to achieve credentials;
- on-going staff development to remain current in their practice;
- good pay for the high value of the work performed; and
- working conditions that support child care providers to do their jobs well. (Labour paper, p.4)

Unionized centres have more access “to in-service training and off-site professional development; ... provisions for payment of registration fees; paid release time and replacements enabling staff to attend professional development sessions; ... and are more likely to receive paid breaks, paid preparation time and paid overtime<sup>10</sup>” (Labour paper, p.4).

Unions (labour) are promoting professionalism and standards on two fronts. The first is that of regulation of the child care sector. Unions have long advocated for regulation of the whole child care sector. They believe that only when the whole of the sector is regulated will it be possible to ensure that professional standards are being met by the entirety of the sector. Additionally, it is only when the whole of the sector is regulated that it will begin to see itself as an entity of solidarity and common interests, rather than a fragmented and patchwork system. “... it is extremely difficult to organize professional associations (and unions for that matter) in a largely unregulated sector”(p.4).

The second front is that of promoting the development of an alternative model of professionalism for the child care sector. Labour believes, as do many others from the field, that “child care as an occupation does not fit with the traditional model of a profession” (Labour paper, p.4). This new model would include all persons who work in the sector, from cooks and cleaners to directors and managers. All should be respected for their individual efforts and contributions and all should have a voice and all be recognized. Such a model would foster solidarity and “promote more democratic, inclusive decision making about issues that affect workers” (Labour paper, p.5).

## Societal Attitudes

### National Scan

Once again, the provincial/territorial environmental scans produced unanimous results regarding the societal attitudes that affect retention and recruitment. It is perceived that there is a general devaluation of the profession and, subsequently, the professional across the country. The key issues are as follows:

- care of young children is perceived as women’s work; however, this work is natural, intrinsic, instinctive and easy for women;
- there is a perceived lack of respect for the individual rights of children; this is evidenced in the lack of understanding of the importance of quality early childhood care and education experiences for all children;
- child care is socially accepted as a private, family responsibility; child care is only, and at best, considered a substitute for mothers who “must” work or who are deemed unable to care for their children by the state.

Without exception, all scans reported that child care was considered women’s work. This is work that society generally devalues, feeling that it is easy and requires very little skill, knowledge or specialized

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<sup>10</sup> Doherty, G. (2003) *Quality in Unionized Centres*, Ottawa: CUPE

training. Alberta reports that “early childhood training may be seen as an asset but something that is not really necessary” (Alberta Report, p.28). Child care practitioners reported experiencing this prejudice in their day-to-day interactions with parents; dealings with other professionals; and discussions (or the lack thereof) with government officials and policy makers. In British Columbia, child care practitioners are described as “a special interest group” (British Columbia Report, p.2). The Saskatchewan report also reported specifically that in their province the media played a significant and important role in influencing this attitude. They say, “It seemed for a long time that whatever child care was in the news, it was in a bad light” (Saskatchewan Report, p.3).

Across the country, prevailing societal attitudes were described as being disrespectful of children and their needs. Respondents perceived the lack of willingness to recognize the numerous studies that prove the value of quality early childhood experiences not just for children, but also for society, as an indicator of lack of respect for children. For example, in the Yukon, the lack of willingness to make quality child care a political priority reflects this societal attitude. They report:

“Quality child care is not a political priority. The political will to address ‘quality’ concerns is absent. When children’s concerns and needs are ignored and not given attention the politicians are demonstrating a profound lack of respect of children.” (Yukon Report, p.8)

The one example produced from these reports that stands counter to this prevailing attitude is that of the Acadian/francophone community outside Quebec. They report:

“French-first language parents have different views on programming regarding child care. For example, language learning is of great importance to Acadian and francophone parents and the community... Early childhood care programs are seen as a means to prepare the child for the French school system as well as a way for the cultural and linguistic survival of the Acadian and francophone population. Although society views the role of the child care provider important ... this is not always reflected in salaries and work conditions.” (Acadian/francophone Report, p.2)

The third prevailing attitude is that of child care as a private responsibility of families, rather than a necessary, universal service for children. This was included in every report except that of Nunavut. They report that the prevailing societal attitude towards the care of children is quite different:

The people responsible for the children are the adults in the community, the parents of the children and the family members. If nobody is responsible for the children, we have a major problem, because if no one is responsible for the children, we have no community. (Nunavut Report, p.2)

## **Addressing the Retention and Recruitment Issue**

### **Manitoba**

The MCCA has long been aware of the lack of respect shown by the general public towards the child care sector. It has been actively addressing this issue by initiating such things as an ECE Awareness Week, which has been officially proclaimed by the Province and is celebrated annually to make communities aware of the value and contribution of early childhood educators. The MCCA also communicates regularly with boards and directors of centres “...with suggestions for how to show appreciation to staff (Manitoba Case Study, p.12), and it has become apparent that many of these

suggestions are being acted upon on a regular basis. Across the province there are activities like ECE/MLA Challenge baseball games and ECE Appreciation Dinners, all with the intent of raising the profile of ECE providers and greater awareness and appreciation within the community.

The MCCA was also instrumental in the early nineties to changing the name from “Child care worker” to “early childhood educator”, beginning with all of its own publications and correspondence (Manitoba Case Study, p.12). This name is now widely accepted and is demonstrated in advertisements for positions, a change in diploma titles at the college, and government legislation.

Yet, despite all the MCCA and child care sector have done to address the issue of public attitude, Manitoba reports that there is little evidence that the public perception of the child care sector has changed. They say:

Despite all these efforts, anecdotal stories confirmed that the public recognized the low salaries and woes of the field all too well. Guidance counsellors and parents steered high school students towards other professions and away from the child care ‘ghetto.’ Demand for post secondary training plummeted, where Red River College had once accepted 70 students each year and had a huge wait list to choose from, more recent graduating classes were of 30. At the same time, early childhood staff were leaving the field to take jobs as teaching assistants, work in retail, or open licensed family child care homes while their own children were young. (Manitoba Case Study, p.13).

The Labour Market Strategy includes a recommendation to address the issue of public attitude towards the child care sector and the child care practitioner. It calls specifically for the Manitoba government to launch:

“... a major public education drive to improve public understanding of the value of the profession and to help with recruitment efforts ... A concerted PR campaign should be targeted to gatekeepers such as parents of high school students and guidance counsellors in every high school in Manitoba... Specific recruitment efforts should also be directed towards the diversification of our workforce to more closely reflect the diversity of children and families in Manitoba... Mechanisms will include web page development for the Province of Manitoba and MCCA, brochures and outreach, participation in career symposiums, targeted mail outs, paid advertising in major and ethnic media, etc.” (Manitoba Case Study, p.16).

The Manitoba government has already begun to act upon this recommendation by providing the Child Day Care Branch with “... a small budget of \$25,000.00” to assist with attracting more students to the field. This budget will allow the department to “...purchase a display to use at career fairs, produce brochures, and update their web page to include recruitment information. Their own staff will promote the field at career fairs.” (Manitoba Case Study, p.18).

### **Quebec:**

Prior to the introduction of the new Family Policy, child care practitioners in Quebec also faced a lack of public understanding and respect for their profession. Fewer students were enrolling in ECE programs and many trained ECE’s were leaving the field entirely. When the new Family Policy was proclaimed, demand for child care spaces soared. The provincial Government became alarmed when it realized that there simply weren’t enough ECE’s to meet the growing demand for spaces and the enhanced training requirements stipulated by the policy. The Ministère de la Famille et de l’Enfance (MFE) responded in the following way:

“It [MFE] has worked to implement a vast campaign to promote and increase recognition of the profession, entitled “Besoin de toi” (We Need You). This campaign was featured in media outlets, throughout the child care network in Quebec, and in high school, through guidance counsellors (Spring 2000). The campaign’s objectives included recruiting a greater number of young people interested in completing a college diploma (DEC) in early childhood education. The MFE had to fight against prejudice in high school students regarding the educator’s profession. The campaign was effective in causing an increase in the number of candidates in colleges, and the candidates’ school achievement levels were higher.” (Quebec Case Study, p.13).

This prominent government campaign, combined with the highly discussed and publicized Family Policy is hoped to have a positive effect on the public perception of the child care sector in Quebec. “Since an occupation’s social recognition is strongly related to its income levels, recognition should also be increasing and it is hoped that this will have a positive impact on recruiting” (Quebec Case Study, p.9).

### **Labour Perspective**

Labour is an active and vocal supporter of universal child care. Many labour representatives believe that the care of children is the responsibility of the whole of society, and should not be the “...financial burden of parents alone”(Labour paper, p.6). They have worked diligently within unions as advocates for the importance of “...quality child care and a public system in Canada”(Labour paper, p.6). As a result of this commitment and advocacy work, labour reports the following:

“Many unions have policies that state child care should be publicly funded, universally accessible, of high quality and regulated to ensure a way to monitor quality. These aren’t just words on paper. Several unions have child care committees or other bodies that are responsible for moving child care issues forward internally and in the public arena. Labour also has representatives on the Council of Child Care Advocates of the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada and on the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council. This means that labour’s experiences around child care are becoming more integrated into key debates in the sector, and that unions are also reaping the benefits of working with and hearing about the views of other parts of the sector.” (Labour paper, p.6)

## **Policy**

### **National Scan**

From the reports of the environmental scans, there are five main recurring themes with regards to policy issues. They are:

- a perceived need for a national/universal policy for child care;
- a need for governments to have an overall vision for child care and a long term plan;
- a chronic lack of funding in place to support existing child care programs;
- child care regulations that are minimal, inconsistent, and in a state of flux;
- child care is treated as a market place commodity, not an essential service.

These five themes are played out consistently across the country, with each province and territory reporting very similar concerns and issues. This is evidence of an underlying liberal ideology at work. The child care sector across the country experiences government policy that insists on:

- minimal intervention (i.e., funding, regulations, standards, etc.);
- patchwork policies that address, at best, short term issues and concerns;

- individual responsibility in the form of parental responsibility for children; and
- child care sold as a commodity for those who can afford to purchase it.

These policies lead to numerous problems for the child care sector, not the least of which is the lack of funding. With this type of social attitude and prevailing policy, there is no hope for wages to increase. Parents cannot afford to pay more than they are currently paying for child care, and thus, the only hope child care staff have of increasing their minimal salaries and benefits is through government support. This is having a huge impact on the recruitment and retention issues for child care personnel.

The lack funding for child care services in general, and the preferred government practice of target funding, contributes to the patchwork policies and irregularities in policy and standards experienced by the child care workforce. Saskatchewan describes it as follows:

“When the federal early childhood development initiative dollars were sent to the province, Saskatchewan quickly decided to create more programs and a new government department to administer the funding. People in child care once again felt that they were left on the fringe and were not consulted during the process. An infrastructure was already in place, but was not utilized. Yes, some money went to child care, but a majority of the money was spent on designing programs that could have easily been developed through the child care system.” (Saskatchewan Report, p.16)

Ontario also expressed great concern and alarm over the spending of the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) dollars in that province. They report:

“The recommendations put forth in the *Early Years Study* [Mustard & McCain, 2000] to create a network of community-based early years centres built on existing community capacity; and that provide development opportunities for children and a full range of parenting supports, including flexible child care, were not acted upon.....Furthermore....the scattered activities and streaming of new financial resources [ECDI money] into targeted services and existing programs does not build community capacity for Early Child Development and parenting programs or equality of opportunity for all families.” (Ontario Report, p.11-12)

The Ontario Report sums up the reported views. They say:

“As long as child care is viewed in policy as a means for gaining entrance and attachment to the workforce, and is not recognized for its developmental benefits to all children and for its investment in human capital, the hope of universally accessible quality child care will not be realized. Policies emphasizing the social, health, educational, and caring impact of child care in communities would, however, acknowledge the importance of universally accessible high quality care. In turn, issues of recruitment and retention of qualified child care staff would be satisfactorily addressed given the critical link established by research of the importance of qualified staff to achieving quality child care services.” (Ontario Report, p.13)

## **Addressing the Retention and Recruitment Issue**

### **Manitoba**

As discussed in previous sections, the MCCA has worked closely with the Manitoba government since 1974, when the provincially licensed and funded child care program first began under the *Community*

*Child Day Care Standards Act.* (Manitoba Case Study, p.6) In addition to setting standards for ratios, training, group size, etc., *the Act* also included a means of classifying early childhood education practitioners according to education and experience. “The particular kind of post secondary training that meets the ECE II or III accreditation has bumped upwards several times over the years.... from being basically untrained to having among the highest minimum training requirements in North America. “ (Manitoba Case Study, p 6)

Historically, Manitoba government policy has also included a means to help fund child care centre operations and staff salaries. The NDP government introduced operating grants in 1974 (the first province in Canada to do so) and the Salary Enhancement Grant in 1986. The Conservative government of 1991/92 cancelled the Salary Enhancement Grant, and this move put the Manitoba child care sector into crisis. This move resulted in “...the worst losses in income felt across the country; no other province witnessed such severe declines in wages for child care staff.... as a result, more and more centres were financially unable to employ trained staff ... and began to require exemptions to this standard.” (Manitoba Case Study, p.7). In 2000-01, the NDP government implemented the previously discussed unit-funding model and child care staff wages are once again improving. Manitoba reports the following:

“Government policies developed in Manitoba have, by and large, helped the system to grow and have supported the link between trained staff and quality of care children receive. Funding shortfalls, however, have meant that low child care salaries significantly contributed to the recruitment and retention issues in the field.” (Manitoba Case Study, p.7).

The Labour Market Strategy looked at this historical context and made specific policy recommendations to address the recruitment and retention issue. The first recommendation of the Strategy was to develop an ECE Recruitment and Retention Committee. The Province of Manitoba will develop this committee, which “...will be made up of representatives of a variety of sectors relevant to the work of the committee ... [and] the province will ensure that the committee is supported by a paid staff person.”(Manitoba Case Study, p.14). This committee will:

- develop a projections model to predict the demand for early childhood professionals across all early childhood sectors
- ensure the federal and provincial government’s annual growth targets are met
- survey regularly demographics that affect training decisions
- ensure articulation between training institutions
- advise government on best use of public ECE funds
- ensure that the child care community is aware of the Labour Market Strategy
- ensure actualization of the Labour Market Strategy
- liaise with government and other sectors
- oversee the forgivable loan program--a program recommended as a means to assist with high tuition and ensure retention in the ECE field. (This is discussed in the Education section of this paper)

There is evidence that the Manitoba policy-makers are taking the recommendations produced in the Labour Market Strategy seriously. Previous sections of this paper have discussed the implementation of wage increases, salary scales, training initiatives, mentoring programs, public relations campaigns, etc. The Manitoba government has also demonstrated an historical, and current, willingness to work closely with the MCCA in its decisions about the child care sector. In fact, “...the MCCA continues to inform and influence the provincial government’s funding and policy decisions through regular meetings with the Minister, the

Assistant Deputy Minister, Director of Child Day Care and representation of the Regulation Review Committee” (Manitoba Case Study, p.18).

## Quebec

The following outlines the objectives of the new Family Policy introduced in Quebec in 1996/97:

“These provisions reflect the government’s desire to modernize and adapt its policies and programs to the evolution of Quebec society. They are designed to respond to the wishes and demands expressed by family support organizations, child care services, representatives from women’s groups and other people representing Quebec citizens. In addition, the provisions are based on a fundamental principle that recognizes the parent’s primary role in their child’s development and the supportive role given to the State. The updated Family Policy realizes this principle through three major goals:

- to ensure equal services to all by providing more support to low-income families, all the while ensuring universal support;
- to help parents in dealing with both their parental and professional responsibilities;
- to foster child development and equal opportunities for children (Quebec Case Study,p.6).

The result of this policy was the implementation of a provincially funded, universal child care system that fundamentally changed the child care sector in that province. Although Quebec continues to deal with a recruitment and retention issue, it is for different reasons than the rest of the country. Newly trained early childhood educators are desperately needed to meet the immediate and vastly increased demand for child care spaces. The introduction of the much-improved salary scale and benefits package, and the government campaign to recruit new students, is helping tremendously. However, since the implementation of a new pension package that has made it possible and attractive for many trained and experienced early childhood educators to retire, the need for additional recruits shows no sign of abating. Besides the recruitment and retention crisis, the Family Policy of 1996-97 had first created confusion and angst among the child care community with the proposed plan to "...transform the existing network of centres." (Quebec Case Study, p.7). The Quebec government of the time created a steering committee to bring together the interested parties and to work out viable solutions. This committee is described below.

“This committee enables the Department to link with various stakeholders involved in developing child care services and Quebec’s Family Policy. During its meetings, the Department provides information or solicits advice from participants on various topics relating to child care services. ... The meetings take place in an atmosphere of collaboration rather than confrontation, and this means that everyone can express their views, however divergent their orientations might be.” (Quebec Case Study, p.7).

The Family Policy introduced in Quebec is not based on liberal ideology, but rather is based on social democratic ideology. It sees child care as part of a universally organized system for which the state is responsible to assist parents with the growth and development of their children <sup>11</sup>. Such a policy sees child care as a service, not a commodity, and sees the child care practitioner as a valuable resource and partner. The implementation of the Family Policy has not been without complications for Quebec, and within the province they were still struggling with the transitional issues when the recent elections brought in power a government who seems less eager to embrace the social-democrat principles on which the current Family Policy is based. Until further developments, it provides the rest of Canada with the opportunity to see a universal child care policy, maybe in danger, but still in action, and to learn from the process.

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<sup>11</sup> Since the time of writing this case study (Winter 2003), there has been a change of government in Quebec. Changes are being implemented by the new government which are having an impact on the child care sector and its delivery of child care.

## Labour Perspective

As previously discussed, unions have long been involved in advocating for child care, and in particular, a universal child care system. They lobby governments for funding to improve wages and benefits, and are often involved in joint campaigns with parents, and other interested parties. "Several coalition campaigns with significant labour involvement have been aimed at persuading the federal government to make child care a funding and policy priority." (Labour paper, p.6).

Unions have been instrumentally involved in both Manitoba and Quebec, and have contributed positively to the gains made for the child care sector in those provinces. Unions have been involved in other provinces as well, and have been successful in addressing policy issues, for instance:

"In Quebec, the unions were instrumental in bringing about a government family policy of \$5-a-day child care, and increases in public funding for the sector that far surpass those in any other province. In 1999, the Quebec unions won average raises of 35.1% over four years for all centre-based child care staff in the province through centralized bargaining, plus a commitment to negotiate a pension plan and to do a pay equity evaluation. The same year in British Columbia, unionized child care staff succeeded in getting increases and improved benefits (since rolled back by the Campbell government), as part of a larger campaign by unionized community social service workers. The two major unions representing child care staff in Manitoba and the Manitoba Child Care Association spearheaded a worthy wages campaign, which secured increased funding from the newly elected NDP government in 2001. In Saskatchewan, public sector unions joined with other community-based organizations and advocates to campaign for job equity and wage increases in community social services, including child care." (Labour paper, p.7).

## Education

### National Scan

There are six key points raised across the country that relate to how education is negatively affecting the recruitment and retention of early childhood care staff. These six concerns are:

- accessibility was the most cited issue; high costs of tuition (both in-service and pre-service) in relation to the low wages of the profession is seen as a huge disincentive to either enter or remain in the field; geographic location was the other accessibility concern;
- colleges not producing enough graduates to meet the current demands of the industry;
- there is a general perception that students are encouraged away from the ECE profession by guidance counsellors, etc. (there is a perception that only lower achieving students who cannot get into other program are being encouraged to enrol in ECE programs);
- there is a recognition that it is hard to attract students to a field that is plagued by low wages, flat career structure, and no recognition; some provinces have seen college programs close due to low enrolments;
- there is a perception that post-secondary institutions are not screening incoming applicants closely enough to ensure suitability of student to the ECE profession; and
- there is a perception that although ECE curricula at post-secondary institutions are currently complex and over-extended, they are still not providing enough education and training to adequately prepare students for the field.

Although all six of these issues were raised in various ways throughout the environmental scans, undoubtedly, the most expressed concern with the education system and its impact on recruitment and

retention was the issue of accessibility. Every report addressed this concern. The high cost of tuition is prohibitive when compared to the potential wages of the child care staff. The other problem is the lack of available training programs in all the various regions of the country. Although there are some distance education programs available, for many these are still not viable options. The Acadian and francophone communities outside Quebec and the Northern regions reported that they feel this accessibility issue is compounded in their communities. For the francophone community it is often difficult to find French language instruction. They also say,

“Most often, the qualified early childhood care provider has received her training at an English training institute. This often limits the early childhood care provider with few resources and information that can be used in the French child care system. In communities where assimilation into the English language is high, specialized programs are needed, which in turn require specialized training. This training is costly and not always available.” (Acadian/Francophone Report, p.2)

Nunavut reports difficulty with language barriers as well, indicating that although they receive very little training locally and that when they do, they need to have translators assist with the programs. This increases their already high training costs substantially.

Nunavut, Yukon and the Northwest Territories all specifically mention the geographical barriers to accessing education and training. In fact, “...some respondents questioned the importance of accessing training if there was no community, industry or financial recognition” (NWT Report, p.3).

The second-most cited problem related the disincentives that keep quality workers from joining or remaining in the child care field. The Saskatchewan Report summarizes it this way:

“Educated staff is ‘stolen’ by other organizations that have better pay and benefits ... and less stress... Again, it is difficult to recruit potential educators when what can be offered does not compensate for the time and cost spent in two years of post-secondary education. Because centres receive a limited amount of funding, there is little room to offer good benefits.” (Saskatchewan Report, p.6-7)

## **Addressing the Retention and Recruitment Issue**

### **Manitoba**

The following excerpt from the Manitoba Case Study nicely summarizes the state of the early childhood education system in that province:

“The education milieu of the field is very healthy in Manitoba and still reflects the initial vision for the licensed sector as first imagined in the 1970’s. The government-appointed Child Care Education Program Approval Committee (CCEPAC) meets year-round, on a monthly basis, to monitor, review and accredit university and college ECE training programs. Thirteen specific competencies and program outcomes have been identified and college or university ECE training programs are vetted against these criteria to ensure the calibre of ECE graduates and their readiness to care for and educate young children. The CCEPAC works to ensure equivalency, portability and articulation between programs of study, monitors student and employer satisfaction, and ensures education programs stay current with best practices” (Manitoba Case Study, p.11).

The province has four community colleges and two universities offering ECE and/or advanced ECE programs, including a francophone program. Many of these programs are offered through distance

education options. Since the mid-80's, Manitoba has also been "...a leader in the development of experiential learning and prior learning assessment models that have supported the child care field." (Manitoba Case Study, p.11). Completion of the various levels of training corresponds to the staff classification system and wage scales.

Yet, Manitoba has been experiencing drops in student enrolment at all their educational institutions. "[This] reflects a major limitation of the relatively high educational standards in our field. Higher compensation and progressive roles have not necessarily been linked to the completion of ongoing training." (Manitoba Case Study, p.12).

The Labour Market Strategy included recommendations to address this concern and to also expand upon the current training and education initiatives. It recommends the development of a Forgivable Loan program. This recommendation addresses the high, and ever-increasing, cost of tuition.

"[This] proposed model, with its contract signed by the candidate and the clause that requires commitment to stay in the field as a precondition for the loan's forgiveness, is an essential component of the recommendation. Literature confirms that through forgivable loans, child care practitioners who have their training paid and are asked for a commitment to the field as their part of the deal comply, and in fact, continue with their training and are retained in the field." (Manitoba Case Study, p.15).

It is also recommended that the "Gap Training Assessment Model" be expanded. This will build on the successes of the ECE: Competency Based Assessment/Prior Learning Assessment project." (Manitoba Case Study, p.17). This process helps child care staff to identify "gaps" in their training requirements. Once these "gaps" have been identified, there must also be a commitment to make workshops available and accessible that will address this need. "Candidates will qualify for forgivable loans to go." (Manitoba Case Study, p.16).

To date, there has been some positive response by the government to address the education issues in the province. Funding has been made available to colleges and universities to "...expand their enrolment of new students in ECE training programs and to adapt their programs of study." (Manitoba Case Study, p.17). Program adaptations include accelerated training programs, prior learning assessments, and "Gap" training. In September 2002, the University of Winnipeg implemented...

"... the Advanced Diploma in Leadership in ECE... targeting the advanced practitioner at the mid-point of her career who is looking for additional skill in leadership, mentorship, and management of complex organizations. This is a unique partnership between the University's faculty of arts and science, and its division of continuing education, which allows the scaffolding of training as an entry into the university milieu. It has a strong prior learning recognition component." (Manitoba Case Study, p.18).

## **Quebec**

The responsibility of meeting the vastly increased demand for trained early childhood educators, as outlined in the new Family Policy, fell to the approximately 25 Quebec colleges. At the same time, the actual diploma programs had to be reviewed to determine if they would meet the increased standards stipulated in the Family Policy. In order to bring the diploma programs that did not meet the increased standards in line with these new standards, a new program called Techniques d'éducation à l'enfance (ECET) was designed and implemented in the colleges as of September 2003.... [This program] is usually offered to the regular daytime clientele, which is mostly comprised of students coming from high school." (Quebec Case Study, p.17).

Several colleges offered ECE training programs to adult clientele. However, upon investigation it was discovered that these programs were "...of varying duration and content [and] were not equivalent to each other and that several of them could not meet the basic standards required by [the new Family Policy]." (Quebec Case Study, p.17). Once this was discovered, and considering the fact that colleges were developing the new ECET program, the government:

"... assumed a leadership role and implemented a committee whose mandate was to create a shared provincial program... which is currently offered throughout the province. It was understood that each college would follow a list of 13 skills targeted by the program but that the content could be adapted in order to complement the programs developed in each department. This new [program] was a significant step towards better consultation at the provincial level. On the other hand, since the program is now available throughout the network, any college can request to become a provider... regardless of whether it has a regular teaching department in the field or not." (Quebec Case Study, p.17).

Prior learning assessment tools have been used by child care training programs in Quebec for a long time. However, the new "skills-based program" required new assessment tools be developed. "... the MEQ, in collaboration with ECE instructors, has developed a prior learning assessment process that covers all the skills required in ECET training" (Quebec Case Study, p.18).

The issue of distance education is also being addressed. The Distance Training College (CCFD) is "developing distance training tools for the skills required..... The medium-term goal is to provide distance training for all 13 skills.... The CCFD also intends to work on a project for a distance training course offered through the Internet for the 'creativity and professional intervention' skill." (Quebec Case Study, p.18).

### **Labour Perspective**

Unions, in general, have long been proponents of training/education guidelines and standards, and advocates for such training to be affordable and accessible to workers. This is no different for the child care sector. Citing the *Unionization and Quality in Early Childhood Programs*, paper (Doherty, G. and Foyer, B. (2002)) –

"Unionized child care centres tend to demand and attract workers with more training and experience. On average, they have a higher proportion of staff with two years or more of ECCE and a lower proportion of untrained teaching staff. They also more often act as field training sites for ECCE students.

More broadly, unions have a strong record of championing affordable, high quality post-secondary training and education. Affordable post-secondary education is critical to recruiting full- and part-time students to ECCE programs. Labour organizations also fought for and supports Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), which is a way to acknowledge and value the experience early childhood educators have and allow them to complete their education in a shorter period of time" (Labour paper, p.5).

## Discussion

Focusing on each of the five factors separately encourages us to sort out the causes of our sector's retention and recruitment problems. However, these factors do not occur in isolation of each other. Actions must be comprehensive, estimating the effect of any intervention upon the other parts of the system. In the past, single "unity theory" solutions have been less than successful. To assume there is only one right answer to the recruitment and retention issues facing the child care sector, and to compete within the sector to find that one right answer will only feed into the systemic oppression, and the human resource challenges the profession faces.

The Nova Scotia paper, *Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Early Childhood Care Staff in Early Childhood Care Centres*, April 2000, outlined five key factors—workplace, standards, attitudes, policy and education—that contributed to the recruitment and retention problem experienced by the child care sector in that province. It also argued that each of these factors is complex in its own right, and each is intertwined with the others, suggesting that there is no singular solution—locally, provincially or nationally.

It is evident that recruitment and retention issues cannot be discussed in isolation from the factors that systematically oppress the child care sector. Chronic ambivalence and ambiguity plague the entire system. Webster's Dictionary defines ambivalence as "...being uncertain or changeful; affected by contradictory emotions" and ambiguity as "being doubtful and uncertain; having a double meaning." This sense of uncertainty, or of not having a clear direction or common understanding of the child care sector, pervades the entire system at all levels, within and without. To understand the prevalence of this systemic oppression, one must ask difficult questions.

## Clients

To begin, ask who is the early child care system intended to serve? Is it the child or the family? Who are the clients and who are the stakeholder(s)? Are children the clients and parents the stakeholders, or is it the other way around? Do all children have a right to quality supports during their early years of development or are only some children deserving of this, as suggested through targeted programs for "at-risk" children? Are young children considered citizens with rights or are they only appendages of their families?

Are all early childhood educators and care providers able to distinguish and agree who their clients are, especially when funding for their services is primarily decided by the ability of a child's family to pay? Do policy-makers have a vision of serving all children as individuals, or are their policies directed towards servicing parents and families? Do childcare providers and policy-makers share the same vision and understanding of the child care system?

## Sector Groupings

From within the system, is there a common understanding of the role of unions and that of professional associations? Are these two diametrically opposed or do they have common goals? Are they able to work together to strengthen the system, or are they destined by their very nature to further fragment the child care sector? And what about the non-profit and commercially organized child care centres? Are these two forms of operating businesses to provide services to young children the antithesis of each other or are they more alike than different? Is the method of business incorporation more important than the quality of service?

## Gender Bias

And what of gender bias, or more specifically in this case, bias against women and women's work? Women's work in our society and culture has historically been, and continues to be, undervalued. This undervaluing affects the entire system. It taints the decisions made by the policy-makers and impacts the interactions within the child care sector and with people outside the sector. This undervaluing makes the early childhood practitioner invisible. This fuels the ambivalence and ambiguity that permeates the system. Individuals within the sector must be prepared to question how this gender bias affects them and ask what they can do to stop perpetuating the myth. Are child care providers themselves colluding with this perceived notion of women's nature, or are they educating themselves to the truth? Do women feel empowered to advocate for themselves and their profession, or do they feel like they will be accused of being self-serving and uncaring and of not living up to the socially acceptable "norm" of womanhood? Will they ever treat themselves respectfully or will they continue to allow the work they do to be overlooked and under-appreciated, yet all the while be expected as part of their nature?

Through the process of this national scan, it has become increasingly evident that if we are to fully resolve the crisis of recruitment and retention in the child care sector, we must address the systemic oppression of the child care system. It will remain difficult to both attract new professionals and to retain current ones, without resolving the issues of ambiguity and ambivalence that pervade the five key factors that impact this issue, and the child care sector as a whole. A common and unified understanding of the system must emerge and be accepted. Difficult questions must be asked and answered and comprehensive action plans must move forward. The work begun by the individual provinces and territories through the process of their environmental scans must continue, and remain mindful of the complexities of the system and the pervasive aspect of systemic oppression.

The case studies of Manitoba and Quebec, along with the Labour Perspective paper, provide examples of plans and actions that encompass an understanding of this issue. In each case, they have researched and responded to all five factors, while maintaining a focus on the whole of the situation. They have also attempted to deal with the ambiguity and ambivalence experienced by the system. Although none of the solutions offered in these papers is perfect, they do provide an excellent means of understanding what can be accomplished when careful consideration and time are allocated to addressing the complexities of the situation. They also offer the reader examples of what may be achieved, and how to embark on a path to resolution.

Quebec, for example, has answered the question of whom their child care system is to serve--it is the children. All children are entitled to quality child care at minimal costs, regardless of family wealth or status. Both Manitoba and Quebec have found that when their professional associations and their unions worked together, they experience increased power and were more successful in achieving their goals. Much can be learned from these papers and case studies, and much can be learned from continuing to watch as events unfold in each of these provinces, particularly regarding union activity in the sector.

This national scan has shown that regional differences in Canada's child care sector are minimal, and from coast to coast, child care remains undervalued and systemically oppressed. It has also shown that the five key causal factors identified as impacting upon recruitment and retention are applicable across the country, and that no matter where child care practitioners are located, they have a strong desire to work

more cohesively on an agenda that is national in scope. The issue and all of its complexities have been defined and are more clearly understood. The challenge now is to build on this momentum and move the sector towards the recognition and respect it deserves and must demand. It is only when the two "R's" of recognition and respect are accomplished that we will resolve the crises of two other "R's"--recruitment and retention.

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