



Early
Childhood
Education Lab

Atlantic Canada Early Childhood Education Training Lab



► *Report 2020-2021*

*NouLAB is a program
of the Pond-Deshpande
Centre at the University
of New Brunswick*

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A program of the Pond-Deshpande Centre
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01

Introduction

About this Report

This report is a review of the Early Childhood Education Lab, a social innovation lab facilitated by NouLAB from July 2020-December 2021. It includes a summary of lab objectives, research, activities, and outputs. It introduces four social innovation prototypes co-created by four provincial multistakeholder teams, along with an overview of learning from prototype evaluations and recommendations for future work. The report closes with a reflection on the lab process itself and the impact that it had on the provincial team participants.



We offer this report to the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector of Atlantic Canada in order to share the collectively created insights and visions for the future well-being of the sector. These insights and visions were produced by the lab conveners and stakeholders, provincial team participants, and early childhood educators who generously shared their hopes and hardships with us in interviews and through field tests.



Who Should Read this Report?

This report is intended to be read by:



- ▶ *those authoring policy to influence workforce development in the ECE sector*
- ▶ *those working in government to regulate and uplift professionalism in early learning and childcare providers*
- ▶ *those supporting educators' access to training through college programs, professional associations, networks*
- ▶ *anyone with an interest in understanding the needs and challenges of providing high quality early learning and childcare, and the current state of efforts toward these goals in Atlantic Canada*
- ▶ *innovation lab practitioners and those interested in learning about the social innovation lab process*



About NouLAB

*NouLAB is a social innovation lab
of the Pond-Deshpande Centre at
the University of New Brunswick.*

It is designed to address public challenges that affect many and which no single party or institution can solve alone. NouLAB exists to be a trusted and neutral convener of change agents from across sectors, convening them around pressing complex issues, and facilitating their journey to deep change. NouLAB is making the change process more reflective of and responsive to the needs of those most affected by those challenges.

What is a Social Innovation Lab?

A social innovation lab stimulates and supports the development and testing of novel ideas that improve the outcomes on social and environmental issues.

A process of testing and adapting refines the most promising ideas and, along the way, labs also generate a deeper understanding of the systemic changes needed to effect change at scale. The Early Childhood Education Lab focused on exploring the question, “How might we support educators in getting ECE qualifications while working to deliver quality early learning and childcare?” Social innovation labs are considered successful when we see evidence of strong relationships developed between previously siloed stakeholders, new perspectives and insights on the problem are uncovered and shared widely, and potential new solutions emerge.



A social innovation lab is a convening of multi-sectoral stakeholders to work on a complex challenge. Social innovation labs are typically made up of five phases:



Groundwork

- Labs build relationships with relevant stakeholders and gather perspectives and goals through informal discussions, knowledge exchanges, and stakeholder interviews. This groundwork lays the critical foundation of relationships and aligns purpose across stakeholders, allowing us to extend meaningful invitations to participate in the lab.



Discovery

- Multi-sectoral teams are guided through activities designed to expand their understanding of the systemic nature of a challenge and uncover the root of the problem. Informed by the voice of lived experience and systems thinking, lab participants explore the broader context and the dynamics among people, power, and resources related to the challenge.



Ideation

- Participants then work through a rigorous design thinking process to generate many new ideas, the most promising of which are developed into prototypes.



Prototyping

- Prototypes are a preliminary model of something from which other forms are developed. A representation of a design idea used to get feedback and generate learnings, prototypes make ideas tangible and testable.

During a lab process, teams use prototypes to make their ideas tangible and testable to test their assumptions about potential effective solutions. For example, the prototyping phase in this lab was broken up into two parts: 1) concept-testing, and 2) a field test. The concept-testing phase involved the development of the concept on paper and presenting it for feedback from those with lived experience and experts in the field. That feedback then informed the development of a field prototype. Field prototypes were tested in live environments with stakeholders working in the field.



Roadmap

- Something can be learned from all prototypes. The most promising and validated prototypes go on to be developed into pilots and, eventually, may become future programs. Learning from other prototypes is shared through recommendations for future development of new concepts that address problems in the same space. The learnings from testing prototypes can be used by stakeholders at all levels of the system. Prototypes that go on to be developed into pilots need existing organizations, community groups, or government agencies to resource, implement, and support them.

NouLAB's Innovation Labs Have 3 Primary Outputs:



Prototyped services and infrastructure ready for further development

At the end of the lab, some promising ideas emerge. These are not yet solutions, but the best ideas are ready for further development, and some are potentially ready for pilot testing. With additional support and investments, these ideas can be developed into breakthrough solutions in the form of new services and infrastructure.

Expanded content expertise

The lab stimulates the creation of new knowledge and learning about complex issues, a more comprehensive understanding of the context and dynamics at play, and builds awareness and readiness for the participants to tackle the challenges beyond the lab.

Expanded networks and strengthened trust

Social innovation labs foster new networks characterized by increased trust in collaboration. People leave the lab with new relationships and connections that allow them to work more effectively and lead change initiatives inside and outside of their organizations.


02

*The Atlantic Canada
Early Childhood
Education Lab*



The Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre awarded funding to NouLAB for a social innovation lab with the support of the four provincial governments in Atlantic Canada (NL, NS, PEI, and NB) to look at tackling the question:



How might we support early childhood educators in getting ECE qualifications while working to deliver quality early learning and childcare in Atlantic Canada?

→ Continued on page 13

→ Continued from page 12

The lab set out to ask this question in collaboration with multi-sectoral stakeholders through an 18-month co-design process that aimed to achieve the following goals:



Generate clearer understanding of the core problems affecting the Early Childhood Education sector in Atlantic Canada.



Develop and test ideas for addressing key barriers to thriving for educators in early learning and childcare centres.



Design a clear pathway to developing prototypes through to the pilot stage (if field testing points to the prototype's suitability for further development).



Create a roadmap to share what was learned and how it can be applied to future work in this space.



Amplify the voice and value of educators and early childhood education.



Build stronger relationships among stakeholders across Atlantic Canada.



The following sections provide an overview of the processes, activities, and key findings generated through each of the lab phases: groundwork, discovery, ideation, and prototyping.

Groundwork Phase

The groundwork phase of the lab concentrated heavily on relationship building within the sector. The lab team held over 50 stakeholder interviews across the four Atlantic provinces with three main goals in mind:

- 1 *to better understand the ECE sector and scope the problem for the lab,*
- 2 *to understand who needed to be at the table for the lab teams, and*
- 3 *to build trust.*

Engaging Stakeholders and Building Relationships

Within the ECE sector in Atlantic Canada we interviewed individuals in government, early childhood educators and their associations, post-secondary colleges offering ECE programs, ELCC operators, and directors, consultants, and academics. These interviews helped us develop and understand our scope for the rest of the lab which was guided by this question:

How might we support early childhood educators in getting ECE qualifications while working to deliver quality early learning and childcare in Atlantic Canada?

We then set out to recruit participants to come together in multistakeholder teams to participate in a 10-week lab process. Having lived experience from the early childhood educators' and directors' perspectives at the table was an important part of this process. We held a series of meet-and-greet webinars to explain the project to educators in the field, get their feedback on the scope, and test their appetite for participating. We then put out a call for applications for one early childhood educator and one operator from each province to participate on each provincial team. We offered an honorarium and paid for a substitute for early childhood educators and directors to take the time to participate in the lab workshops.

Four Lab Teams, Three Provinces

Four teams entered the lab program in March 2021: two from New Brunswick, one from Prince Edward Island, and one from Newfoundland and Labrador. Each team had representation from an educator, ELCC director, government, association, and college. Teams went through a series of 8 workshops over 10 weeks, working through the research and data, sharing each other's perspectives and lived experience, and co-creating ideas for improving the situation in their provinces. The teams were divided into two cohorts: one anglophone and one francophone.

→ Continued on page 15 and 16

Province

Educator

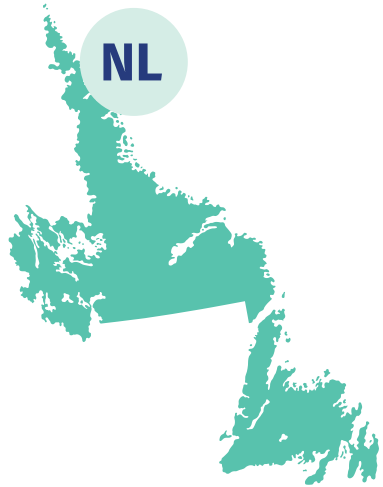
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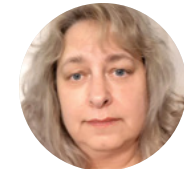
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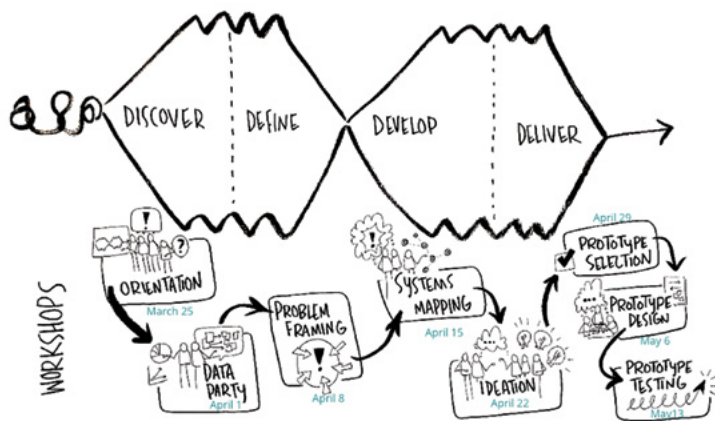
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Principles of the Lab

To create an innovative and cooperative space during the lab, a set of principles was developed and used to guide the work.

During the orientation workshop that kicked off the lab, teams were asked to develop team agreements on how they would enact these principles and how they would work together over the course of the lab. Their team agreements included meeting etiquette and agreements to the following questions: What do we need to work well together? How will we ensure equal sharing of airtime? How will we make decisions? How will we communicate outside of the workshop? These principles and team agreements helped create a container for the lab and we revisited them when new members joined or at transition points in the team's development of their prototypes.



➤ ORIGINAL LAB PROCESS ILLUSTRATION BY RACHEL DERRAH

Original Lab process of the 8 workshops the lab teams participated in along with the double-diamond design process. The workshops were designed to bring the groups through phases of discovery of the problem and each other's perspectives, definition of the problem, development of ideas and delivery of prototypes tests in the field.



Transparency

A commitment to honest and clear communication about what people can and cannot influence regarding the scope of what the lab can achieve (power and dynamics). Using shared language to support clear and honest communication rather than assuming we have a shared understanding.



Lab as a Meeting Place

The workspace (Miro, Zoom, etc.) is welcoming, clear, and organized. We strive to make the space safe enough for all voices to be heard and valued. There will be a consistent rhythm to the ways in which we meet guided by these principles.



Innovative and Creative

We think outside the box. We explore and quickly test solutions on a small scale as a first step. We learn and adapt. This iterative process can often be messy and unclear at times. We need to work with some discomfort.



Co-creative

Having a sample representation of the “ECE system” in the co-creation of ideas leads to better ideas, greater uptake of initiatives, and buy-in for change.



Data Informed

Decisions and actions are informed by evidence from research of different forms such as lived experience and inclusive of different perspectives to maintain the integrity of the lab and systems work.



Check Assumptions

With many realities and truths in the early childhood education system, we keep an open mind to build trust in diverse groups. Rather than jump to assumptions, we will practise naming those assumptions and using curiosity to better understand other points of view.



People-Centred

Those most affected by decisions must be able to participate in and shape those decisions. Relationships are central to this as trust is necessary to be successful in this work.



Reflective

We have a practice of reflecting on what we are learning about ourselves, our team, and the ECE system, and how those reflections influence our actions and decisions.

In *Design Justice*, Sasha Constanza-Chock (2020) discusses the ethical implications of problem framing in community innovation projects. To create true innovation projects that produce novel, system-shifting ideas that effectively empower those most affected by the outcomes, not only solutions but problems must be co-designed by the people and communities who own them. Moreover, innovation processes must take asset-based approaches to framing an opportunity for innovation, by seeking to understand not only needs and barriers but also what communities are already doing to confront them, where their capabilities and strengths currently lie, and the resources communities have already built that are available to build upon.

The ECE Lab took a strengths-based approach to understanding both the problem space and the opportunities for innovation. Attention was focused on uncovering not only the barriers to training, but the existing workarounds and success stories of educators developing their practices despite challenges, and the characteristics of these resourceful solutions. This line of discovery can be traced into the concepts the teams developed, which play to the strengths of the provincial ECE communities where they have been tested.

Discovery Phase

Background research and the voices of lived experience were woven together to create a shared understanding of ECE training opportunities and standards, working conditions, and ECE workforce challenges in Atlantic Canada.

The purpose of this research was to provide lab participants with a rich understanding of the current state of the sector's workforce. We pulled together a comprehensive view of ECEs' lived experience, work context, and access to and support for training from research activities including:

- ▶ *desk research*
- ▶ *two academic literature reviews*
- ▶ *a primary study of educator experience with training and professional development in Atlantic Canada*

In Atlantic Canada...

just under
10,000
educators



provide care
and learning
services for



more than
60,000
children



Sources: 2019 Atlantic Canada ECE Progress Report

Background Research

Research for the lab was guided by initial stakeholder interviews and questions raised by a panel of sector leaders and subject matter experts who consulted with us throughout the project. During desk research, the lab team gathered peer-reviewed data and gray literature on educator experience and training, OECD benchmarking data on ECE workforce conditions, Canadian census and Atlantic Canadian workforce data, and ECE industry white papers and reports to create a profile of Atlantic Canada's ECE workforce. In order to understand existing efforts to tackle challenges facing the ECE sector, the lab also commissioned reviews of academic literature on 1) professional development models and 2) credentialing and alternative training pathways in the ECE sector from Canada and around the world.

Voices of Lived Experience: Atlantic Canada Early Childhood Educator Interviews

Informed by the findings of the background research, we designed a study to better understand the ECE experience in Atlantic Canada.

Semi-structured interviews gave insights into educators'

- ▶ current/prior work experience, nature of employment, and original motivation to join the field
- ▶ exposure to and experiences of professional training, mentoring, and education opportunities
- ▶ reflections on working within the sector, including what quality early childhood education means to them, career pathway, favourite elements of the work, and frustrations



Who Did we Interview?

We recruited individuals who were currently working within the sector, as well as people who had left the sector within the last three years.

In total, we interviewed...



forty-two (42) educators from across the four Atlantic provinces,



including nine (9) francophone educators.

Interviewees by Province

	En	Fr
New Brunswick	15	5
Newfoundland/Labrador	4	0
Nova Scotia	8	4
Prince Edward Island	6	0
Total	33	9

The interviewees worked in...



private (17),

or



non-profit centres (18)

in the last three years, with the remainder (7) having had experience working in multiple types of centres.

Most worked, or previously worked, full time.



Twenty-three of the interviewees were currently working in ECE,



four were still working in the sector but were on various types of leave, and



a dozen (12) had left ECE.

We spoke with...



two administrative assistants,



seven directors, and

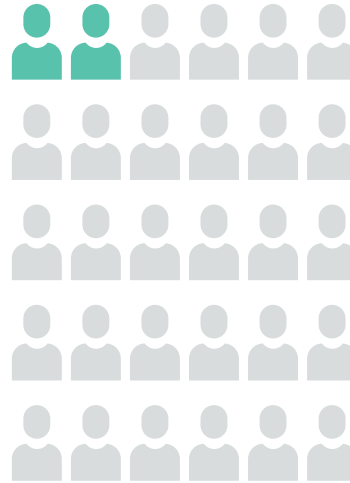


two inclusion support assistants,



one supervisor,

all of whom had hands-on experience delivering or supporting ECEs in the classroom environment.



Of the **30 other respondents** who described themselves as educators or teachers...



one had worked as a “float” in a centre (i.e., moving to whatever classroom needed help).



Another had worked as a centre director for a period.

16

participants were in the first five years of their careers

16

had worked in ECE between five and ten years

5

participants had between 23-35 years of experience each



Almost all the ECEs and directors we spoke to were certified in accordance with provincial requirements,

and one of the four (4) uncertified ECEs was in the process of completing their courses.



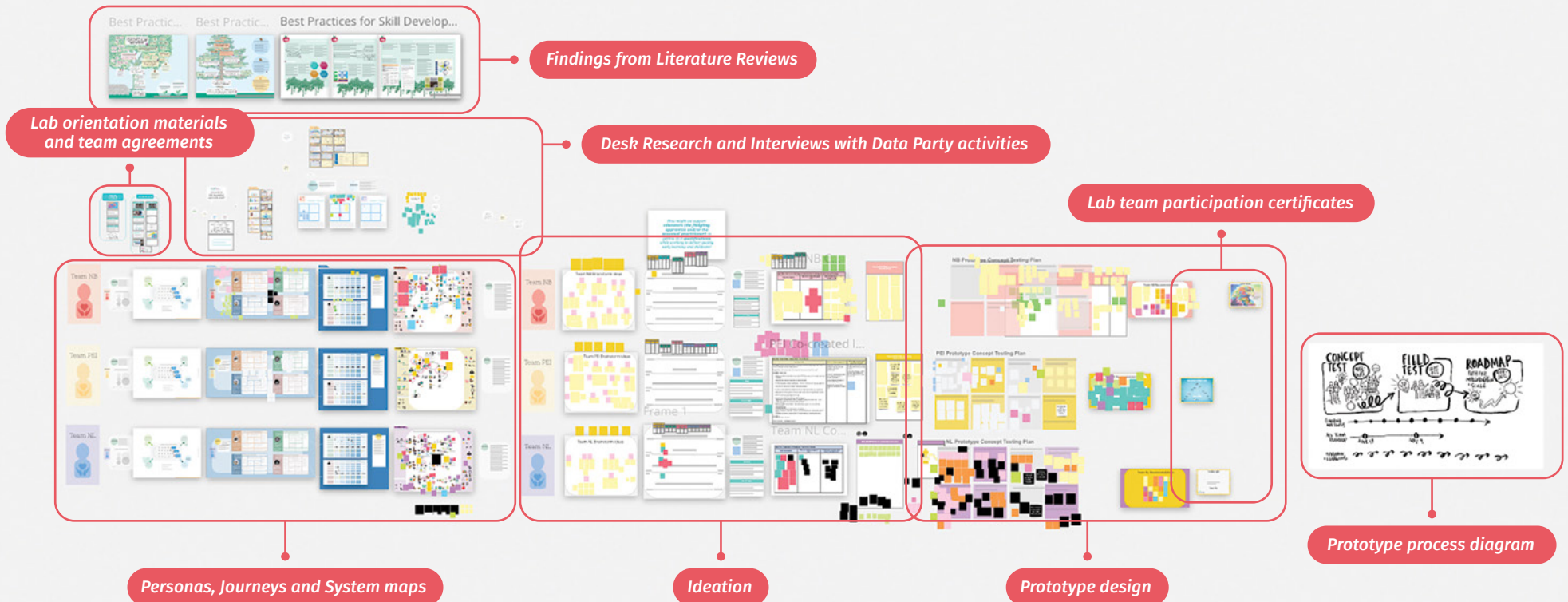
Several (18) had completed college diplomas or



bachelor **(9)** degrees,



and there were **four** with masters in related fields like education or child studies.



ECE Lab Virtual Data Party

We synthesized the research data into a virtual two-day Data Party for lab participants to explore using Miro, a collaborative whiteboard app. Findings were presented to the lab participants through graphic visualizations and hands-on activities for synthesizing and reflecting on the data.

Findings from Discovery Phase

Educators' Lived Experience

In interviews, educators commonly defined “high quality early childhood education” as personalized to each child's development, work that is rewarding but is also physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding, and time intensive.



High quality early childhood education and childcare essentially values its children and staff equally.”

- Atlantic Canada
early childhood educator

Analysis of interview responses confirmed that researchers' and practitioners' definitions were closely aligned, and challenges that educators face on the national level are nearly identical to those faced in Atlantic Canada.



The single most critical factor affecting the quality of early learning and care programs is the knowledge, skills, and stability of the early childhood workforce.”

- Best Start Expert Panel,
Ontario (2007). p. 7

Overall, the quality of early childhood education is linked to:

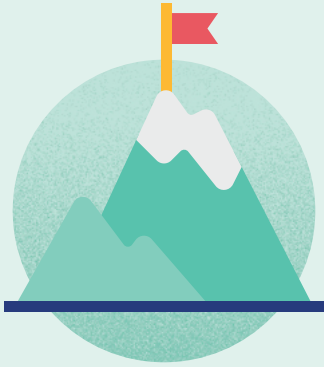
- 1 *the quality of ECE practice and*
- 2 *wellbeing of staff, which influences their capacity to excel in their work.*

Educators recognize the value of training applied to their work, but their everyday situation, which some educators described as “**survival mode**,” prevents some educators from accessing the training they need. The lack of resources for training compounds the stress of the work because educators are aware that there are ways that they could be improving their professional practice, but they are unable to access them.

Educators' most frequent complaints about professional training included the limitations of online courses and the relevance of the content to the needs in the workplace, especially regarding professional development. Interviewees found that the quality of the content was difficult to assess before taking the course, resulting in frustration with courses being either too advanced or too basic, wasting resources without meeting needs.

However, interview data revealed that **mentoring** and **practical learning** are key practices that help educators surmount barriers to achieving higher quality work. Interviewees noted that both require time and energy from mentors and mentees, which can limit how often these practices are supported in centres already facing staffing shortages.

► *For a full description of interview responses describing barriers and supports to high quality early childhood education, see Appendix 1, p. 86.*



Systemic Challenges, Resourceful Educators

Background research showed that there is much data available on the state of the sector, and that this data describes a few persistent challenges.

To understand these persistent challenges in the lived context of Atlantic Canadian ECEs, we wove together findings and quotes from the educator interviews with background research findings to create a situated understanding of the challenges faced by ECEs in Atlantic Canada.

Challenge 1

The Atlantic ECE workforce, like the national ECE workforce, is on average **getting older**. At the same time, the overall workforce is becoming **more educated**. 2016 Statcan data shows that the ECE sector¹ in Atlantic provinces (except for New Brunswick) are proportionally more educated as they age. Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador in particular see a steep increase in education of their older population. This goes against the overall Canadian trend that sees higher education rates in younger populations. These parallel trends lead to questions about how to support those needing to transition out of the most physically demanding parts of the job, and how to support and retain those credentialed educators from leaving to work in other sectors.

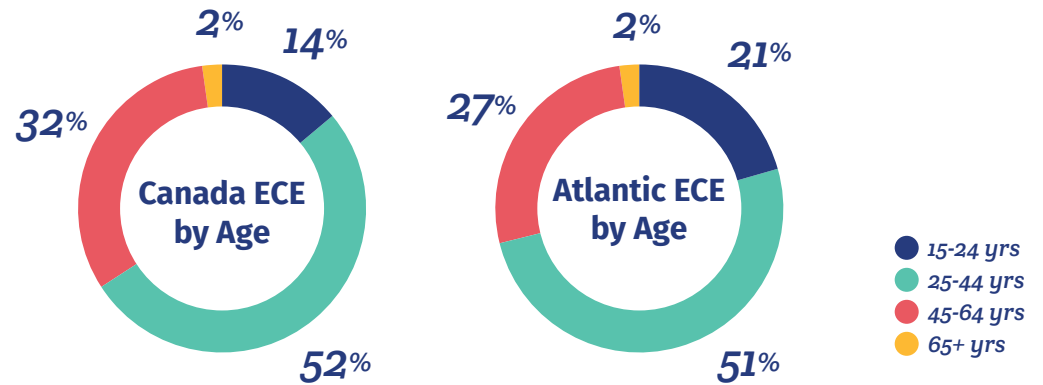
“

They stay in their careers for longer than they should because they don't have a safety net. So, we're trying to push 65-year-old women out of the classroom because they can't run after a child. And that affects the whole culture of the job, because the other ECEs have to support them.”

- Atlantic Canada
early childhood educator

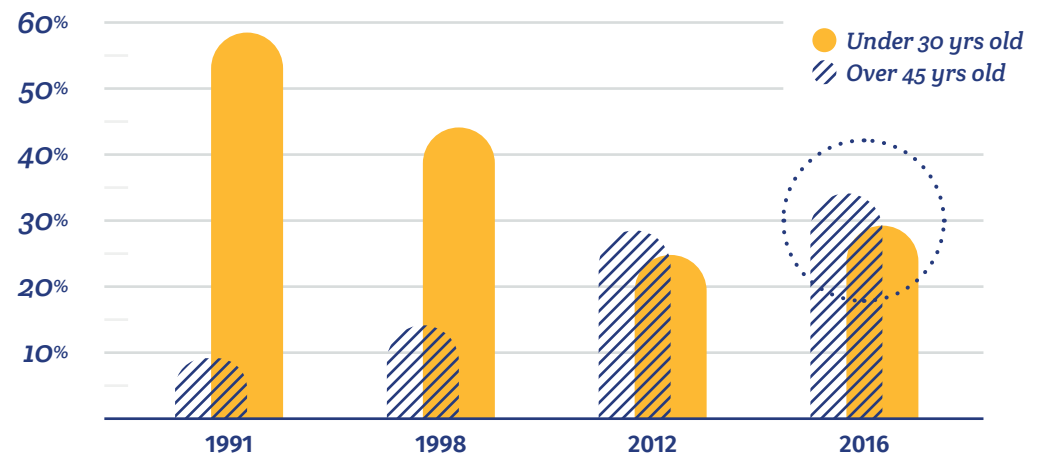
¹ Early Childhood Educators and Assistants (NOC 4214)

Atlantic Compared to Canada



Sources: 2016 Census data, Atlantic Canada for NAICS: Early Childhood Educators and Assistants (data rounded to nearest percent)

More educators are over 45 than under 30



Sources: Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development and the Canadian Child Care Federation. “ECE Workforce Research Roundtable.” June 2019. 2016 Census data, Atlantic Canada for NAICS: Early Childhood Educators and Assistants 2021 ECE Innovation Lab Primary Research Interviews.

Challenge 2

Increasing emphasis on **inclusion** means that educators are providing care in a growing number of **languages**, deepening curricular engagement with **diverse cultures**, and providing care to a growing number of children with **special learning** and **medical needs**.

“
I struggled with the children with autism, because all those children are so different and some of them are brilliant and some of them really struggle and it's just hard to figure out what that child in particular needs. So, I did struggle with that because we couldn't get good support workers for children with special needs.”

- Atlantic Canada
early childhood educator



Challenge 3

Educators face an increasing workload outside of regular working hours due to staffing shortages. In practice, this drives down the value of their compensation through unpaid working time. This extra unpaid time adds pressure to the already precarious work-life balance that educators grapple with, as many juggle care responsibilities for children and elders, and many struggle to tend to their own personal care needs due to lack of paid time off and retirement benefits. In fact, the most recent national survey of ELCCs (in 2013) found that 1 in 4 ECEs have additional part-time jobs to meet basic expenses (Flanagan, 2013).



I would say that we need living wages right now. We need pension plans and adequate sick time that can be accumulated. The training and the certifications and all of that stuff, I feel really frustrated when the emphasis is on that and this glaring huge problem is ignored. You go to these trainings and they tell you these things that you're supposed to be able to do in your classroom, but you won't be able to do those things if you're worried that you might get evicted. Like you're not going to be able to be a fully present teacher there for the children if you're still taking pain medication because of whatever root canal procedure you're going through. Or if you're food insecure, how am I supposed to make playdough in my time off to bring into the classroom if I can barely afford food? ”

- Atlantic Canada
early childhood educator

Carrying an Invisible Load: Common Work Tasks of ECE Educators

Work tasks required and compensated

- Teaching young children basic life skills
- Keeping children safe, clean, and fed
- Modelling social and emotional skills
- Supervising rest and play

Work tasks required but not compensated

Many educators reported that these tasks were not allocated in work hours and were performed on their own unpaid time, effectively driving down the real value of compensation and creating a system reliant on in-kind time and labour donations of its workers.

- Communicating with parents
- Writing reports
- Peer-to-peer mentorship
- Professional development
- Fundraising
- Training for advanced ECE qualification
- Cleaning classrooms and facilities
- Preparing classroom materials
- Organizing events to connect children to local community
- Mentoring ECE students
- Planning activities to deliver ECE curriculum



Challenge 4

This is an occupation **considered high risk for occupational stress** (Wagner, 2013), and many of the educators we spoke to reported experiences of **burnout requiring medical leave and contributing to high workforce churn**.

“

After 23 years of constantly caring for other people, I just forgot to fill my own tank. So, that's another professional learning, I feel. Our own mental wellness is extremely important for us to be able to maintain a high professional level of care. Like we need to put on our own oxygen mask first.”

- Atlantic Canada early childhood educator discussing their experience of being on medical leave for burnout

“

It's taking away from the quality of the programs and the enjoyment for the early childhood educators, because a lot of times they're just trying to get through today.”

- Atlantic Canada early childhood educator

The above challenges negatively impact the capacity of the ECE workforce to engage in ongoing training and skill development. However, unlike the primary education system, which shares many of these challenges, they are compounded by other factors to put immense pressure on ECEs.

In contrast to the centrally managed and regulated education system, ECE is a fragmented, distributed system where it is difficult to intervene on the scale required to address workforce problems. There is a pervasive lack of benefits such as overtime pay, sick leave, paid time off, and retirement savings, and the invisibility or misperception of the ECE profession in public discourse means that the sector rarely gets support at the scale required to make significant progress on these issues.

Frankly, on paper the ECE sector should have collapsed long ago, yet the story of the many barriers ECEs are up against can overshadow the significant resources and capabilities the ECE workforce brings to meet these challenges.

In the Discovery phase of the lab, we took an asset-based approach to understand how ECEs manage the sector's precarity, and in interviews and through desk research we looked at what was working, how educators were making due with the limitations and challenges they faced, and why they were motivated to keep doing so.

Our research revealed that early childhood educators bring many resources to bear as they face these challenges. Among the most important, educators are passionate about the impact of their work on society and report overall high satisfaction with their work.

“

The first three years of life are extremely important for human development; the research is there. We're not just babysitters, we're educators. ...we're working with language development, we're working with physical development in the very early stages, and we're working with cognitive development. So, we're setting it up for the [K-12] educators, so that helps them when they go into the school system. It's very, very important what we do. And I think it needs to be seen.”

- Atlantic Canada early childhood educator

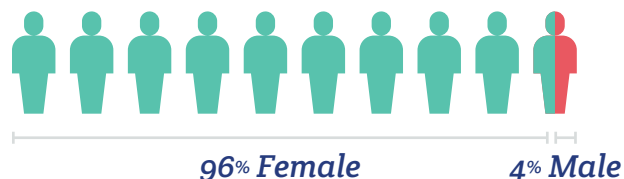
Many educators we talked to described the difference between public perception of their role and what they believe about the value of their work, and they hold this belief in its value despite the societal narrative of early childhood educators as “just babysitters.” This resilience and deep belief in the importance of early years learning and development is a tremendous resource that they contribute to the viability of their sector.

Because of this deep belief in the value of their work, they are highly motivated to deliver the best possible early learning and childcare. When faced with gaps in resources, educators creatively marshal resources from their communities or environment, and often contribute their own time and financial resources toward the success of their curriculum and to meet the needs of the children they work with. Lastly, educators highly value and rely on peer support networks to share information, help them meet challenges, and provide motivation to keep going.

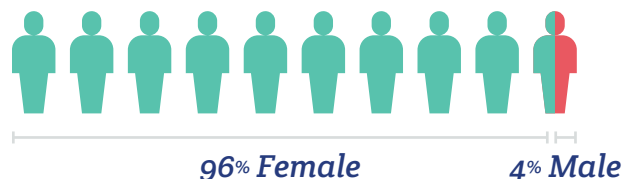
ECE Profile – Atlantic Compared to Canada

The ECE profession is by a vast majority female, on the regional and national levels.

Canada ECE by Sex

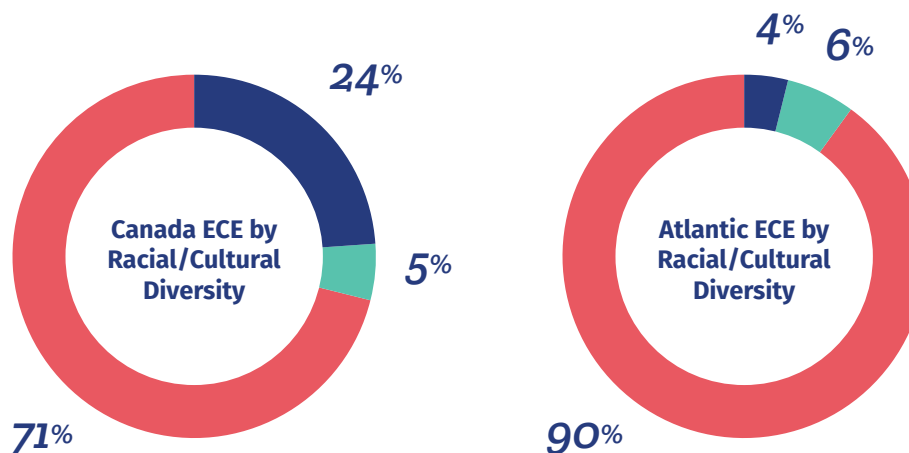


Atlantic ECE by Sex

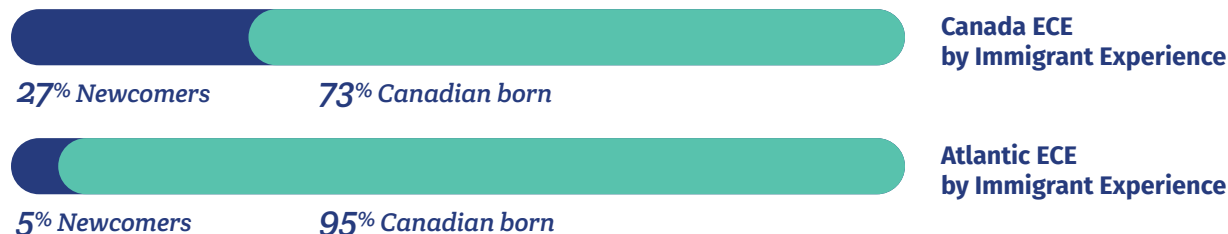


Atlantic CA has less racial and cultural diversity among ECE workers than the national average. NL is the highest in the region with 9% of ECE workers identifying as Aboriginal.

- Visible minorities
- First Nations/Inuit/Métis
- White/Caucasian

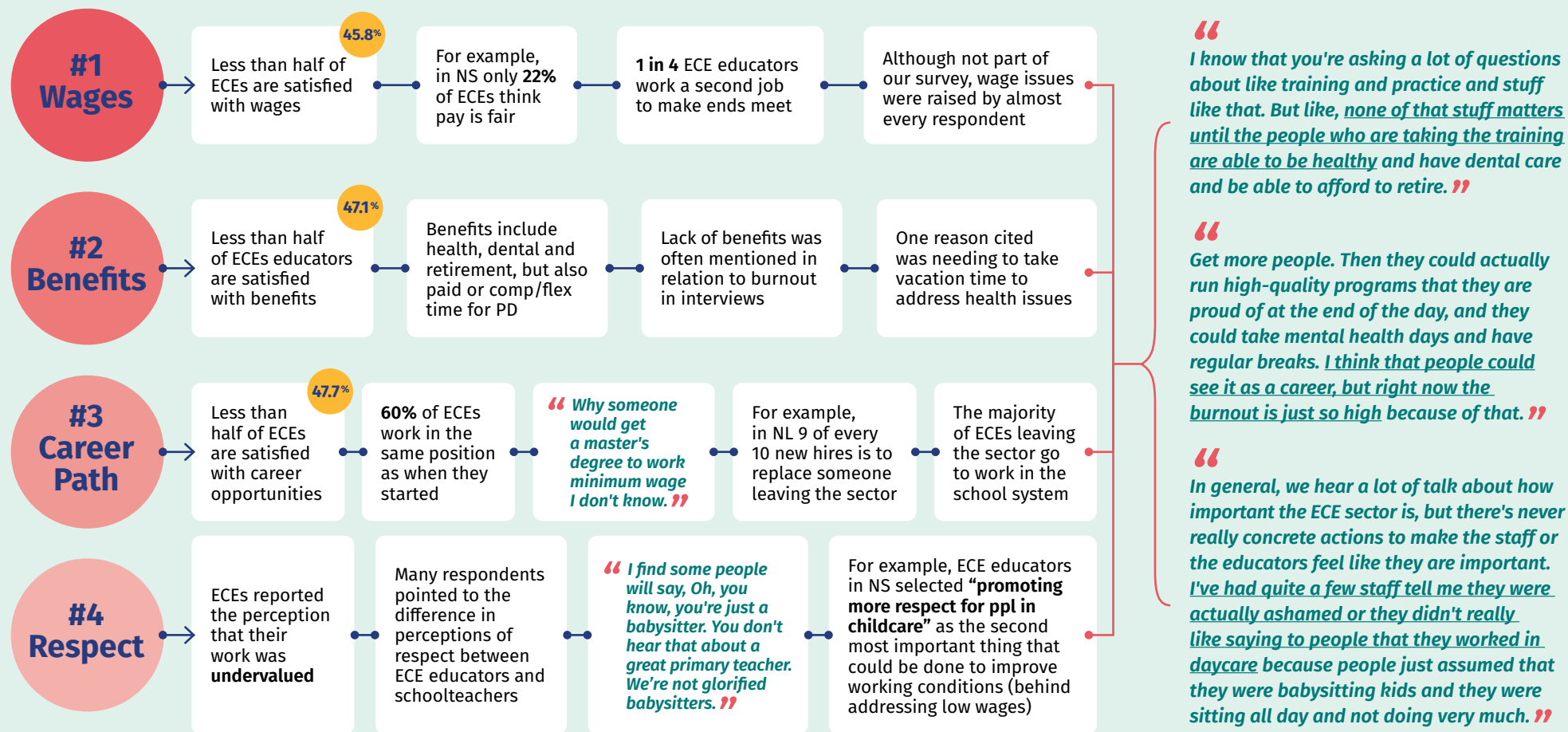


Atlantic CA has fewer newcomers working in ECE than the national average. NS is the highest in the region with 8% of ECE workers identifying as newcomers.



Sources: 2016 Census data, Atlantic Canada for NAICS: Early Childhood Educators and Assistants

Gaps | ECE Educators are least satisfied with these aspects of the work:



For educators, pay isn’t only an economic issue, it’s a symbol of how ECE work is valued by Canadian society.

Sources

2021 ECE Innovation Lab Primary Research Interviews.
Kathleen Flanagan, Jane Beach and Petr Varmuza. “You Bet We Still Care: A Survey of Centre-Based Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada. Highlights Report.” 2013.
Christine Saulnier and Lesley Frank. “Unappreciated and underpaid” Early Childhood Educators in Nova Scotia. 2019.

Early Childhood Educators Human Resource Council. “Examination of Recruitment and Retention Issues within the Regulated Early Learning and Child Care Workforce in Newfoundland and Labrador.” May 2019.
Kathleen Flanagan and associates, “PEI Workforce Strategy Project Final Report.” March 2019.

Quotes are from interviews with Atlantic Canada early childhood educators and directors.

Resources

The following are a few of the many resources ECE Educators bring to their work to meet the complex challenges they face:



Own Resources

Educators bring their own resources to work to fill in the gaps. The most commonly contributed resource was their own time. Among ways they contribute their own time resources include: covering staff shortages, participating in professional development, supporting co-workers, and communicating with or supporting parents.

Some educators reported using their own financial resources to supplement tight centre budgets, mainly for materials and snacks. For example, some educators interviewed planned to use their interview payment on treats and toys for their classes.



Creativity

Educators bring high creativity and adaptability to their work, describing how they apply ECE concepts in play-based settings to improvise learning opportunities for their students. Educators are often looking for new ideas and techniques to support their creativity when they select professional development opportunities.

“

I just really loved seeing the connections and the aha moments with the children. And then just seeing their learning happening. One of my favourites started as somebody spilled their drink at the table while we were eating and I put [a] paper towel down and it sucked up the water and we talked about it and I said, that's called absorption. And then they asked questions about it. Really great questions. And that turned into a two-month learning activity around absorption. How different things absorb, and talking about what do we think is going to happen, and then planting things, seeing how it absorbed the water... Those little learning moments could happen and turn into a huge learning opportunity.”



High Job Satisfaction

Educators report that they love their work. They cite enjoyment of working with children, opportunities for input, and good coworkers. Over half are very satisfied with the work schedule and how many hours they work.

Educators know that their work is important, which gives them a sense of purpose.

Many directors (75%) retain hands-on work in the classroom in addition to their administrative responsibilities. In interviews, directors indicated that this was due to a lack of staff resources, but considered this ongoing connection to the classroom as a positive job aspect due to their love of children being a motivating factor for their work.

“

It's really important when you're going into this field that you try to always keep hold of why you're there. That you always try to keep that love. You always try to be open-minded. It's such an amazing rewarding field, but you can't be there expecting that everything's going to be perfect because it's not, and it's really up to you to try to make it as best as you possibly can.”



Peer Support Networks

Educators share information and offer emotional and professional support for each other through informal networks. Some of these networks are created through working or attending training together, others use social media such as Facebook groups to get advice on common challenges.

Relationships among staff vary widely between centres. Some educators reported team dynamics to be a highly rewarding and helpful part of the work, while others reported team dynamics to be highly challenging, with a few describing the work environment as “toxic.”

Sources

2021 ECE Innovation Lab Primary Research Interviews.
Kathleen Flanagan, Jane Beach and Petr Varmuza. “You Bet We Still Care: A Survey of Centre-Based Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada. Highlights Report.” 2013.
Christine Saulnier and Lesley Frank. “Unappreciated and underpaid” Early Childhood Educators in Nova Scotia. 2019.

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Personas and Journey Maps: Tools to Bring Research to Life

Personas and journey maps are design tools used to ground collaborative discussions and decisions in the context of people impacted by the issue being addressed (or potential solution being designed), and to make sense of their interactions with services or processes.

Personas are archetypes used to represent people throughout the design process (Cooper, 1999), distinguishing types of people through characteristics of their situation, values, attitudes, behaviours, or needs. Journey maps illustrate in discrete steps how different personas navigate a process or service, usually from when they first learn about it to when they complete the process and exit the service. Used together, these tools allow us to think critically about how different people might experience a service, and how we might reimagine a service or process to create better experiences.

The creation of the personas used in the ECE lab were informed by the analysis of interviews carried out with Atlantic Canada ECEs during the lab's Discovery phase. They were introduced to the teams during the Data Party and used as the basis for constructing journey maps to describe how educators in each province move through the process of seeking out and taking training. The personas and journey maps were continually revisited throughout the lab process to ground design discussions and decisions in the context of the lived experience of the forty-two (42) ECEs who shared their stories with us.

Four distinct educator archetypes emerged through a thematic analysis of the interviews, representing educators at different stages of their careers and learning journeys:

- ▶ *Fledgling Apprentices*
- ▶ *Seasoned Practitioners*
- ▶ *Expert Learners*
- ▶ *Visionary Leaders*



Fledgling Apprentices

Pragmatic and curious: learning what it means to work in early childhood education. The Fledgling Apprentice is relatively new to the field and trying to figure out if this is the right career for her. She starts in ECE because she needs a job and likes children but doesn't know if she should commit to ECE as a career and get her certification.



Seasoned Practitioners

Experienced and dedicated: delivering early childhood education without training or recognition. The Seasoned Practitioner is being told that she should become qualified. She has worked in the field for years and would love the recognition and wage raise that would come with a qualification but is overwhelmed by the thought of going back to school and being treated like a newbie.



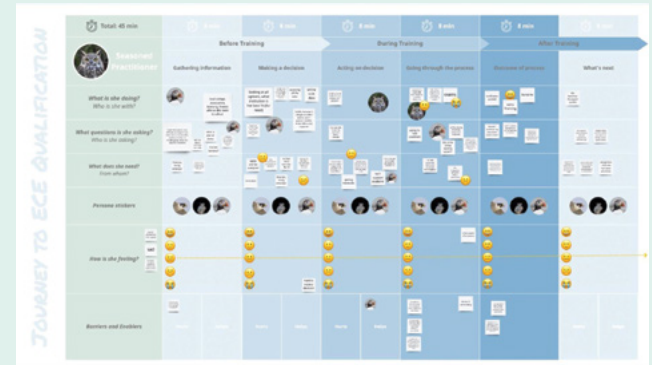
Expert Learners

Educated and insightful: seeking opportunities to learn, adapt, and apply best practices. The Expert Learner is dedicated to providing the best possible education to the children in her classroom. She loves learning but is frustrated by the theory-practice gap between what is taught in school and PD/PL and the reality of her place of work.



Visionary Leaders

Passionate and big-picture thinker: advocates for improvement and professionalization of the field. The Visionary Leader is striving for excellence in the field. She sees the significant impact that high quality early childhood education has on children, their families, and communities but feels constrained by a society that misunderstands and undervalues the profession.



Here is an example of one of the journey maps the teams completed in Miro.

Teams were asked to reflect on the key learnings and implications raised by each of the personas.

Informed by the initial question that brought the lab together, we asked each provincial team to map the current journey to qualification for the Fledgling Apprentices and Seasoned Practitioners, marking places where the journey falters or stops if needed. Collaborative mapping of these journeys provided teams with insight into the educator experience of how training is currently undertaken and allowed them to explore existing challenges and opportunities for potential innovation.

Teams were then asked to reflect on and prioritize one element of the current journey to focus on for the remainder of the lab, becoming the basis for the social innovation concepts developed in the next phase, Ideation.



Fledgling Apprentice

Pragmatic + curious: learning what it means to work in Early Childhood Education.

The Fledgling Apprentice is trying to figure out if this is the right career for her. She starts in ECE because she needs a job and likes kids but doesn't know if she should commit to ECE as a career and get her certification.

Good support for this type of educator is a combination of modelling and hands-on guidance from senior staff. Major obstacles to training are lack of time and financial resources to go to school, and not seeing ECE as a good career option.

“

I don't even have a full-time team teacher because she gets pulled for admin duties all the time. And it's a large classroom to clean and cleaning up after children and toys and COVID. And then I'm meant to clean a couple of stairwells and mop them and mop the floor. And this is all after looking after very, very active children all day long. And then go and take some courses and do some project work.”

- Atlantic Canada early childhood educator



Goals

- ▶ **Learn the job**
- ▶ Get certification (or not)
- ▶ **Find career path**
- ▶ Support themselves and/or their young family



Hurts

- ▶ **Being ignored / senior staff and director too busy for questions**
- ▶ Out of the loop on decisions and communications
- ▶ Gatekeeping out of opportunities for development
- ▶ **Low pay (can't afford additional education)**



Needs

- ▶ To be shown how the work is done and why
- ▶ **To learn “how to work” — their own way to balance work and life**
- ▶ A future that inspires and motivates
- ▶ **Living wage**
- ▶ **Sense of belonging in team and field**
- ▶ Wellbeing
- ▶ Support from colleagues & peers



Helps

- ▶ **Hands-on guidance and role-modelling**
- ▶ Giving space to explore career opportunities and try new things
- ▶ Connecting to resources for development, including PD and gov't programs to support certification training
- ▶ **Formal team development, coaching as a team**

Fledgling Apprentice



Sees

- Educators who are comfortable and confident performing their role
- Older colleagues who can't afford to retire
- **More experienced colleagues who can't advance due to lack of credentials**
- Colleagues working second jobs to support their families
- Directors who pick up the slack, stay late, are exhausted and don't have time to answer stupid questions
- Certified educators who do PD and come to work with new ideas
- Disengaged wage-workers who do the bare minimum and have routines that help them get through the day
- **Dedicated educators who are burned out and must take leave for stress**
- Specialists who work one-on-one with kids with special needs
- Kid aesthetics: cartoons, animals, bold and bright colours, basic learning, soft edges and textures
- Furnishings that are kid-scale (sitting in kid-sized chairs at kid-sized tables; using kid-sized toilets and kid-level sinks)
- **Runny noses, drool, spit-up, messy food, poop, pee — it's constant**
- Fast cleaning to get done and leave as soon as the last kids are gone



Hears

- Educators' kind and patient voices for children
- Children's voices saying hilarious or sweet things (childhood is magical)
- **Colleagues and director complaining about other staff, wages, benefits and working conditions**
- Parents' frustrations and problems, sometimes harsh voices, sometimes sad voices
- Constant din of kids yelling, crying, singing, laughing, playing
- Recordings of the same kids' music, children's stories
- Quiet (nap time — they're usually the ones doing nap time while the others do prep work or take their break)
- Instructions about tasks to do (work)
- Advice and support about what to do (personal life)
- Career advice
- Stories about wild things that colleagues have experienced in their work ("This one time...")



Says

- "I'll try this for a while"
- **"Wow, I love this!"/ "Ugh, this is awful"**
- "It's easy to get a job in this field"
- "I'm not sure how long I'll stay"
- "This is harder than I expected"



Does

- **What she's told by senior staff and director**
- Work during work hours, not extra unless asked to
- **Watches what everyone else does and how it affects them**
- Finds out what is required for certification and what it costs
- Takes an online course, such as Intro to ECE
- Looks for another job



Thinks

- **Wow, there are a lot of challenges to this as a career**
- Not too concerned about the future, focus on what is good right now and decide later
- It's clear to me how I can make more money, but not sure I want to invest to get there
- This doesn't look like a good career choice



Feels

- **Happy with the kids / or realizing they're not**
- Secure, that they can rely on the senior staff and director to figure things out
- Secure, that this job will always be available
- **Insecure when thinks about their own future**
- Worried about money



Seasoned Practitioner

Experienced + dedicated: delivering ECE without training or recognition.

The Seasoned Practitioner is being told that she should become qualified. She has worked in the field for years and would love the recognition and wage raise that would come with a qualification but is overwhelmed by the thought of going back to school and being treated like a newbie.

Good support for this type of educator meets her where she is in her career. Major obstacles to training are lack of financial resources, fatigue, and the need to start from scratch.

“

The demands and stress that are on the educators get pretty exhausting. I'm in my 50s and I've been there 20 years, but I'm finding the days are getting more exhausting because it's so busy. And with COVID now too, there are certain rules you have to follow and stuff. I don't think society in general understand the type of work that our own childhood educators do. And that education for them is important. They need to know what goes on inside the centre and they need to know what the educators do for their children. Some families get it, but a lot of families don't.”

- Atlantic Canada early childhood educator



Goals

- ▶ **Recognition for experience in the field**
- ▶ Secure retirement options
- ▶ Get certification (or not)



Hurts

- ▶ The need to leave employment to train
- ▶ The cost of training
- ▶ **Burnout**
- ▶ Lack of career advancement opportunities for their certification level
- ▶ Rigid structure of what qualifies for certification



Needs

- ▶ **Tailored support in updating established practices**
- ▶ **To understand reason behind changes to approach**
- ▶ Living wage
- ▶ Retirement benefits
- ▶ Wellbeing
- ▶ Support from colleagues & peers



Helps

- ▶ Love of the work
- ▶ The children
- ▶ **Colleagues – good working and social relationships**
- ▶ Institutional support for tailored training

Seasoned Practitioner



Sees

- New grads coming into more senior positions, who don't know how to work with children
- Training opportunities going to people who are already "qualified"
- **Practices and classrooms changing**
- Colleagues burning out
- Colleagues supporting each other
- Children playing and learning
- More children with challenging behaviours



Thinks

- **It's too late to go back to school**
- **It would be nice to prove my worth**
- The pay increase would be fantastic
- It's getting harder to get up off the floor
- Not sure how much longer I can do this job
- That the people making the rules don't understand the work



Says

- "School's not for me"
- **"I can't take on any more work, I'm exhausted"**
- "Can I have some help, I need to take a breath"
- **"I shouldn't have to start from scratch"**
- "We are so much more than babysitters"
- "We are a second family"
- "We are a safe place"
- "I love the kids"



Hears

- Things have changed, that's not how we're supposed to do that any more
- **It's going to become mandatory to get your level 1 soon**
- Other Seasoned Practitioners complaining about the placement that they had to do
- "You're the best" from children
- "You're just babysitters" from public
- Concern from politicians and media for teachers during COVID, but not for educators



Feels

- Tired and overlooked
- Worried about money
- **Like I'm operating in survival mode**
- Confidence in own abilities to work with children
- Love from the children
- Embarrassment/shame at the misunderstanding and disrespect of their profession
- **Aha moments:**
 - when a frightened fledgling gains confidence
 - when a child remembers how to do something
 - when a parent recounts a story that their child told them about the day before



Does

- **Educates**, cares, plays, wrangles, dresses children, changes diapers, cleans the room, documentation
- **Supports Fledgling Apprentices**



Expert Learner

Educated + insightful: seeking opportunities to learn, adapt, and apply best practices.

The Expert Learner is dedicated to providing the best possible education to the children in her classroom. She loves learning but is frustrated by the theory-practice gap between what is taught in school and PD/PL and the reality of her place of work.

Good support for this type of educator creates space for her to implement change. Major obstacles to this are the continuous other demands on time and a lack of resources.

“

I just really loved seeing the connections and the aha moments with the children. And then just seeing their learning happening.”

- Atlantic Canada early childhood educator

“

I'm somebody who likes the knowledge. I mean, I seek it out anyway. We're required to have 45 hours in three years. I am a year and a half in and I reached 75 hours that I know will pan out for sure.”

- Atlantic Canada early childhood educator



Goals

- ▶ Be proud of the education that I can deliver to the children in my classroom/centre
- ▶ Growth and development as an educator
- ▶ Support myself and/or my family



Hurts

- ▶ Lack of classroom resources: financial, staff support for ratio, special needs support
- ▶ Impossible workload
- ▶ Gatekeeping PD opportunities/learning scarcity
- ▶ High responsibility/low control



Needs

- ▶ Context-specific training
- ▶ Resources to implement learning
- ▶ Wellbeing
- ▶ Support from colleagues and peers



Helps

- ▶ Support staff for cleaning, transition times for the kids (going outside, washing up)
- ▶ Clear and accurate descriptions of training opportunities (knowing what you're getting)
- ▶ Access to expert knowledge applied in classroom context (hands-on, theory-practice)
- ▶ Leadership training for directors and owners to provide better HR support

Expert Learner



Sees

- Junior staff struggle to find their place in the team/field
- **Directors with not much more pay but much more responsibility**
- Curriculum leads and ECE-adjacent professionals with more flexible working conditions
- **Those working in the public system (former colleagues or mentees) with same credentials who make more money, have less responsibility, and work less hours**
- Colleagues with serious financial and health worries
- PD instructors with less education and/or experience
- Inspectors what is their deal
- Specialists with much-appreciated expert knowledge in special needs education
- Parents struggling with life circumstances — from them they see shame, absence, lashing out, resourcefulness, gratitude, fear
- Parents showing more appreciation for educators since the pandemic started



Hears

- “You’re so smart, you could have done something else” from everyone
- “Must be so easy, you just sit and watch kids play all day, right?” from everyone
- “Why are they just playing all day? Shouldn’t they be getting ready for learning in school?” from parents
- Complaining from the director about short-staffing and other staff problems
- “What should I do about this?”
- “How do I do this?” from trainee/junior staffer
- “What did my kid eat today?” (from parents, at midnight via FB Messenger or WhatsApp)
- **“Mom, why do you have to work today? It’s Saturday.” from own kids**
- “Try this in your classroom... it takes XX time to prepare and get these special items” from PD



Thinks

- **This work is so important! But no one seems to get it**
- Everyone is focused on the wrong stuff — it’s about the kids and their learning and growth
- **Where do I go from here, career-wise? Maybe I should leave the classroom...**
- I would really miss the kids
- Should I go to a small centre for the cozy environment where I have more freedom to enact my vision for my classroom? Or should I go to the large centre where I have more opportunities for advancement and more resources for training?



Feels

- **Overwhelm at being the nexus of so many needs and requirements**
- Love for the kids
- **Determination to keep achieving the curricular objectives**
- Self-judgment for falling short in some areas
- Frustration at the inability to get everything done
- **Pride in kids’ accomplishments and growth**
- Defensive about misperception of the ECE field
- Worry for the kids who are falling through the cracks
- Satisfaction that this work is important and they are good at it



Says

- **“I’m an educator, not a babysitter”**
- “Based on recent research, play-based learning is age-appropriate primary school preparation”



Does

- **Comes in early, stays late to get prep and paperwork done**
- Reads on own time about ECE techniques and theory
- Keeps current on ECE certification
- Takes all the training can afford / is funded by centre
- Tries new things in the classroom
- Keeps track of the kids’ learning needs and advocates for them with director
- Mentors (informally and formally) junior staff
- **Advocates and gathers resources for classroom materials and her vision for the classroom environment**
- Seeks connections with other educators at training events



Visionary Leader

Passionate + big-picture thinker: advocates for improvement and professionalization of the field.

The Visionary Leader is striving for excellence in the field. She sees the significant impact that high-quality early childhood education has on children, their families, and communities but feels constrained by a society that misunderstands and undervalues the profession.

Good support for this educator type amplifies the visibility and value of ECE. Major obstacles include an underdeveloped workforce and lack of sector level systems that activate their leadership potential.

“Looking at the ECE field as a whole, I think it needs to be more recognized as a real profession. We need education, and we need our professional development. And with that, we need wages that are competitive with what we actually do. It's a tremendous amount of energy that's put into this field from educators. And I think to continue to have people stay in it long-term, they need financial recognition. And I know PEI has done incredibly well with our wage increase, but everybody needs to be on par with that. It needs to be across the board and to be more.”

- Atlantic Canada early childhood educator



Goals

- ▶ **Implement vision of excellent early childhood education**



Hurts

- ▶ Not being able to find or keep trained staff
- ▶ **Not being able to bridge skills gaps within existing team**
- ▶ Competing with the school system
- ▶ Burnout and pay



Needs

- ▶ **Trained, motivated, well-resourced workforce**
- ▶ Good relationships with other stakeholders in the system
- ▶ Wellbeing
- ▶ Support from colleagues and **connection with peers**



Helps

- ▶ **Being able to connect with like-minded leaders**
- ▶ Remembering why this is important

Visionary Leader



Sees

- **Qualified staff leaving for the school system/gov positions**
- Staff coming back from training invigorated with new ideas
- A lot of press coverage and concern for teachers during COVID
- Staff making a difference in children's lives
- Special moments of connection and emotion between team and the children
- **Not enough high-quality training opportunities for staff**
- Team coming in to work sick
- Team getting burned out
- Increasing number of children with special needs



Hears

- You need to stay open
- Teachers are essential workers
- If there were more men in this job, we'd get paid more
- We need more materials
- **We need more people**
- Nap time doesn't make sense
- **Students are clueless**
- The days are too long
- This isn't what I expected
- Can you show me how to?
- Why?
- I don't have time
- What about if we try this?



Thinks

- I wish I could give the team what they need
- I wish I could get this team where it needs to be
- **Things could be so much better if my educators could focus on educating**
- There is so much potential in children
- There is so much potential in this field
- **We prepare children for life / the school system**
- We create really impactful experiences
- We can change things for the better



Feels

- Pride in the role of educator
- Aha moments:
 - When she watches other educators coach new team members
 - When she sees new team members become comfortable with the children
 - When team members suggest new approaches after training
- Unseen and unvalued as a professional
- Distress when good educators leave
- **Compassion for the team**
- Stuck between a rock and a hard place when it comes to compensating them
- Frustration with a system that doesn't respect or support the work that it depends on
- **Determination to implement change inside and outside of the centre**



Says

- **"We need a well-trained workforce to do this job well"**
- "We need government to match their words with action"
- "Society doesn't understand the impact that we have on their children's development"
- "We can't compete with the school system"
- "At some point I'll go into policy"



Does

- Open door policy for educators to ask for help
- Spends a lot of time restarting interrupted tasks
- Seeks out training opportunities for team, **and supports team training financially as much as centre finances allows**
- Administration, oversight, mentorship, management, cleaning, working with children
- **Constant onboarding because of turnover**
- Advocates for the profession
- Everything she can to hire students who have performed well during placements

Ideation Phase

Through Ideation we transformed the collected learning and insights about challenges and opportunities in the Atlantic ECE sector into tangible social innovation concepts that could be tested through prototyping. To do this, we used several design methods including rapid ideation, system mapping, and impact analysis to reveal the opportunities for innovation specific to each provincial context.

Over the course of two lab sessions, teams worked hands-on with data gathered and analyzed in the Discovery phase, thinking through the lenses of their lived experience of the ECE sector in their province to create social innovation concepts for testing. This ideation process was seeded by presentations about best practices in other provinces, mentorship and educational pathways, and a survey of innovative projects in the ECE sector from around the world.

From Red River College, Ruth Lindsey-Armstrong, Chair of Community Services, and Tanya Larter, Academic Coordinator of the Early Childhood Education Workplace Program, presented their model for accessible career pathways through certification programs coupled with study support and mentorship. Their program is designed to meet students where they are in their educational journeys, and help them balance demands of work, family responsibilities, and school.

Beth Kelly, Manager of Early Childhood Development Research and Partnerships for Nova Scotia Workforce Projects, gave a talk about programs and models to increase ECE training access in Nova Scotia.

During the Francophone cohort, Collette Aucoin, Vice President from Collège de l'Île on PEI – shared the development of their new Micro-accreditation program and Sophie Letendre, *Conseillère aux projets stratégiques*, with the *Association québécoise des CPE* shared initiatives they are working on to recruit and retain ECE's and training incentives that exist in Quebec to support ECE's getting their certification.

Concept Development

Equipped with research data from earlier sessions and practical examples from other provinces, each lab team followed a concept development process to zoom in on a particular element of the larger ECE problem space.

The Prince Edward Island team chose **mentorship**, New Brunswick's anglophone team chose **study support**, New Brunswick's francophone team chose **recognition of prior learning** through experience, and the Newfoundland and Labrador team chose **career pathway planning**.

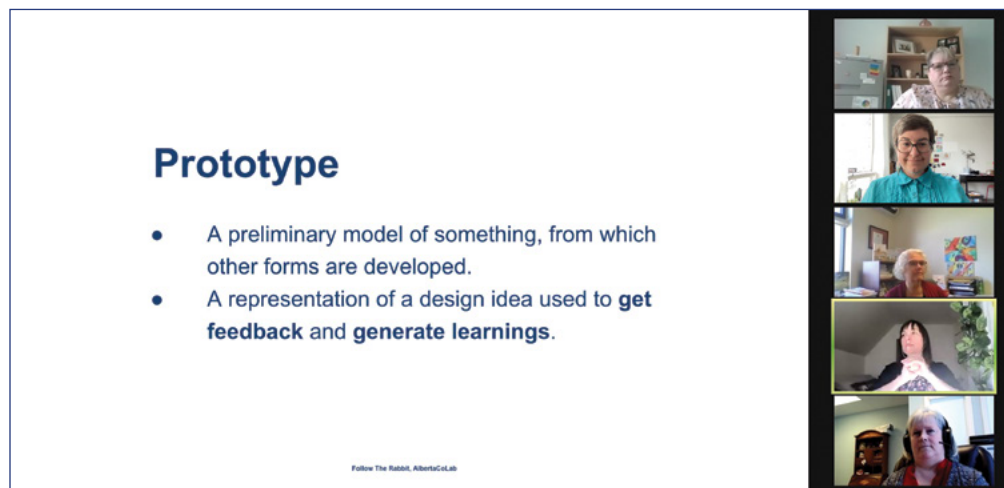
Hands-on work with these themes was facilitated through a systems-mapping workshop to prioritize needs for each province and locate leverage points for change that the teams identified as valuable places to experiment in the system.

Once teams had selected a focus for their innovation, we used design ideation tools to help teams brainstorm potential ways to tackle these leverage points. Teams pooled their ideas, discussed them, and then prioritized again, eventually creating a service concept. Finally, teams worked with sketches and storyboards of these concepts to refine their ideas and come to a consensus about which were the most important elements of their concept to test through a live field prototype.



Prototype Phase

Each provincial team worked with an embedded design coach from the NouLAB team to design, implement, and evaluate a field prototype of their social innovation concept. Teams identified core elements of their concept that could be tested with a small live prototype and defined what needed to be learned from their prototype to evaluate their concept and identify the next steps.



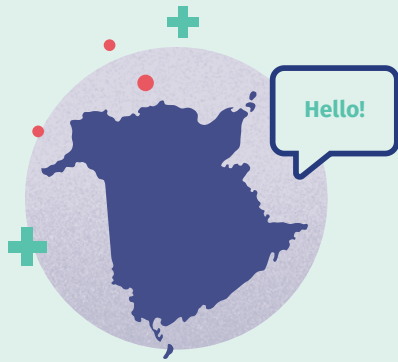
➤ Here is a screenshot from the workshop on prototype development.

Depending on the specific prototype, early learning and childcare centres, substitute educators, administrators, and others in the ECE sector were recruited to take part in the prototype programs and give feedback. Live testing of prototypes was conducted during summer and fall of 2021, and evaluation was conducted in December 2021.

The following is a table that summarizes the prototypes and their key findings, along with a guide to where you can find the full descriptions of each prototype in this report. Key findings and recommendations for next steps for each prototype are included with its description.

Summary of Prototypes

Team	Challenge	Prototype and Key Findings	Prototype Description
NB Anglo	<u>Lack of time for working educators: to study, to spend with family, for self-care</u>	Study Leave Support Program Paid study leave provided multiple benefits to participating ECEs: improved marks, ability to be more present at work while studying, and increased self-efficacy and interest in further education. While the value of having regular subs for ELCCs was affirmed, the prototype highlighted the amount of time and effort it takes centres to recruit new staff. The things that subs find appealing about the role vary depending on the stage of their ECE career e.g., retired ECEs, newcomers to Canada, and newcomers to ECE.	p. 49
NB Franco	<u>Limited uptake of experiential PLAR option by experienced educators</u>	Experiential PLAR Scenario Visualization Recruitment is last minute and difficult for educators to plan around. Current process of proving work experience requires a high level of trust and memory from owner operators, is not based on competencies, and resources exist that could inform a competency-based checklist form. The trend of losing experienced staff to the public school system once they are qualified disincentivizes PLAR for operators.	p. 55
PEI	<u>Gap in career ladder for experienced educators with higher levels of certification</u>	Centre-Mentor Program The combination of mentorship training and peer support had a positive impact on ECEs' aspirations to advance their careers through training. ECEs reported an increased sense of confidence among peers to ask questions and to discuss challenges they're having in the classroom. Centres with full staff participation reported a positive change in conversations happening between staff.	p. 60
NL	<u>Lack of support for those who help educators plan their career and advance their education</u>	Visualizing and Supporting the Educational Pathway Administrators currently rely on word of mouth and previous experience to find answers to their staff's questions and would like to create a network with other centre administrators and licensees to draw on. Participants were very positive about the visual, which addressed the need for a concise way to communicate the journey from applying to a program to applying for certification for a higher level. Administrators reflected that the biggest barrier to supporting their staff, implementing the resources, and using the tools shared was their own time and availability.	p. 66



Prototype Descriptions

New Brunswick Anglophone: Support While Studying



The Challenge

Working ECEs have a wealth of experience and knowledge and are often the cornerstone of the ELCCs. There are many barriers that deter these seasoned practitioners from pursuing training for credentials. Those who study while working can increase their risk of burnout due to the increased emotional, physical, and cognitive demands.

Team NB chose to focus on reducing one stressor for ECEs: pursuing training for credentials while working. The challenge that came up repeatedly throughout the lab, and one which the team found themselves discussing most often, was **time**: a lack of time to study, to spend with family, and for self-care, with one team member with lived experience sharing a story of how she had to sleep in her car during lunch breaks because it was the only time she had to rest.

The team decided that providing working ECEs with time to study is foundational to the overall goal of increasing the qualifications of the sector without disrupting the essential service through educator burnout and/or the need to step away from a paid position to focus on studies. One of the key barriers to ELCCs providing study leave to unqualified staff is a lack of reliable substitutes/relief workers.



Prototype: Study Leave Support Program

As such, the Team NB prototype is a Study Leave Support Program for Working ECEs. The original/broader vision was a provincial pool of highly quality subs/relief workers that ELCCs could call on to cover the study leave of ECEs (with the potential in the longer term to expand scope to provide much needed coverage for sick leave and vacations). There are many logistical challenges that would need to be overcome to implement such a vision, but the driving questions for this iteration of the prototype were:

- ▶ How might paid study leave impact an ECE's experience of studying while working?
- ▶ How might paid study leave impact the ELCC operations?
- ▶ How might we cultivate a high-quality sub list? Starting with preliminary explorations of the sub-question of *what would motivate individuals to join a sub list?*

To explore these questions, we:

- recruited four ELCCs who had a seasoned practitioner currently enrolled in a NBCC ECE course
- assisted with the recruitment of substitutes/relief workers to work with a single ELCC (inspired by the learnings shared by Red River College and motivated by the hypothesis that a predetermined number of shifts and a consistent site would be preferred by both the ELCC and the substitute/relief worker)
- provided paid onboarding and covered one shift per week for study leave for each seasoned practitioner for twelve weeks, with a view to extend for a second twelve-week period if the placement was going well and all involved parties were interested in continuing

Four ELCCs were initially recruited, but one had to drop out when they decided that they could not manage studying while working and left their job to study full time before a sub was found. An overview of the other participating ELCC operators, ECEs, and substitutes/relief workers can be found below. All participants were interviewed at the beginning and in the final weeks of the prototype test to evaluate the prototype with its overall aim of supporting the ECEs and the sector without disrupting service.



Rural For-Profit ELCC

ECE – 6 yrs experience

Trigger to train: children are older now and asked during job interview

Sub – 20 years ECE, recently retired, never subbed before, had already been subbing for centre for 6 months (recruited via daughter who works at centre).

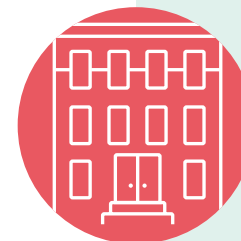


Suburban For-Profit ELCC

ECE – 3 years experience

Trigger to train: senior co-teacher went on sick leave, realized she had a lot to learn

Sub – first ECE role (previously worked in residential home for older adults for 6 years), had been subbing at this centre for 2 weeks (recruited via Indeed).



Urban Nonprofit ELCC

ECE – 2 years experience

Trigger to train: encouraged by coworkers

Sub – newcomer to Canada with 7 years experience in ECE, currently studying for 2-year diploma and subbing elsewhere (recruited via FB).



Key Findings

Impact on the ECE Experience of Studying While Working

As ECEs who were also working full time, each of them described the need to study at night and on weekends to meet the requirements of the course, with $\frac{2}{3}$ actively integrating study time into their work day during children's nap times or lunch breaks. The stress of trying to achieve the impossible task of balancing work, life, and study was already taking a toll on the ECEs.

Two thirds of the ECEs were experiencing difficulties transitioning back to studying, reporting that school had always been a struggle for them or that self-imposed high expectations were causing a degree of anxiety.

Having study leave was an overwhelmingly positive experience for the ECEs. Both ECEs interviewed saw their **marks improve**.

“It’s been going better because my first few assignments I did before the [study leave] started were returned with notes saying that they looked rushed. I’ve been getting better marks since having the day off, and my instructor said my assignments seem less rushed.”

- NB educator

“It’s helped with my marks, I’ve never gotten marks like this in my life. I have time to actually sit and absorb the information so I don’t feel as rushed as I did in university.”

- NB educator

They also felt a shift in their **capacity to deliver quality ECE**.

“Because I knew I had the day off to do my homework, I was able to be so much more present at work.”

- NB educator

“For the first month, I was doing schoolwork at work. I was doing homework during nap time [...]. Now I’ve been able to get so many more learning stories and crafts ready for the children. [...] Even just the mental health aspect of it has been amazing. I feel a lot more rested going into school this year. My co-teacher has noticed a difference in me mood-wise, and I’m progressing in a more positive way.”

- NB educator

Although they both still found studying and balancing it with work to be a challenge, they also reported experiencing an **increased confidence** in their own abilities to learn.

“I have more confidence. I never thought I could go to school because of my reading and writing. I didn’t think I could do it but now I am getting 80s and 90s. I didn’t think I could do it, but I can!”

- NB educator

“I have learned in general, I can apply myself better than I thought, I manage well when given the resources. Having the day off gave me more motivation [and] a stepping-off point; I didn’t have great confidence in university. Knowing I have the time to do it, I can really apply myself. Maybe I do like school.”

- NB educator

Not knowing that the study leave was going to be extended, one ECE had already made an arrangement with her employer to continue taking a day of study leave off without pay for the remainder of her studies. Cost would have been a barrier for the other ECE to take unpaid leave.

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Impact on ELCC Operators

Operators were keen to participate in the evaluation of this prototype because they understand the pressures that ECEs are under when studying and working at the same time. More than just providing time, they saw this as an opportunity to provide their ECEs with relief and protect their mental health. Existing supports were limited to being available to answer questions and were provided space and time to study during the day during breaks or if workload allowed. Both operators were happy with the way the study leave was carried out in their centres. They saw **positive impacts on the well-being of the ECEs** who were taking the study leave and saw this as an additional way to **increase the desirability of studying while working** (along with the increasing number of options for alternative training pathways for working ECEs).

Operator concerns at the onset related to the disruption for children on the days that the sub would be working, whether a sub could effectively integrate into the team with such limited hours, and the potential for increased workload for remaining regular staff.

Having a consistent sub to cover a single ECE's study leave was very important for all operators, because of the concerns. While both operators found the use of a part-time worker who was already familiar with the centre to be critical to the successful integration with the team and minimal disruption for the children, one was open to recruiting new subs specifically for study leave purposes as long as she could be involved in the interview process. **Having a cost associated would likely become a barrier to future participation** for operators given the already strained finances of private operators.

High-Quality Sub List Cultivation

The process of recruitment was labour intensive. One of the selected centres already had a casual relief worker on staff, and it was agreed that they would be able to assign that worker to cover the shift of their ECE who had just started studying for their ECE certificate. A job description template was created by the lab team and configured by each of the remaining ELCCs. The job description was then shared with the team's and ELCC's networks, and posted to CareerBeacon, Kijiji, and Facebook Jobs. The vast majority of applications (82%) came from Facebook Jobs.

Overall, we received 28 applications for the four posted jobs. Upon review, 10 were considered appropriate to interview (with relevant experience as requested in the job posting).

One of the participating sites was able to find and recruit a part-time employee, who we again agreed to assign one day per week to cover the ECE's study leave.

For the remaining site, a shortlist of three candidates was proposed. The first candidate to receive a job offer accepted the offer but did not show up for work. The position was readvertised, with a smaller response. Two interviewees impressed the centre operator, but only one was available at the required time. Again, the successful candidate “ghosted” the operator, never arriving for their shift, at which point the centre operator reconnected with the other candidate and adapted the required working hours to fit their existing schedule.

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Reflections from our participants suggest that **distinct substitute types have distinct motivations** to take on the role of substitute. One participant was recruited to work casual shifts at the ELCC where her daughter worked. She was a retired ECE with over 20 years of experience who missed working with children and was looking for an excuse to get out of bed and out of the house. The experience provided much needed opportunities for social interaction and connection.

“
It helps me feel like part of a family. No regrets about stepping out of retirement, it is good for me. I was even invited to the Christmas party, the girls are all asking if I am coming! Yes, I will be there.”

- NB substitute (retired ECE)

One participant wasn't necessarily looking to be a sub but was looking for opportunities to break into the field. She applied for a part-time position, her first within ECE. She loved the variety of work that her position provided (she worked at different sites in addition to the one shift per week to cover study leave) and speculated that other school leavers could benefit from a similar experience.

“
Maybe someone just coming out of high school to test it as a potential to do this as a career. Like when I left high school I would have loved to try it. This was a great test for me to see if I liked it. I am actually registered in September for my ECE program.”

- NB substitute (new to ECE)

Only one person was hired through the prototype recruitment process, a newcomer with several years of experience as an ECE abroad who was looking for additional Canadian experience while she worked part-time and studied for her ECE certificate.

In contrast to the operators for whom consistency of placement was very important, it was less important for the subs for whom – with the exception of the retiree who was happy to limit her hours of work – gaining experience and more hours was a higher priority.



What's Next

The evaluation of this field prototype has demonstrated multiple benefits of paid study leave for ECEs, including improved marks, ability to be more present at work while studying, and increased self-efficacy and interest in further education. While these findings suggest that paid study leave is a promising strategy to increase an ECE's ability to obtain their credentials, a large-scale study would be needed to measure the impact of paid study leave on ECE motivation and ability to obtain their ECE credentials.

The prototype also affirmed the value of having regular subs for ELCCs and highlighted elements of the work that appeal to potential subs at different stages of their ECE career. The recruitment process for this prototype, however, also gave us insight into the amount of time and effort it takes centres to recruit new staff. Future iterations of this work could consider developing recruitment strategies that:

- ▶ alleviate the current burden of recruitment and onboarding from ELCCs
- ▶ leverage existing connections in the community and those suggested as strong candidates by the initial field prototype, with particular focus on those who are more difficult to reach by current hiring methods (e.g., older adults and newcomers)
- ▶ build a cohort of subs by region/community

Finally, the question of how substitutes can be funded to allow for educators' time off the floor to study remains. Experimentation with organizational and financial structures is needed to identify a sustainable business model for this initiative.



Prototype Descriptions

New Brunswick Francophone: Recognition of Prior Learning Through Experience



The Challenge

The NB francophone team envisioned a future in which each educator has access to individualized training based on their strengths and challenges to help fill in the gaps that would make them more effective ECEs.

To further this vision, the team focused on amplifying recent efforts in the sector to encourage the many experienced educators who are currently working in licensed ELCCs without certification to obtain their ECE credentials.

In exploring this focus, the team discovered that the *Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (CCNB)* currently offers a recognition of prior learning through experience option, whereby educators can get up to 80% of their course recognized and accredited by proving their experience in the field. CCNB recently reduced the number of years of prior experience required for this program from 10 to 3 years, and while this move increases the potential reach of the initiative, it also increases the need for a rigorous process to ensure the gaps in education for the ECE are identified so that ECE's are returning to work with increased qualifications, ensuring the quality of education for the educators is upheld. The current process of evaluating each educator's unique past education and experience remains complex and cumbersome. In particular, the program requires demonstration of experience through letters from employers and observation from instructors.

The team considered these requirements to be a significant pain point for the ELCCs, ECEs, and CCNB personnel, and therefore decided to focus on how to improve the process of evaluating the past experience of these seasoned practitioners.

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Key Questions

The key questions driving the initial vision for this prototype were:

- ▶ How can more educators take advantage of the experiential Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) options?
- ▶ How might we make connections between what CCNB students need and what operators need to provide to demonstrate educator experiences as they relate to educator competencies while maintaining a quality certification?

Over the course of the lab, the team surfaced assumptions that they wanted to explore through the prototype:

- ▶ Experienced practitioners may not have the technical capacity, may not have the language skills, and may never have had the experience of filling out a form to demonstrate their experiences as required by the module.
- ▶ Educators and operators may not have enough time during working hours to demonstrate or evaluate the experiences.
- ▶ Operators may not have the time or the details needed to evaluate the competencies.

Prototype: Experiential PLAR Scenario Visualization

A visual storyboard was created to illustrate the process educators go through from considering going back to school all the way to becoming certified through the experiential PLAR. This was presented to owner/operators of ELCC's, educators, college representatives, and government employees with direct experience with the experiential PLAR program either as supporters, past participants, or influencers. The visual storyboard (See Appendix 4, p. 93) was used as a reflective prompt, with stakeholders asked to provide feedback about the program, what was working well, and what could be improved.

After working with the team and CCNB, it was discovered that the whole ECE program at CCNB will be revamped to a competency-based program for September 2023 so making any small changes before that wouldn't make sense. However, the findings from this process will help inform the development of the new program.



Key Findings

Stakeholders confirmed in the feedback sessions that evaluating practice (or proving experience) was challenging and uncovered additional insight into the administrative and cognitive labour involved for the ELCC operators. In addition, two other pain points were raised as warranting attention: the existing recruitment process and unintended consequences of qualification.

The insights gained into each of the three challenges are discussed below, presented in the order in which they occur during the operator and educator experience.

Recruitment

Stakeholders raised two challenges with respect to the current recruitment process: the short recruitment timeline and ambiguous program requirements.

Funding for the experiential recognition program has been determined and allocated annually, leading to last-minute recruitment efforts when the funding is confirmed. Recruitment for the program is often done by staff of the program at CCNB, visiting centres within 2 weeks of the program start date. This makes it difficult for educators to make a big decision like going back to school with such a short deadline.

The decision-making process is further complicated by the fact that many educators aren't aware that they can get credit for their experience via PLAR or don't understand exactly how it works. There is a lot of confusion between the experiential PLAR and the educational PLAR:

- ▶ Educators often think they can only get credits for previous education that they have already completed, as opposed to getting credits for their experience in ECE.
- ▶ They don't know what parts of the program their experiential credit can be applied to.

The lack of clear communication makes it difficult for educators to make informed decisions during the recruitment stage.

“
*J'ai fait tout mon cours avant
de savoir ce qui serait accepté,
je ne savais pas si je finirais
en avril ou en juin. Enfin, l'ERA
(PLAR) a remplacé le stage.*”

- NB educator/alumna of the
programme ERA experiential at CCNB

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Proving Experience

Currently educators need to ask their employers to write a letter outlining their experience. The letter asks that the following experiences be outlined from a licensed early learning centre:

- ▶ Number of years of experience
- ▶ Age of children in your group
- ▶ Number of children under your supervision
- ▶ Type of setting
- ▶ Routine, duties, and responsibilities
- ▶ Complete contact information for the child care and education centre
- ▶ Name, signature and role of the person who wrote the letter

From our feedback the letter was not an issue for the owner/operators to write, but the letter requires a high level of trust that they can remember all the experience of individual staff. CCNB is seeking a more competency-based checklist that would create a more rigorous process which would bring a more detailed quality of information about instructors to decide how the educator's experience might be awarded credit to replace taking certain courses.

The need to refine the process of proving experience was further supported by the observations of test participants that operators are seeing educators return to work after successfully completing their studies, yet they still lack skills for the job.

Unintended Consequence of Qualification

When discussing the challenges surrounding the certification of untrained staff, operators pointed out that they often also lose those with credentials to the public school system. In this respect, the program has a somewhat limited appeal for operators who depend on those essential team members to meet quota and operate safely.



What's Next

The three challenge areas raised by the prototype test participants point to three distinct opportunities for future work.

Given the province's focus on increasing the number of educators pursuing their credentials, our findings suggest that a priority should be to better understand and address the barriers to recruitment to the program, and if there can be an option developed with more lead time for the educators to rearrange their life to make the decision to register for the program.

When reflecting on the challenges in proving experience that were raised by operators, it was mentioned that there are existing tools that could be of assistance. They suggested that the Staff Evaluation and Accompaniment Tools (*Outils d'évaluation et d'accompagnement de personnel des service de garde éducatifs*) previously developed by Early Childhood and Care & Education New Brunswick (*Soins et éducation à la petite enfance Nouveau-Brunswick*) would serve as a good starting point to develop a competency-based checklist that employers could complete to outline the experience of their staff. When testing this, we must ensure that it gets the information needed for CCNB without adding too much administrative burden to the owner/operator.

Finally, the unintended consequences of losing qualified staff to the school system cannot be left unaddressed for much longer.

Emerging Impact: Association Atlantique Francophone de l'Éducation à la Petite Enfance (AAFEPE)

In the francophone cohort of the lab there was a full team from NB. The other three provinces did not have enough human resources for full teams, so we invited representatives from each province in the francophone ECE sector to participate in the research data sharing and analysis workshops. (3 of the 7 workshops.)

It was identified during those 3 workshops that each province is working in a minority language context with limited resources and that there was a need for those working in the francophone ECE sector in the region to connect more frequently to share resources, training opportunities, and best practices in francophone ECE. We facilitated two follow-up discussions on this topic and during that time it was decided that some kind of interprovincial committee should be formed.

Another FSC funded initiative with an Atlantic-wide innovation mandate, the Atlantic Colleges Atlantique (ACA) guided a subcommittee with representation from each province's ECE directors, colleges/universities, associations, and government to build the mandate and structure to present to the larger committee in the fall of 2021. This subcommittee is currently working on a name, mandate, funding, and initial steps the association could take to better connect those working in francophone ECE in the region. They will access the prototype fund to test the idea over the spring of 2022.

► For a full list of attendees of these discussions see Appendix 2, p. 89.



Prototype Descriptions

Prince Edward Island: Embedded Mentorship



The Challenge

Through the lab's discovery and ideation process, the team from PEI realized that there is a gap in the career ladder for experienced, motivated educators with higher levels of certification.

These ECEs, known in our project by their persona as the Expert Learners, are passionate educators with leadership potential who don't currently have a path to career development that keeps them working directly with children. Instead, these bright and accomplished ECEs find career advancement, higher pay, and better working conditions in jobs outside of ELCCs. Losing this expertise on the floor hinders centre's ability to effectively mentor and train new educators, and shrinks the leadership supply of potential directors, thus applying further pressure on the overall quality of the field.



Prototype: Centre-Mentor Program

The PEI team sees these experienced, motivated educators as a leverage point to influence the quality of ECE across the province through their potential ability to motivate and support their less-qualified peers to gain higher certification. To activate them, the team developed a mentorship program concept that creates a new embedded mentor-educator role within centres. The concept includes whole-centre mentorship training, a new job description and pay grade increase for mentor-educators, and a new area of professional development around mentorship available to the entire sector, including a peer support network and ongoing Community of Practice for mentor-educators. In the fully realized vision of this program, the embedded mentor-educator role would work collaboratively with centre directors and PEI's team of provincial coaches to share pedagogical leadership in their centre, and provide support to other ECEs as they learn on the job, connect theory to practise, and develop their careers.

Key questions that framed the development of the PEI prototype included:

- ▶ What kinds of mentorship learning and peer support will meet the needs of educators at each centre?
- ▶ How might we structure a program to provide real career growth opportunities for ECEs that allows them to continue direct practice with children?
- ▶ How might we create a replicable program that increases quality across the field in PEI despite differences in certification levels among centre cohorts?
- ▶ How might we activate the Expert Learners as a resource in the ECE system to support skill development and retention of educators with fewer credentials or less experience?

The PEI lab team was able to draw on a collective institutional memory as they developed the prototype to test their concept. They had identified mentorship as an area of focus for their concept because they thought it effectively brought together the needs and capabilities of both the Expert Learners and the educators who could benefit from gaining higher certification. However, they knew the history of previous attempts to start up mentorship programs in the province, none of which had lasted.

Some of these were because there wasn't sufficient buy-in from the sector or clear benefits to participation, and one promising program was shut down due to funding cuts unrelated to program performance. Based on this history, and the team's desire to shift working culture in the sector toward educator recognition and empowerment, the PEI team decided to take a new, centre-based approach to mentorship, creating an innovative process for identifying and activating mentor-educators.

The prototype tested three core elements of the PEI team's mentorship concept:

- 1 A mentorship learning opportunity to develop the whole centre staff as a learning cohort, delivered through a half-day workshop with ECE mentorship consultants Anne Marie Coughlin and Lorrie McGee Baird
- 2 An anonymous peer nomination process in which educators could select 2-3 fellow educators to continue mentorship learning and take a stronger mentor role in their centre
- 3 Two Community of Practice sessions with the mentorship consultants, in which the nominated mentor-educators from each centre came together in one group to exchange peer learning and reflection on mentorship practice



Key Findings

Four early learning and childcare centres participated in the prototype test, which included the half-day workshop, the peer nomination process, and the Community of Practice sessions. Pre-participation and post-participation interviews were conducted with a director and at least two staff from each centre, for a total of 24 interviews. In intake contacts and pre-interviews, we asked about the current staffing situation and needs for skill development at each centre, participants' personal interest in mentorship, current certification level, and expectations about what participants hoped to gain from taking part in the prototype test.

In pre-interviews, we learned that educator participants were eager to deepen their skills in mentorship, particularly around mentoring students from the college during their practicums. Many expressed the hope that mentorship training would increase cooperation, peer support, and skill sharing among educators. They anticipated that mentorship training might increase their time management skills, interpersonal skills, skills in giving constructive feedback, and help build a better culture of professional support at their centre for current and future staff.



We have high expectations for new hires but no formal way to help them onboard to our high standards and then they don't stay, so it would be great to meet them where they are.

- PEI Educator

In the post-prototype interviews, we asked participants to reflect on their experience of the prototype, what was missing, and to assess potential impacts, including:

- ▶ Does mentorship participation increase interest in gaining higher ECE credentials among low-credential ECEs?
- ▶ Does mentorship participation increase interest in remaining in the ECE sector among high-credential ECEs?
- ▶ What are the impacts on staff attitudes and mentorship activity of a peer-nomination process to select mentors?
- ▶ Do the benefits of participation indicate that this program would be valuable to other centres?

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Mentorship Participation Influencing Increased Interest in Certification and/or Career Development

Every educator interviewed reported that the mentorship workshop and subsequent peer support activity at their centre had a positive impact on their aspirations to advance their career, many through taking more training. Two educators reported that they have gained interest in taking certification to become directors. One educator with basic qualifications reported that she was motivated by the mentorship workshop and experience as a peer mentor to take the accelerated course to achieve her Level 2 certificate.

“ I plan on taking the accelerated course to get my 2-year certificate. It is something I have been working towards but making it easier to mentor helped me seriously consider it. ”

- PEI educator

One educator was so impacted by the career reflection prompted by participating in the prototype that she “took a leap of faith” and applied to become an ECE learning manager at a local college, and in this new role will guide students toward their Level 3 certification.

Mentorship Participation Impact on Attitudes and Practices

Educators reported an increased sense of confidence among peers to ask questions and discuss challenges they’re having in the classroom. Several reported a sense of shared purpose or positive challenge that has helped galvanize collaboration and provided something to work toward together. Many educators discussed greater empathy for others and a new understanding of what mentorship means.

“ I thought of a mentor as a bossy person telling everyone what to do and I didn’t want to do that. But I learned it was more about modelling good behaviour and asking good questions. It has given me more patience with adults – before I had patience for children but not for adults. It has changed me a lot. ”

- PEI educator

“ It has opened up a deeper conversation. Our director provides a lot of autonomy and we talk about it and she asks questions, but this helps us think about our values and beliefs and how that impacts our practice. This has been the big discussion at our centre in the last few weeks. Asking why we do the things we do. This has been helpful. ”

- PEI educator

Three of the directors we interviewed reported a positive change in the content of conversations happening between staff, including more constructive exchanges about education practice, more openness to different educator styles, and increased comfort with asking questions.

“ Before [conversations with educators] were like ‘Am I doing this right,’ and it switched to ‘I am thinking about doing this – how can I do it better?’ There seems to be a little shift. Is there more room to go? Yes, but there has been a definite shift. ”

- PEI director

“ They are going to each other for feedback and coming to me less. I LOVE that they are going to their coworkers. I am in my office all day, they know the place from the floor better than I do, so it is great that they are going to each other. They chat a fair amount more than they used to. ”

- PEI director

Among all centres, positive results from participation correlated with high percentages of staff participation in the workshop. Despite the low impact reported from one centre with low staff participation, educators from those centres still reported positive personal impacts on their practice and attitudes. This finding reveals that in future mentorship programs it will be important to create conditions for full staff participation to reap benefits to the overall centre work environment.

→ Continued on page 64



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Benefits of Participation in Prototype Indicate Value in Continued Development of Concept

When asked in post-prototype interviews if the full mentor program concept would be beneficial to centres, every respondent answered yes.

“ It would be fantastic. [The mentor could be] a safe person [to talk to] so if people were struggling with something they could step in, observe, say what you have seen is happening, and make suggestions for change. It would take a lot of weight off the directors. ”

- PEI educator

“ I think it would be very positively impactful for everyone. I think what is missing in the whole sector is just a little bit of guidance on the floor. Because you get into trouble on the floor and don't know what to do or try to do the same thing. ”

- PEI educator

Some educators and directors raised concerns around the design of the peer nomination process, indicating that it was difficult to nominate someone without knowing their interest in serving in a mentor role. Other educators reported a positive experience with peer nomination, citing how the anonymous nomination process allowed those with quieter leadership styles to be selected as mentors. Directors gave feedback that they wanted to be more involved in selecting mentors.



What's Next

**“
I feel like I understand the role
and the concept, but how will
we [the peer mentors] be able
to apply this role, and will our
director be helping us? How is
it gonna apply in real life? What
are the supports as we start
applying [what we've learned in
our community of practice]?”**

- PEI Educator

Results from this prototype test strongly suggest that interest in mentorship is high among educators and centre leadership, and that peer mentorship embedded in centres has potential to positively impact educator intention to remain in the sector, and help educators overcome barriers to taking certification training. The next iteration of this concept must test whether a mentorship program and supporting resources can be structured to meet the identified barriers to educator participation in training for higher credentials. Further prototype development should investigate:

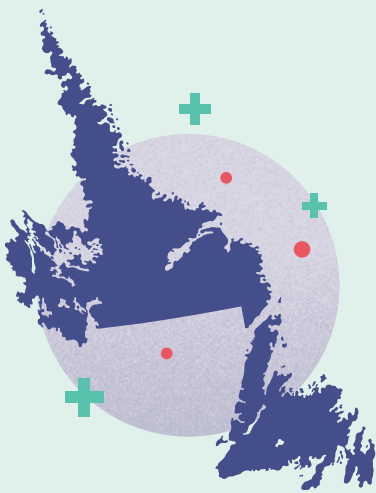
1 How might an embedded mentorship role be structured to create more flexibility in staffing without sacrificing quality of care and early learning?

Such flexibility is needed to allow educators to blend work, private life, and increased time demands for mentorship work – both by mentor and mentee. Flexibility would mean that centres can cover necessary time spent in mentorship and training without reducing educators' pay and reduce the overwhelm of too much work / too little time that pushes educators into a survival mentality instead of a mindset of reflective practice.

2 How might a new embedded mentorship role create opportunities for career advancement and practice development for ECEs of all certification levels?

Impacts must be measured of this new role on a) retention of highly qualified staff, b) activation of low-credentialed staff toward upskilling, and c) the ability of ELCCs to attract new ECEs into the workforce.

In the short duration of this prototype, we were able to test the impact of the PEI mentorship concept on interest and motivation for career development and training. To fully evaluate the relationship between sustained mentorship support, educator recruitment and retention, and increased participation in training for certification, centres will need a longer test to measure these impacts over time. For example, the next iteration of this concept could test mentorship capacity and career development impact on barriers to training and retention through prototyping a 50% centre mentor / 50% educator role embedded in 5-8 centres in various geographic and demographic areas of PEI. The expanded mentorship prototype could be tested in each participating centre for 2 years, which would include rolling out mentorship training to those centres and supporting the Community of Practice for centre mentors for the duration of the prototype. Additionally, testing and further development is required to prototype a business model for the mentorship program that could weather the known challenges facing such a program for the PEI ECE sector.



Prototype Descriptions

Newfoundland and Labrador: Support Through Pathways



The Challenge

Team Newfoundland and Labrador acknowledges that ELCC staff want to be recognized as professionals and feel valued. This recognition is missing and was identified as one of the reasons staff may not be motivated to increase their level of education in ECE.

The concept prototype team Newfoundland and Labrador developed first was a toolkit for administrators and licensees to help ELCC staff feel heard, valued, and supported. This toolkit would include tools to onboard new hires, create a supportive work environment, and develop a professional community of practice for administrators and licensees. After feedback from three administrators, the aspects of the toolkit that resonated the most were being better equipped and informed to help guide staff advance their education, and time to connect with their staff to support their educational pathway.

“This is something that is really needed. How to ease those fears and guide them through going back to school and for me to have more knowledge about it so that I can guide them properly, and often I don’t have those answers.”

- NL administrator

“Getting them to chase the information is just putting extra pressure on them. They are already stressed from studying while working. They don’t need the extra pressure.”

- NL administrator

Team Newfoundland and Labrador incorporated this feedback and began exploring the challenges of “How would an administrator self-reflect on how approachable, encouraging, and supportive they are of their staff advancing their education and qualification levels?” and “How can administrators create psychological safety within their centres to help their staff advance their education and qualification levels?”



Prototype: Visualizing and Supporting the Educational Pathway

Team Newfoundland and Labrador prototyped a series of sessions with centre administrators and licensees that aimed to create a supportive relationship between administrators and their staff as they advance in their educational and professional journeys. The series consisted of:

- ▶ a self-assessment questionnaire for administrators to reflect on how they help their staff advance in their educational pathway
- ▶ a three-session series of online workshops facilitated by Mary Linehan, a certified level IV early childhood educator in Newfoundland and Labrador with over 30 years of experience in the sector (sessions covered best practices on how to create a supportive environment for encouraging staff to advance in their educational pathway and allowed for participants to share their experiences of supporting their staff in furthering their education and developing a practice of goal setting with their staff)
- ▶ a visual of the educational pathway in NL from uncertified to fully certified (see Appendix 3, p. 89)

The prototype tested three core elements:

- 1 Does a community of practice for administrators and licensees positively impact their confidence to support ELCC staff in pursuing higher certification?
- 2 Does a visual of the educational pathway positively impact ELCC staff's understanding of their options and motivation to pursue higher certification?
- 3 Does a supportive relationship between administrators or licensees and ELCC staff positively impact their desire to pursue higher certification? Does building a practice of goal setting within ELCC staff help them break it down step by step so it feels more attainable?

The series was promoted through the AECENL Facebook page and participation counted for 5 hours of Professional Learning. Ten administrators/licensees registered for the workshop series from across Newfoundland and Labrador.

- ▶ Due to time constraints, 2 participants withdrew their registration. Both would have preferred a daytime option.
- ▶ 4 participants attended all three sessions, the other 4 attended only one session each.
- ▶ 7 work in privately owned centres, 1 works in a non-profit centre.

We asked all participants to connect us with one of their staff to interview for feedback on how the sessions might have impacted their relationship with their employer. After several attempts to connect with educators at the participating centres, we were not able to schedule interviews with them.



Key Findings

Reliance on Word of Mouth and Previous Experience

Participating administrators currently support their staff by using their personal networks to find answers to their staff's questions, and/or sitting down with their staff to go through the process together.

Participants that are new to the administrative role find guiding their staff challenging because they have to go through the process to figure it out. While seasoned participants feel better equipped to guide their staff in their educational pathway because they've done it before themselves or learned by supporting other staff, programs and regulations change so they become disconnected from the process.

All participants recognized that there is a need for clearer information regarding the options, process, benefits, and resources available to support their staff in their educational journeys. It is important to ensure that the information they are accessing is current.

A Needed Communication Tool

Overall participants were very positive about the visual that was created. They said it addressed the need for a concise way to communicate the journey from applying to a program to applying for certification. It helped by showing different avenues or options for achieving this. The certification process in NL is known to be one of the more complicated in the country.

They used or intended to use the visual as:

- ▶ a checklist for staff taking courses
- ▶ a map to guide staff where they want to go
- ▶ a visual prompt for the staffroom
- ▶ a “brochure” to be handed out to staff
- ▶ an interview tool to show what a new hire would need to do and the options available

The educational pathway was also tested on an instructor of early childhood education, College of the North Atlantic, and the AECENL Registrar. Both of whom saw value in using the visual in their daily work with educators and hope to use the visual in the classroom and/or on their website.

Participants feel that having an educational pathway visual will impact the desire of their staff to advance their education by opening the door to a conversation about certification levels. They also mentioned that there are other factors at play in the decision-making process, such as the financial support available and the impact of higher education on their pay scale.

→ *Continued on page 69*



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The Value of a Community of Practice

All participants said they would have participated in the 3 workshops without the offer of professional development hours as they felt the topic and structure were important to their work. When administrators have questions or concerns about their role and how to support their staff, they turn to their personal contacts in the field. Building an informal contact network with other centre administrators and licensees is perceived as extremely helpful and valuable, as is having a role or point of contact with AECENL.

Participants liked that the workshop series provided the opportunity for them to learn from each other and share what is working well when supporting their staff who are pursuing higher education.

They liked the group setting and hearing from each other, but they would have preferred a medium that allowed for one-on-one interactions and networking to take place, preferably in person, as they found this difficult through video call (Zoom).

There is a reliance on informal networks as operators feel that they can't raise questions to government employees or to regulators as they could face negative repercussions for not understanding regulations.

Even with the value of the informal network between administrators and licensees, there can be a hesitation to share information because of a sense of competition among centres to get qualified staff, especially for those that are for-profit and in the same region. Therefore, it is important that a community of practice or network take the time with administrators to develop trusting relationships.

What is Working Well to Support Staff

Participants shared that helping their staff begin their educational journeys had the most impact. Being there for emotional support and breaking down assignments into actionable tasks was also helpful.

Administrators identified that the most valuable aspects of the workshop were learning how important their role is besides being the leader and what they can do to help, and having a tangible goal-setting activity to work on with their staff. They recognize that what is missing the most is clear communications between educational programs and students, and therefore it becomes a challenge to guide staff through the process when there is a lack of explanation of how programs work, what the requirements are, and what the different terminology means. The educational pathway visual was considered a solid first step to addressing this.

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Barriers for Implementation

Participants demonstrated that they are motivated to encourage staff in their centres to pursue higher education and certification because they value self-improvement and see value in continuous learning. Upon the completion of the workshops, administrators noted that time was the biggest barrier to supporting their staff, implementing the resources, and using the tools shared. They also mentioned the barriers below which would prevent them from fully implementing what they learned in the workshops.

The barriers to implementation were:

- ▶ the lack of information or clarity about the programs for their staff to increase their education
- ▶ the study environment for the staff
 - Staff don't always have access to an ideal environment for learning without distractions. They are trying to fit in courses after a full day of work, performing their own home duties, raising their own children, and other responsibilities.
- ▶ staff leaving the centre to study or for another job
 - From an operational standpoint, when staff leave to further their education, paying and finding substitutes is difficult for the operation of the centre from a financial perspective. Administrators and licensees argue that increasing education and levels is discouraging staff from staying in the sector as they can work somewhere else with less stress and better pay.
- ▶ the waitlist
 - Participants reported difficulties accessing training and education programs, with some reporting waitlist times as long as three years.
- ▶ lack of financial resources to enroll in the programs
- ▶ their return on investment

Participants have difficulty finding qualified staff to fill spaces, especially when staff are absent, go on maternity or medical leave, leave to study, or leave the field. Further, they are concerned about current staff not being able to offer quality learning and care because of being understaffed.

“ I have the best intentions to help [staff] with programming, but I can barely get my own job done. Let alone... short staff/burnout. I love my job and I love what I'm doing, but I don't have time to do what I want to do. To sit down with them and do these different things that were given to us, I don't think that will happen in reality. ”

- NL administrator

“ Finding time. Trying to find time. 9 to 5:30, getting there twenty minutes early, I get a snack ready, I do two breaks after that, I do dishes, I get lunch ready, then I do an hour with my children, then I do breaks... whatever time I get to do some office time, I do it when I can. If anyone is off sick, it's up to me to fill in. I do administrative work at the end of the school day. Trying to find that five minutes to see how everyone is doing and what help they need. Even just to get a bit of one-on-one time, that would be great. We all have the issue of staffing. It's always going to be an issue, trying to find staff, trying to train staff, trying to keep staff. ”

- NL administrator



What's Next

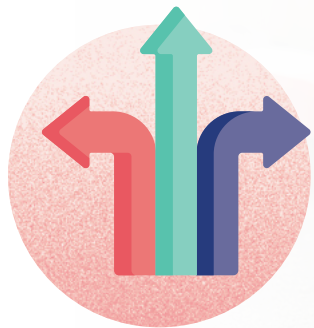
There was an expressed interest in this kind of administrator support system. For future iterations, administrators would like to see more content on labour laws specific to the ECE sector in Newfoundland and Labrador, how to communicate the changes in regulations, more information on the Operating Grant Program and wage subsidies, as well as administrative and business training.

For future iterations, we would hope to learn how a peer support network for administrators and licensees could exist and what would the model be to keep it sustainable and to add value to administrators? How best to promote these opportunities to administrators and licensees so that they are aware of them and see the value in participating?

*Next Steps for
Social Innovation in
ECE in Atlantic Canada*

Where the Provincial Prototypes Might Lead Next

The ECE Lab has generated learning and insights into several dimensions of the challenge of upskilling an overburdened sector that lacks the social, political, and economic infrastructure needed to create conditions for success.



Through our foundational and desktop research, we have found a mature and extensive body of literature that outlines the desirable skills, qualities, and credentials of highly qualified early childhood educators and documents the social, political, and economic barriers to a thriving workforce.

Through our primary research, we surfaced the lived experience of 42 early childhood educators from the Atlantic provinces. They provided insights into the impact of those barriers on their career, family, health, and well-being.

Through the overall lab process, we developed an understanding of a fragmented but passionate, dedicated, and determined sector that has much to share and learn from each other.



The evaluation of the four prototypes suggest that:



Providing a **framework for educators** who don't yet have their credentials to reflect on their career aspirations and possible pathways, and fostering a community of practice for administrators may increase ELCC's awareness and interest in pursuing their professional credentials.



Creating **space for ECEs to study** while working through paid study leave can result in the ECEs receiving higher marks, an increased ability to deliver high-quality early childhood education while studying, reduced stress, and increased self-confidence in their ability to learn, thus potentially incentivizing ECEs who may otherwise be deterred by the threat of burnout and exhaustion.



Increasing **mentorship capacity in ELCCs** may spur educators with limited qualifications to pursue higher certification and increase interest among highly qualified educators in pursuing career development within ELCCs as opposed to exiting for other opportunities. Moreover, a new type of embedded mentor-educator role in centres may sustain an increase in mentorship capacity while improving educator retention and recruitment.



There are opportunities to further improve the **experiential recognition process** for educators and to find the balance between recognizing experience and maintaining quality education for educators.



There is value in **connecting those working in the francophone ECE sector** in Atlantic Canada to share resources, training opportunities, and to have a common voice.



In addition to the incremental development and testing of each prototype proposed in their corresponding sections of this report, we should consider how these four prototypes might work in concert with one another in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador.

Call to Action

A key systemic challenge that future work should address is the vicious retention and recruitment spiral resulting from chronic understaffing of centres. The key contributing factors to this spiral are a confluence of rising demand for childcare, being outcompeted by adjacent sectors for workers, and negative work conditions resulting from chronic understaffing.

In this work we have learned that wage remedies implemented in the last few years and the ones coming with the federal bilateral agreements are hugely important first steps in resolving this systemic dysfunction, but they are not enough on their own. Each of the current lab prototypes address retention and recruitment issues through ideas generated by educators and administrators in the field.

The findings generated by these prototypes will be directly applied to subsequent iterations, further developing their capacity to address these systemic challenges. Each of the prototypes work in different functional areas of ECE but recognize the independence of increasing the quality of working conditions while expanding access to training to retain existing qualified staff and increase desirability for potential new recruits.

Ultimately, the ECE sector is suffering from a gap between the professionalism required of contemporary early childhood education and the labour supply mechanisms that staff the sector. Over the last decades, ECE work has professionalized and become more technically demanding to administer, evaluate, manage, and deliver. Yet the labour mechanisms – wages, benefits, hiring practices, leadership, and human resource support – have not sufficiently developed to meet the new, high level of professional work required to deliver the high standard of outcomes our regulations dictate and our children and families deserve. We will continue to see the fallout from this gap – educator burnout, recruitment and retention struggles – until appropriate support for a professional workforce is in place and real change to working conditions is achieved.

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“

It is difficult to work full time, have a family at home and study – that is the barrier. I have two Level 1s who've been here the longest and they are my strongest staff. I have two Level 3s but they are not strong leaders. So my Level 1s are my strongest staff.

They have tried to go back to school several times but have gotten overwhelmed by trying to juggle study/work/family. I have had the conversation with them to arrange a sub to cover a day a week so that they can study, but they know how hard it is to find subs so they don't want to make things more stressful for me and the centre. I have given them time to do their documentation and studies but it is a trade-off – if they use the time to study, then their documentation gets behind.

Hopefully the Level 1s can participate in the PLAR program where they can do their level 2 and again do their level 3 – and we could get a backfill from the Steps to Success Program (a substitute and accelerated training program recently launched in PEI), which would help relieve the barriers for the Level 1s to go back to school. But it is terrifying to think of my leadership being gone for that long.”

- PEI director

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Here we must acknowledge that the vast majority of our work thus far has been informed by the dominant demographic and culture of the Atlantic Provinces.

As such, more work is needed to focus on the needs of early childhood educators in and from Indigenous, newcomer, francophone, and rural communities. In researching the challenges and needs that exist in the sector, we learned that there is much available information about the state of ECE as a whole, but relatively little information available that describes the specific challenges faced by the ECE workforces from underserved communities. More work is needed to focus on the needs of early Childhood educators in and from Indigenous, newcomer, francophone, and rural communities.

In addition, there are many systemic factors that were not fully explored in this lab: gender and pay equity, the tension between which business model (private, non-profit, or public) is best suited to deliver this essential service, and the societal value of the caring professions and what that means for the future of work. Systemic factors will continue to undermine solutions until they are on the table to be explored, challenged, and disrupted.



Epilogue

Reflections on the ECE Lab

This section outlines lessons learned on the lab design, how participants benefited from the experience, and what next steps are recommended to further support the attainment of higher qualifications by ECE educators in Atlantic Canada. This section is informed by evaluation interviews with lab participants conducted by Jamie Gamble of Impact Consulting and Greg Woolner of Colab, as well as the observations and perspective of the NouLAB team.



The Value of the ECE Lab to Participants

The ECE Lab has been overwhelmingly successful in creating value for the participants. 94% of ECE Lab participants reported receiving “high value” and having a very positive experience. The lab process had a powerful effect on working practices and people’s relationship with others who are working on the issue of early childhood educator qualifications.

► For a full breakdown of reported benefits of lab participation, see Appendix 5, p. 97

Net Promoter Score: 64

The ECE Lab received a Net Promoter score of 64. Net Promoter is a measure of someone’s willingness to recommend something to others. A score of 50 or greater is considered excellent.

The Application of Lab Approaches

Participants in the ECE Lab are incorporating different processes and practices into their professional roles. This includes:

<i>Sharing early childhood practice</i>	▶ Professional exchange: Shared practice from others in the lab that informs improvements to frontline ECE work
<i>Innovation methodologies</i>	▶ Prototyping: Learning how to test an idea with learning as the primary outcome, and to do it in a quick, light, and inexpensive way ▶ Problem solving approach: How to break down big ideas into manageable pieces and a focused action plan ▶ Participatory research: Directly engaging people affected by the issue in the research process
<i>Leadership skills</i>	▶ Collaboration: More effectively leading processes so that others can meaningfully contribute ▶ Empathizing: Tools and skills for listening to perspectives different than one's own ▶ Leading meetings: Structuring meetings to engage and bring people on board to change

Approximately half of ECE participants were reporting some immediate application. This suggests a potentially meaningful indirect impact of the lab on professional practice and future initiatives.

“

The 'pairing up' model we developed in the prototype is so helpful. And I can already start applying that in my centre. ”

- ECE lab participant

“

I've taken on a lot of leadership responsibilities in the past, and I found it fascinating to get people on board and see the value in slowing down. I learned a lot as a leader to break things down into manageable pieces. Just from watching the facilitation team work, their collaboration, and how they brought others on board and into the process. I've been applying some of those skills and used them with my own team. It was professional development. ”

- ECE lab participant

Insights into NouLAB's Innovation Lab Process

NouLAB built upon their prior experience in design and implementation of the ECE Lab. In addition to the adaptations needed to adjust program delivery to the virtual meeting realities of the COVID-19 pandemic, NouLAB was also testing two major lab adaptations:

- 1 Adding an individual with human-centred design expertise to each prototype team and adjusting the way social innovation theories and concepts are introduced into the program. Each prototype team was assigned an experienced designer who could provide real-time coaching to the prototype's development and carry out some of the tasks needed to advance the work (for example if additional research was needed or help was needed bringing ideas together for follow-up meetings.)
- 2 Shifting away from a "theory-first" approach. Instead, the lab emphasized applied practice first, and then introduced innovation theories and concepts as needed to support the questions and challenges that participants faced in developing their prototypes.

Both of these new ideas were positive and encouraging. By embedding design coaches on each prototype team – an element highly praised by participants – the number of active prototypes launching from the lab process substantially increased from previous NouLAB labs. Also, it enabled the conceptual prototypes to be presented for feedback and then developed into a field prototype, with the field test managed by the team coach. This created the opportunity for iterative prototype development as findings were brought back to the team to be analyzed, discussed, and incorporated into next steps.

A strong presence by the NouLAB team between the sessions advanced the work. This is a major design feature to have in future programs. The NouLAB team clearly and concisely summarized what participants were saying, and from session to session, the team kept everyone current on where they were in the process and clearly communicated progress. The systemic approach taken by the NouLAB team was respectful of all perspectives and lived experiences. Participants felt that no one person or group was made to feel responsible for creating the current challenges and that we are all responsible for creating positive change.

It was critical to have active frontline ECEs involved in the process of uncovering the challenges and developing prototypes. Despite the fact that most participants had been educators at one time, they recognized that collaborating with active ECEs dramatically increased the potential success of the prototypes. ECEs are operating within a culture, system, and context that is always changing. Participants who have been in the field for a long time (15+ years) indicated that while they weren't necessarily exposed to new perspectives, they highly valued the perspective of the current ECEs.

“

Having the ECEs in the process kept it realistic. We are just observers. Can't build a system for people without them being part of designing it. It is critical for buy-in for a new program.”

- ECE lab participant

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Overall, the response of participants to the lab experience was overwhelmingly positive. While some had initial reluctance to the process and expected time commitment, these concerns were eased as the lab progressed. The participants held the NouLAB team in high regard.

“

They are the right people for this work. Very energetic, non-judgmental, patient, a fantastic team. For a group of people who had no ECE background, they really took an understanding of our sector. Very impressed.”

- ECE lab participant

The restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic forced what is commonly an in-person program into a virtual space. Some participants, understandably, were longing for in-person interaction. There was, however, an appreciation for the weekly online format, and in some cases it was preferred to an in-person option. The weekly online sessions enabled frontline workers and operators to participate, who would have been unable to leave their work for a full day or multiple days in a week.

The adoption of virtual tools was uneven. Some participants felt they would have benefitted from additional voluntary orientation sessions dedicated to learning the online whiteboard platform (Miro). Breakouts were highly valued, and different approaches helped to engage the various learning styles of the participants.

There were some challenges that participants identified. These are all challenges that could possibly emerge in future labs, and having strategies to respond will remain an important program element.

- ▶ The content of the lab touches on some challenging issues in a sector that people care deeply about, which can be traumatizing for some.
- ▶ Recruitment for the lab was challenging and, as a result, new people were added throughout the process while others dropped out. This created some challenges for participants as time was spent to orient new people to the work done to date.
- ▶ Participants felt that while the representation was quite good, it was one of the few areas that could always be improved by having greater regional and sector diversity.

Next Steps for Systems Change Makers

The challenges explored in this lab are not unique to Atlantic Canada; the need to better support the Early Childhood Education sector is an area of international concern. Many scholars and think tanks have been working on these issues for over 30 years, and many of the recommendations made 30 years ago still stand. As such, this lab has further demonstrated the potential of social innovation lab processes for creating the space and conditions to apply systems thinking, co-design, and applied experimentation to long-standing problems.

Augmenting academic research with primary design research that focuses on people with a lived experience of systemic challenges was essential to grounding discussions and design decisions in the current reality of ECEs in Atlantic Canada. While the personas and insights generated by the research should in no way replace people with lived experience at the design table, having a robust body of context-specific primary research does remove the burden of speaking for the whole sector from the people with lived experience, and instead frees them to speak and contribute from their own perspective. Ensuring operators and educators could participate in the co-design process meant compensating them financially for their time, as well as offering financial support for hiring a substitute to cover for them while attending meetings.

This iteration of the lab design process showed us that increasing the rigour of lab participant engagement with data pays off **in both the discourse the lab catalyzes and the quality of solutions created through the process**, and should continue to be explored in more robust co-design projects. In addition, embedding a designer in the lab teams helped continue the momentum that was gained during facilitated sessions, and helped maintain an iterative approach to developing and testing their assumptions and ideas.

The relationships that are developed during a lab – across disciplines and contexts – bring immediate benefits to sector ecosystems as well as long-term resilience. Better decisions are made when we embrace solution-seeking in collaboration with constituents (as demonstrated by the emerging solutions work we are seeing as a result of this lab), and more resources for creating conditions and support systems for relationships across disciplines are needed.

As we advocate for more efforts to meaningfully engage people with lived experience in the design process, attention and resources should be allocated to promoting the accessibility and equity of opportunities. Our collective experience during this lab points to the need to integrate trauma-informed approaches and principles of design justice into the design of future work in this domain.

Glossary and references

Glossary

- ▶ ACA – Atlantic Colleges Atlantique
- ▶ AECENL – Association of Early Childhood Educators Newfoundland and Labrador
- ▶ CCNB – Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick
- ▶ CNA – College of the North Atlantic
- ▶ ECDA – Early Childhood Development Association of PEI
- ▶ ECE – Early Childhood Education
- ▶ ECE(s) – Early Childhood Educator(s)
- ▶ EECD – Education and Early Childhood Development
- ▶ ELCC – Early Learning and Childcare Centre
- ▶ FSC – Future Skills Centre
- ▶ GNB – Government of New Brunswick
- ▶ NBCC – New Brunswick Community College
- ▶ OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- ▶ PLAR – Prior Learning and Recognition
- ▶ PDC – Pond-Deshpande Centre
- ▶ UNB – University of New Brunswick

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Supports and Barriers to Delivering High-Quality Early Childhood Education in Atlantic Canada

This chart is a breakdown of findings from Atlantic Canada Early Childhood Educator interviews describing conditions that impact the quality of ECE.

<i>Things that help early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>	<i>Things that prevent early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>
Training	
Hands-on learning through college practicums	Overall lack of training
Personal development, reading and research	Training that doesn't meet practical needs/constraints/realities
Situation-specific training to meet practical needs	Lack of training to address special needs
New ideas on how to implement curriculum	

<i>Things that help early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>	<i>Things that prevent early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>
Financial Factors	
Large grants for special projects	Low wages
Nonprofits and public centres have more resources than private centres	Can't compete with wages and schedule of school system
Community-specific funding sources	Costs of running a centre are high
Having diverse funding sources (city, province, sponsors)	Private centres rely on parents for income, an unstable source
	COVID has prevented fundraising
	Working hours: shifts are too long but necessary to earn income

<i>Things that <u>help</u> early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>	<i>Things that <u>prevent</u> early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>
Centre Qualities	
Supportive supervisor	Chaotic atmosphere due to high staff turnover
Senior staff willing and able to mentor junior staff	Tension when senior staff dominate junior staff and “take over”
Paid prep time	Tension: not wanting to turn away children vs. resource capacity
Collaborative reflective practice and learning environment	“Feels like family” can also mean lack of boundaries
Homelike, comforting, cozy atmosphere	Limited funds to replace things that wear out
Educator questions taken seriously, help and advice is readily available	ECEs need support in all capacities, not enough hands
“Feels like a family,” lots of communication and support	Space is limited for new materials and activities
Paid PD and investment in professionalization of staff	Surviving not thriving
Enough resources and materials for activities	Not enough resources to support children with special needs

<i>Things that <u>help</u> early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>	<i>Things that <u>prevent</u> early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>
Staffing	
Shorter classroom shifts so day goes quicker	Staff come in without basic housekeeping and child hygiene skills
Support staff to cover cleaning so educators can work with children	Shortage of trained ECE staff mean that those who should be fired are not
Full staffing means no staying late, no missing breaks	Training programs are unaffordable at this wage
Good schedule with holidays that match school system	Lack of qualified substitute staff
Staff trained in ECE or human services	Not graduating enough new ECEs
Support through good working relationships with colleagues	Lack of credentials training in existing ECEs
Good team, supportive people in leadership	Quality ECE is more than training, need “heart for the job”
Being able to go to HR with questions and issues	Short-staffed directors can’t mentor or develop staff who need it

<i>Things that <u>help</u> early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>	<i>Things that <u>prevent</u> early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>
Program/Pedagogy	
Support from centre to adapt and develop programming	Supervisor or owner gatekeeping PD opportunities
Being able to see outcomes of work with children	Ratios are based on things going well
Control of classroom setup and organization	Demanding job, needs a lot of patience
Ability to be creative in planning activities	Lack of materials
Small group allows for stronger relationships with children	Challenge to implement curriculum concepts in work context
Regular venue changes possible (field trips, outings)	PD pedagogical content that conflicts with ECE training
Planning time and documentation time set aside	Not enough time in the day to get everything done
Flexibility and personalization in approach	Staff wants to innovate but supervisor doesn't support
Child-centred rather than requirement-centred	
Environment where everyone is engaged	
Community involvement and connection	
Support from centre to adapt and develop programming	

<i>Things that <u>help</u> early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>	<i>Things that <u>prevent</u> early childhood educators deliver high-quality ECE</i>
Regulation	
ECE Curriculum is good	Documentation takes time away from children
Ratios are good, don't go higher	Conflicting messages from different agencies cause confusion
	Demands of inspection disruptive, takes focus away from children

Appendix 2

Participants in the Francophone Interprovincial Committee Discussions

*Participants in the discussion about an Atlantic Francophone
Early Childhood Education Association (AFECEA)*

Name	Role	Organization	Province
Lise Maillet	Pedagogical Agent in Early Childhood	GNB	N.B.
Mona Normandeau	Teacher Childhood Education, Campbellton Campus	CCNB	N.B.
Sandra Guitard	Owner, Director, Educator	Garderie aux p'tits amours	N.B.
Liane Roy	Director of Student Success Acting Director of Student Success	Collège de l'Île	P.E.I.
Yoan Rousseau	Coordinator of Recruitment and Retention	Association des CPE francophones de l'Î.-P.-É	P.E.I.
Kathleen Couture	Executive Director	Association des CPE francophones de l'Î.-P.-É	P.E.I.
Marick Romedenne	Coordinator of Early Childhood and Family Services	Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador	N.L.

*Participants in the discussion about an Atlantic Francophone
Early Childhood Education Association (AFECEA)*

Name	Role	Organization	Province
Jane Williamson	Executive Director	La société de la garderie Le Petit Voilier	N.S.
Lise Parent	College Professor in Education	Université Sainte-Anne	N.S.
Nadine Thebeau	Director of the Innovation Centre	Atlantic Colleges Atlantique (ACA)	N.B.
Pierre Martin	Human Resources (Branch) Education and Early Childhood Development	GNB	N.B.
Josée Nadeau	Development and Learning 0-8 Years (Branch) Early Childhood Education and Development	GNB	N.B.
Yvan LeBlond	Development Manager	CCNB	N.B.
Danielle Michaud Coté	District scolaire francophone Nord-Ouest (Branch) Education and Early Childhood Development	GNB	N.B.
Julie Cyr	Dean and Director, School of Health and Community Services	CCNB	N.B.
Mary Haché	Director, Early Learning and Child Care Services (Branch) Early Childhood Education and Development	GNB	N.B.

Appendix 3

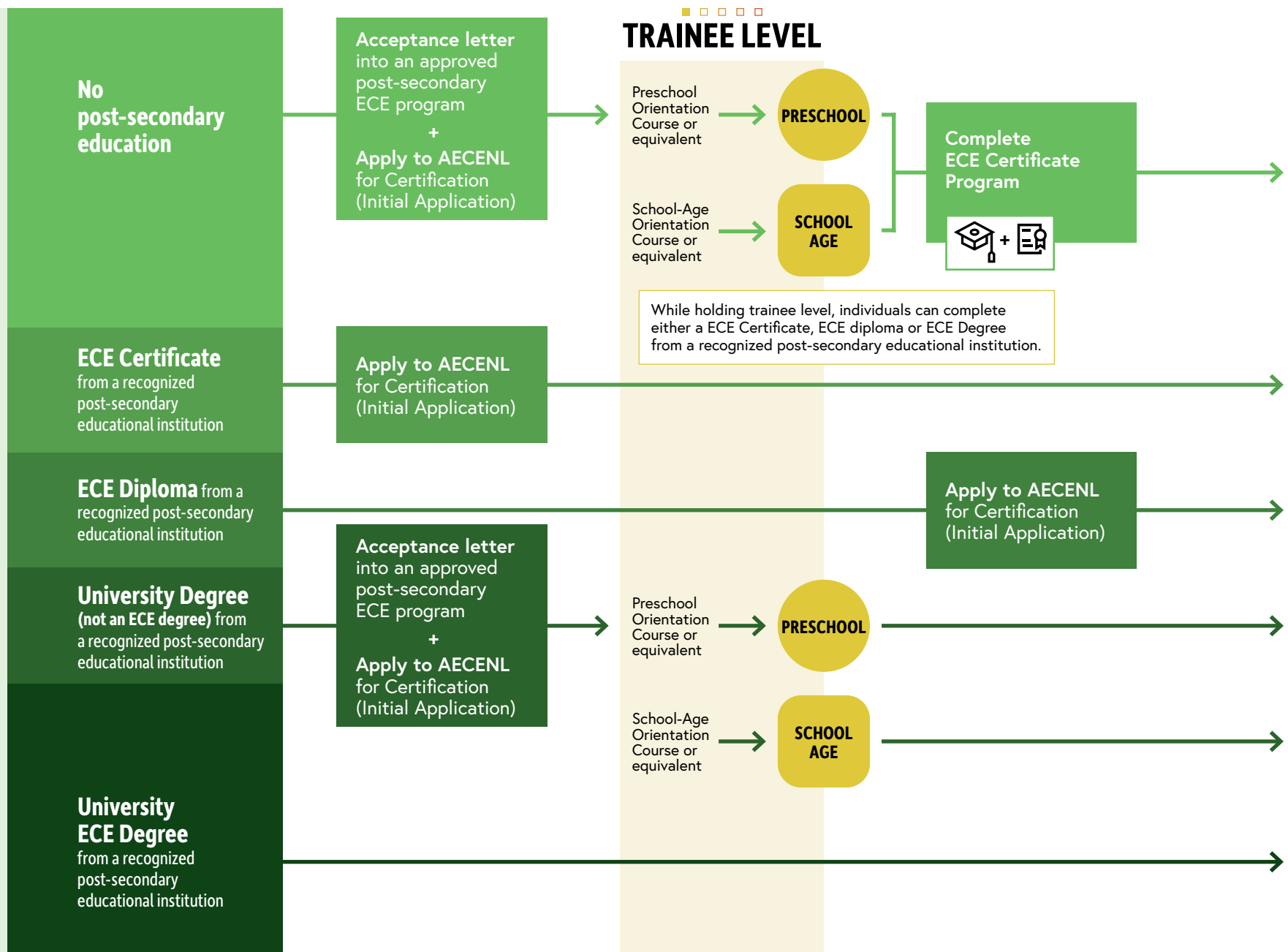
The Newfoundland and Labrador Career Pathway

Child Care Services Certification is one of the legislative requirements to work in a regulated child care centre or licensed family child care home in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL).

This educational pathway provides information on post-secondary education requirements to obtain a child care services certification in a regulated child care centre. The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL) is a non-profit professional association who has a service agreement with the Government of NL to provide Child Care Services Certification, orientation courses (to achieve certification in a particular classification) and professional learning opportunities. www.aecenl.ca



- CHILD CARE CENTRES**
- PRESCHOOL CLASSIFICATION** encompasses children ages 2 to school-entry (who are not attending school full-time) in a regulated child care centre.
- SCHOOL-AGE CLASSIFICATION** encompasses children ages from school-entry (who attend school) to 12 in a regulated child care centre.
- INFANT CLASSIFICATION** encompasses children ages birth to 24 months in a regulated child care centre. Note: to hold an infant classification a minimum Level One in Preschool is required.
- LEGEND**
- * Completion of the course not needed if classification was obtained in earlier level.
-  Apply to AECENL for Certification (Reissue Application)
-  From a recognized post-secondary educational institution.
- ECE** Early Childhood Education



CHILD CARE CENTRES

-  **PRESCHOOL CLASSIFICATION**
encompasses children ages 2 to school-entry (who are not attending school full-time) in a regulated child care centre.
-  **SCHOOL-AGE CLASSIFICATION**
encompasses children ages from school-entry (who attend school) to 12 in a regulated child care centre.
-  **INFANT CLASSIFICATION**
encompasses children ages birth to 24 months in a regulated child care centre. Note: to hold an infant classification a minimum Level One in Preschool is required.

LEGEND

- * Completion of the course not needed if classification was obtained in earlier level.
-  Apply to AECENL for Certification (Reissue Application)
-  From a recognized post-secondary educational institution.
- ECE Early Childhood Education

LEVEL 1

PRESCHOOL

SCHOOL AGE

INFANT

* School-Age Orientation Course or equivalent

Infant Child Care Orientation Course or equivalent

Complete ECE Diploma



Complete ECE Certificate Program



Apply to AECENL for Certification (Initial Application)

LEVEL 2

PRESCHOOL

SCHOOL AGE

INFANT

* School-Age Orientation Course or equivalent

* Infant Child Care Orientation Course or equivalent

CHILD CARE CENTRES

PRESCHOOL CLASSIFICATION
encompasses children ages 2 to school-entry (who are not attending school full-time) in a regulated child care centre.

SCHOOL-AGE CLASSIFICATION
encompasses children ages from school-entry (who attend school) to 12 in a regulated child care centre.

INFANT CLASSIFICATION
encompasses children ages birth to 24 months in a regulated child care centre. Note: to hold an infant classification a minimum Level One in Preschool is required.

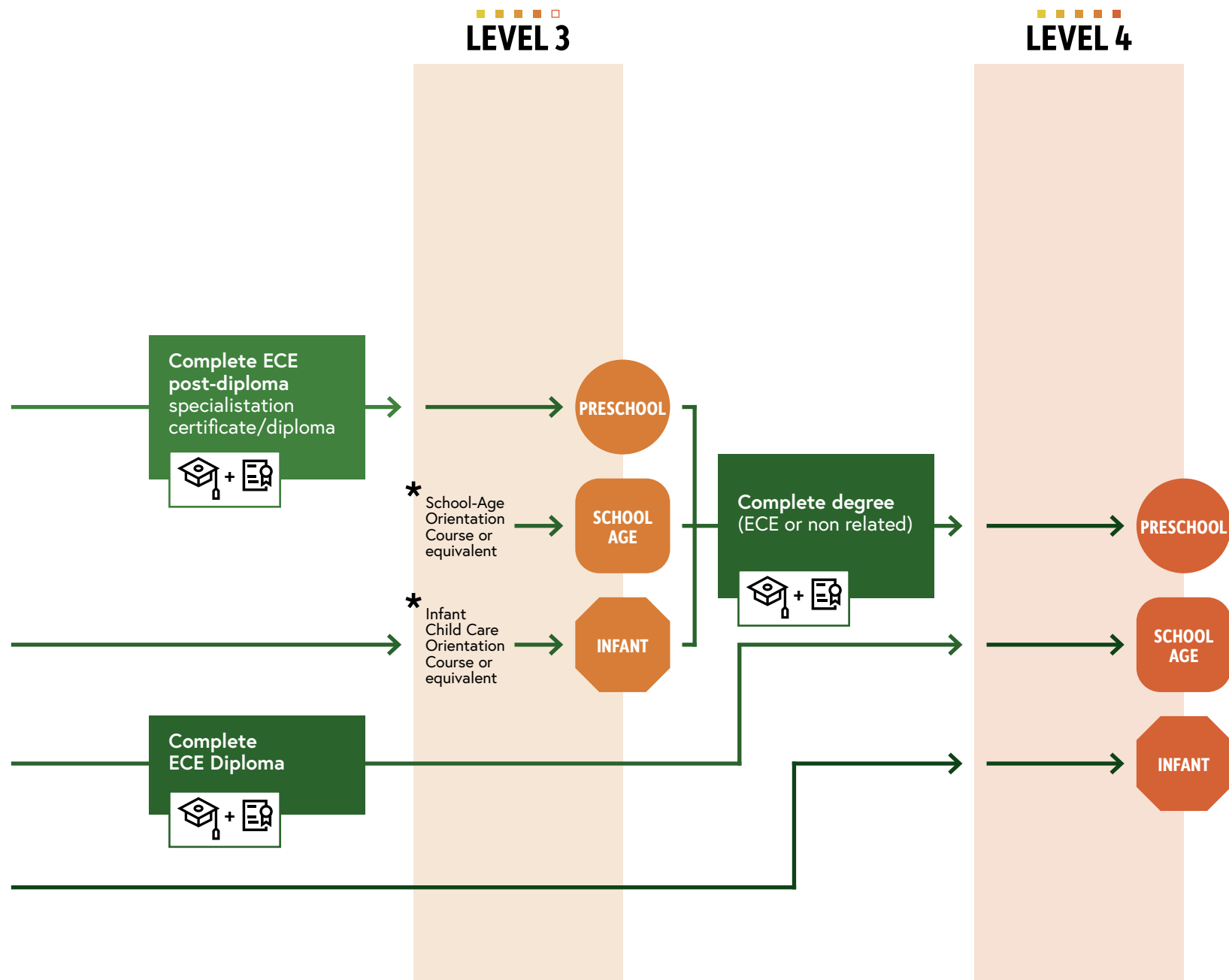
LEGEND

* Completion of the course not needed if classification was obtained in earlier level.

 Apply to AECENL for Certification (Reissue Application)

 From a recognized post-secondary educational institution.

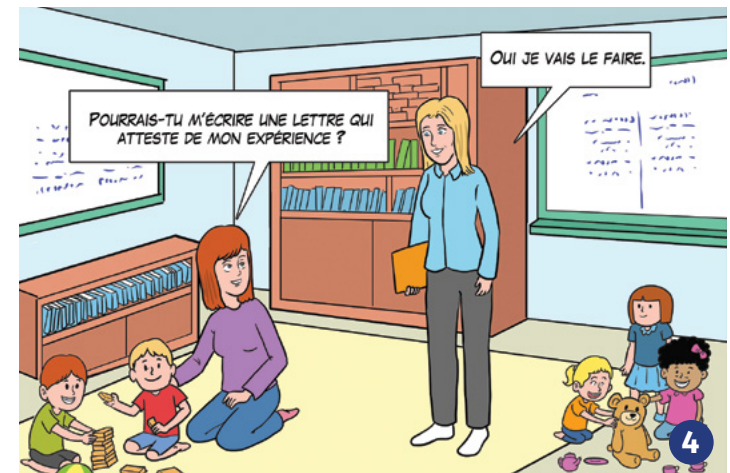
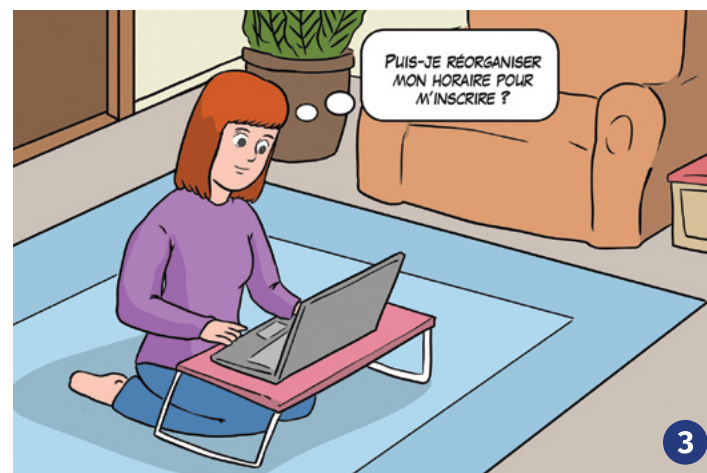
ECE Early Childhood Education



Appendix 4

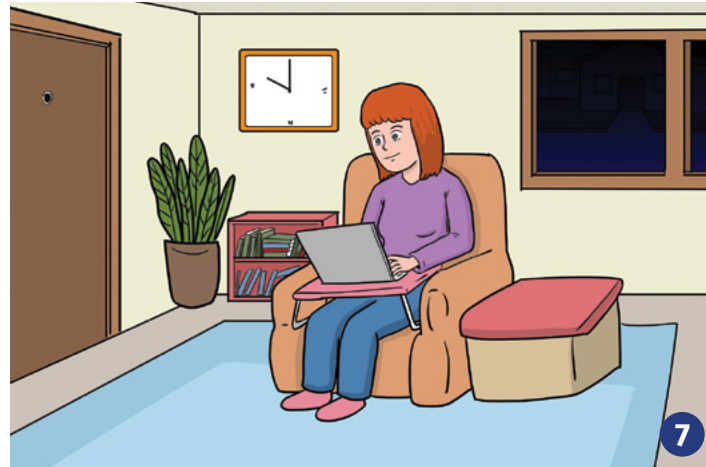
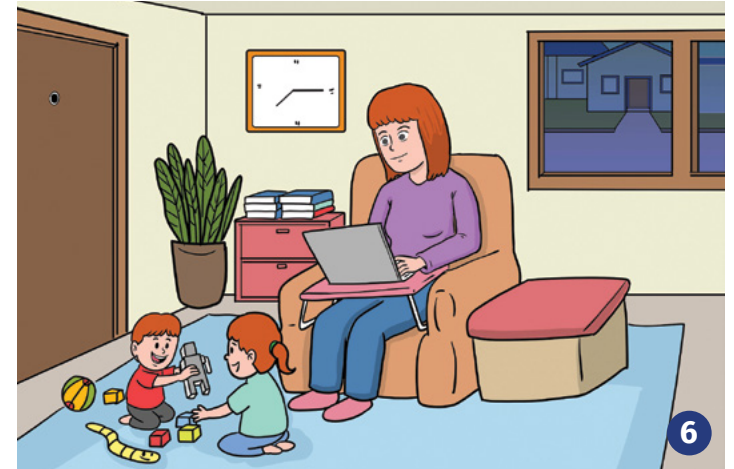
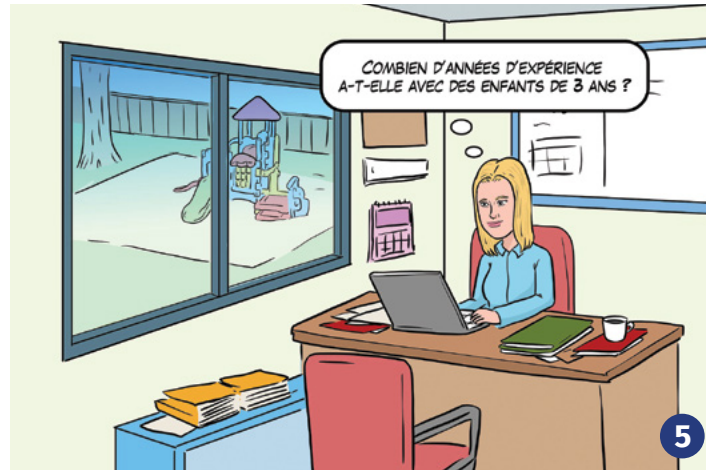
Experiential PLAR Scenario Visualization

Storyboard of the PLAR experience for educators attending the programme at CCNB.



Appendix 4

Experiential PLAR Scenario Visualization



Appendix 5

Benefits of Lab Participation

The following table highlights the primary benefits identified by ECE Lab participants. Findings are from evaluation conducted by Impact Consulting.

Main Themes	Description	Illustrative Quote
Strengthened networks of support	▶ Building and strengthening relationships with people in the same province. ▶ Work together across the sector including new relationships (there was always at least one person on each team that individuals didn't know before the lab) and strengthened relationships through this new form of engagement and experience working together on the same challenge. ▶ Development of a network that people intend to call upon when facing a challenge or looking for resources. For example, a new working group is collaborating across the Atlantic provinces to share training, resources, and have a common voice – the Francophone Association for Early Childhood Education which is operating entirely outside of the lab workshops and prototypes.	<i>“ I've been connecting with the people in [my province] across the government, college, and frontline operators. There's been little crossover, especially during the pandemic. [The ECE Lab] was critical at building those relationships. And in my new role this was really helpful. It really accelerated the relationship building. ”</i> - ECE lab participant

Main Themes	Description	Illustrative Quote
Strengthened government – frontline collaboration	▶ Frontline early childhood educators, advocacy representatives, and government representatives all agreed that the lab aligned their needs with their respective provincial government representatives. ▶ Frontline workers feel that their work is more valued; there is a sense of working shoulder-to-shoulder across silos, where everyone at the table was a pivotal piece to finding the right solutions and moving those solutions forward.	“ We were connecting across the sector, breaking down the silos between government, education, and industry to get new perspectives and ideas. ” - ECE lab participant
Improved system alignment	▶ The lab built empathy for others in the system. Participants learned that there is a desire to find solutions and push through barriers, despite the siloed roles in the sector. ▶ There is a greater understanding that the intention of provincial government staff is aligned with the colleges, frontline ECE workers, operators, and advocates. ▶ Participants gained a new understanding of the realities in other provinces. This helps build a supportive and sympathetic field of practice that hadn't existed before the lab. ▶ Having a diversity of perspectives informing development of solutions made them more effective and have less chance of duplication of effort. Prototype teams were able to draw on one another's experience and resources, and beyond the prototypes, individuals are now sharing program and policy-related resources, enhancing their efficacy in regular roles.	“ It was a real eye-opener to different facets of our system. Talking to people in government, colleges, directors, associations. What's being done, what they value. Puts into perspective that they understand that recruitment and retention are significant challenges that our sector faces. Lets us know that they're hearing us and our concerns. ” - ECE lab participant

Main Themes	Description	Illustrative Quote
Enhanced data-driven perspective	▶ The research that the ECE Lab conducted in advance of the workshops provided very valuable regional context. The data allowed participants to gain an overview at scale, which was helpful in seeing the whole system and reduced the burden of individual responsibility.	“ The data that was provided of who is in the sector and how they’re feeling really informs us. It creates empathy for us as we think about redesigning these processes. I oversee a staffing group that provides coaching support to centres in [my province]. I had a conversation with the coordinator of that group. I was able to share that information with this person, that was incredibly helpful. ” - ECE lab participant
More comprehensive grasp of the challenge	▶ Developing and rolling out the prototypes with different perspectives on the same challenge enabled participants to get to the root of a problem, find unexpected solutions, and uncover the complexities.	“ Through all the steps, my understanding of the challenge did change, and can evidence that through the development of the prototype. It’s not what I would have expected, but I now believe it’s the best way forward. It’s feasible and hopefully effective. It was action research, an ongoing cycle of change and revision. When we got to the end, we felt we had arrived because we had asked all the right questions. ” - ECE lab participant
Renewed inspiration	▶ The lab gave participants hope and a renewed sense of optimism in a system that can sometimes feel stagnant. Across the provinces, participants were buoyed by the intention and resources being put into this lab. ▶ The lab renewed their commitment and willingness to champion change to improve the lives of all who benefit from this work.	“ I see it from my perspective, but to hear other perspectives was important. This gives me hope. It’s a big deal. Our voices are being heard. ” - ECE lab participant

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