



Early
Childhood
Education Lab

Bonjour!



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

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

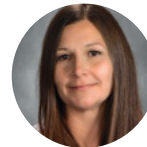
Four provincial teams worked with an embedded design coach from the NouLAB team to design, implement, and evaluate a field prototype of their social innovation concept. A prototype is a preliminary model of something from which other forms are developed; a representation of a design idea used to get 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--ecelab-labope-lhb.ca/>
or email innovate@noulab.org.

The Francophone team from New Brunswick was made up of **Isabelle Fournier**, Operator, *Au p'tit monde de Franco*; **Renay Martin-Landry**, *propriétaire et éducatrice à la petite enfance* at *Centre Éducatif Le Platinum à Dieppe*; **Sandra Guitard**, Operator, *Garderie aux p'tits amours Inc.*; **Lise Maillet**, Early Learning Centre Coordinator/Early Learning Consultant; **Danielle Gauthier St-Onge**, Specialist, *Développement et apprentissage 0-8 ans GNB*; **Celine Cormier** (GNB), Early Learning Consultant, *Développement et apprentissage 0-8 ans* (Branch); **Mona Normandeau**, Instructor CCNB. Others in the ECE sector were recruited to take part in the prototype programs and give feedback.



Isabelle Fournier

Operator – *Au p'tit monde de Franco*



Renay Martin-Landry

Propriétaire et éducatrice à la petite enfance at *Centre Éducatif Le Platinum à Dieppe*



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Operator – *Garderie aux p'tits amours Inc.*



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Danielle Gauthier St-Onge

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Celine Cormier (GNB)

Early Learning Consultant – *Développement et apprentissage 0-8 ans* (Branch)



Mona Normandeau

Instructor CCNB

The NB Francophone team chose to address the limited uptake of experiential PLAR option for achieving certification. In investigating this challenge, the team realized recruitment for Experiential PLAR is last minute and difficult for educators to plan around. The 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 team explored concepts including a visualization of the PLAR process from the educators' point of view. The trend of losing experienced staff to the public school system once they are qualified, which acts as a disincentive for operators to support the PLAR process, remains a challenge to address.



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 page 8) 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 services 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)

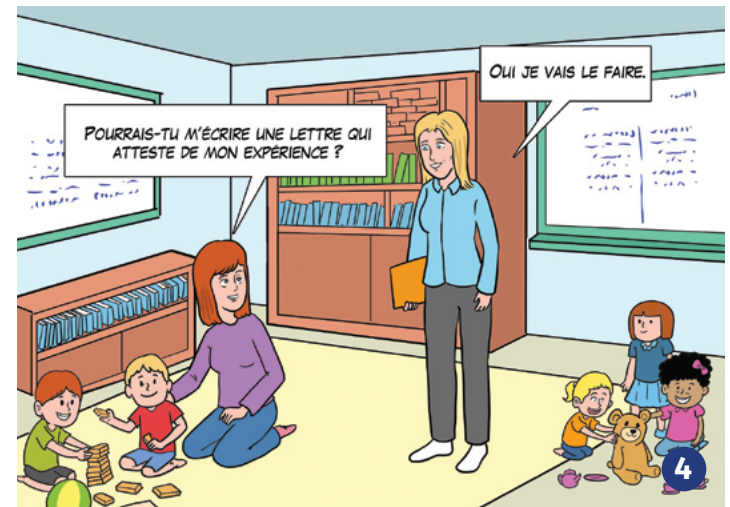
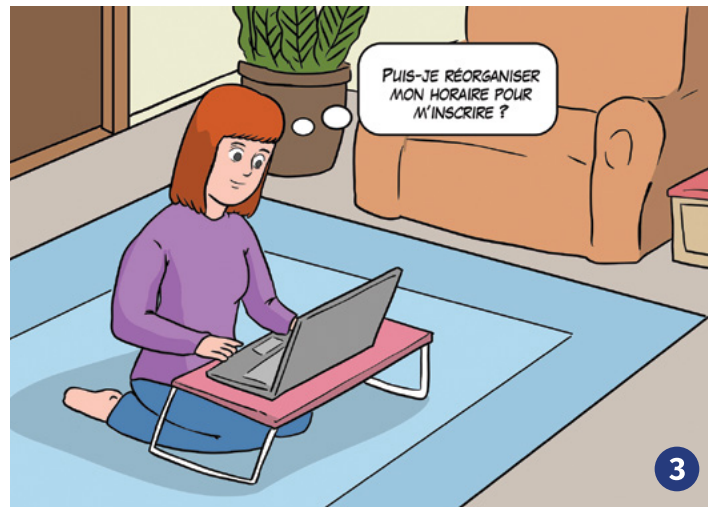
In the francophone cohort of the lab there was a full team from NB. The other three provinces did not have enough human resources for full teams, so we invited representatives from each province in the francophone ECE sector to participate in the research data sharing and analysis workshops. (3 of the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

Experiential PLAR Scenario Visualization

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



Experiential PLAR Scenario Visualization

