



Early
Childhood
Education Lab



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

***Newfoundland and Labrador
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.

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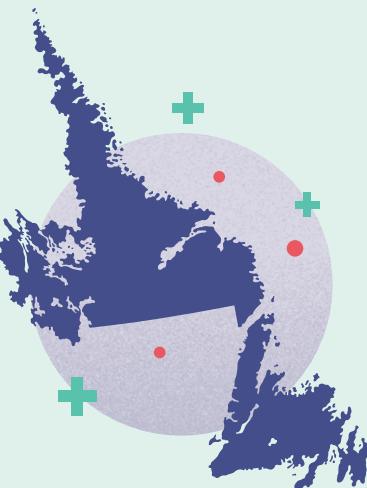
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The NL team chose to tackle the lack of support for those who help educators plan their career and advance their education. Administrators in NL currently rely on word of mouth and previous experience to find answers to their staff's questions, and would like to create a network with other centre administrators and licensees to draw on. The team prototyped an Educational Pathway 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. The visual was met with positive feedback from participants. Administrators reflected that in addition to visualizing the complex pathway to certification, the biggest barrier to supporting their staff, implementing the resources, and using the tools shared was their own time and availability.



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

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.

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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.

In addition, 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?