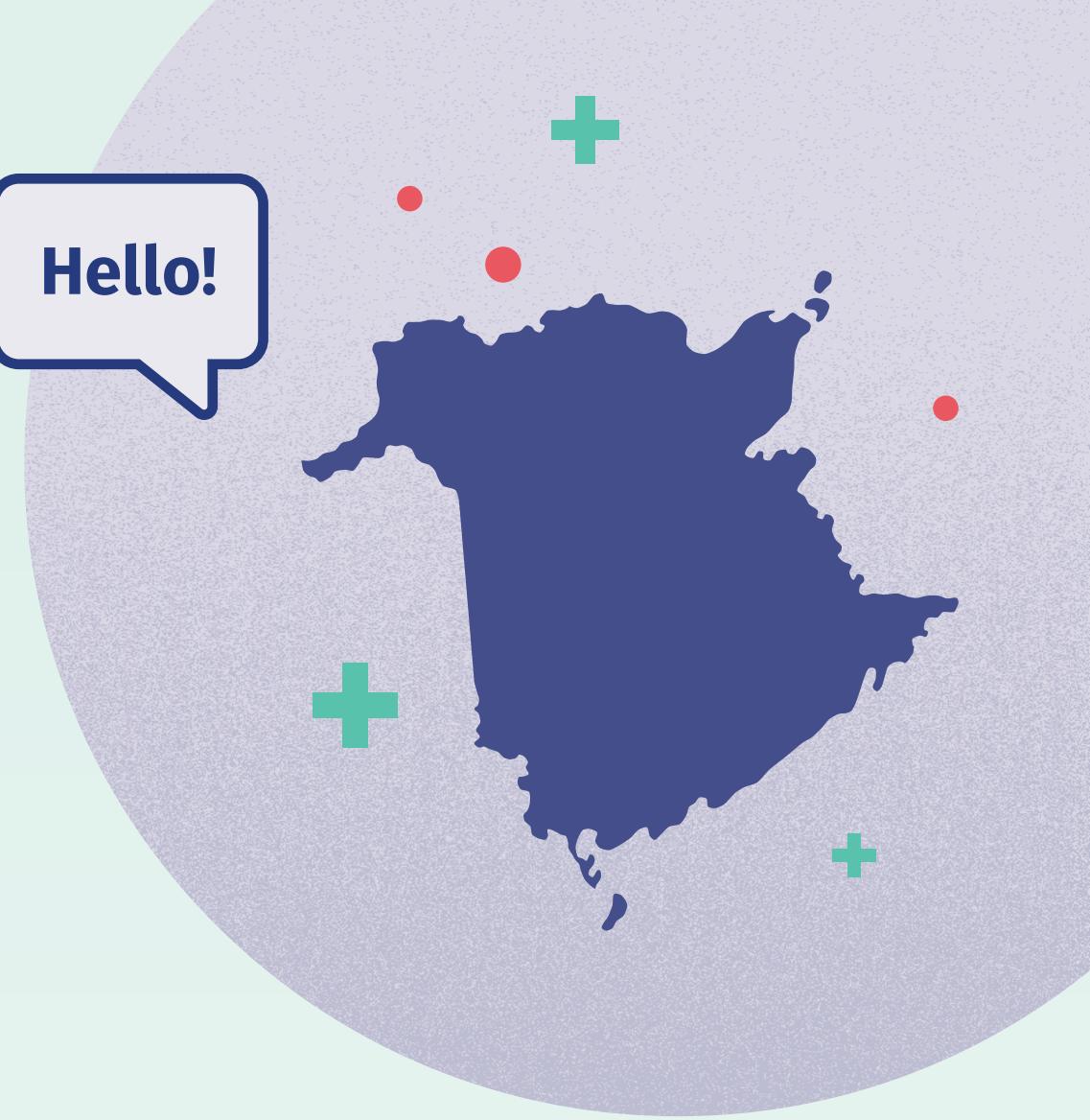




Early  
Childhood  
Education Lab

Hello!



*This booklet includes an overview  
of the prototype tested by the:*

***New Brunswick Anglophone  
team as part of the  
Early Childhood Education  
(ECE) Training Lab***

*Four provincial teams worked with an embedded design coach from the NouLAB team to design, implement, and evaluate a field prototype of their social innovation concept. A prototype is a preliminary model of something from which other forms are developed; a representation of a design idea used to get feedback and generate learning.*

Live testing of prototypes was conducted during summer and fall of 2021, and evaluation was conducted in December 2021.

- To find summaries of the other three prototypes, their key findings and recommendations, the full report can be accessed at:  
<https://xn--eclab-labope-lhb.ca/>  
or email [innovate@noulab.org](mailto:innovate@noulab.org).

The Anglophone team from New Brunswick was made up of **Caroline Noel Munn**, Educator, Cedar Brook Early Learning Centre; **Kari Sprague**, Operator, Cedar Brook Early Learning Centre; **Janice Sutherland**, Association Rep and Operator with Home with a Heart Early Learning Centre; **Heather Fowler**, Academic Chair, NBCC; and **Clare Archibald**, Director, Anglophone East School District. Others in the ECE sector were recruited to take part in the prototype programs and give feedback.



**Janice Sutherland**

Association Rep and Operator – Home with a Heart Early Learning Centre



**Caroline Noel Munn**  
Educator – Cedar Brook Early Learning Centre



**Heather Fowler**  
Academic Chair NBCC



**Kari Sprague**  
Operator – Cedar Brook Early Learning Centre



**Clare Archibald**  
Director – Anglophone East School District EECD

The team identified the challenge they wanted to work on as the lack of time for working educators: to study, to spend time with family, and for self-care. In response to this challenge they developed the idea for the Study Leave Support Program to prototype. The Study Leave Support Program 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 varies depending on the stage of their ECE career e.g., retired ECEs, newcomers to Canada, and newcomers to ECE.



## 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 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.