Early childhood educator qualification requirements and the achievement of national goals for

early learning in Canada

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Contents

Abstract

In this paper, I analyze the early learning and child care policies that pertain to teacher training requirements in Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia, and Alberta as they relate to achieving the Provincial and Federal goals for early learning in Canada. These provinces have the potential to be national influences in early learning and child care trends due to their large populations. The provincial policies regarding staff qualifications will be analyzed using a framework established by drawing on current literature regarding best practice in the field. The national goals for quality early learning and care are outlined by the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017) and the each of the provincial Early Learning and Child Care Frameworks (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017; Ministère de la Famille, 2019).

Dans cet article, j'analyse les politiques d'apprentissage et de garde des jeunes enfants qui se rapportent aux exigences de formation des enseignants en Ontario, au Québec, en Colombie-Britannique et en Alberta en ce qui concerne la réalisation des objectifs provinciaux et fédéraux en matière d'apprentissage des jeunes enfants au Canada. Ces provinces ont le potentiel d'exercer une influence nationale sur les tendances en matière d'apprentissage et de garde des jeunes enfants en raison de leur grande population. Les politiques provinciales concernant les qualifications du personnel seront analysées à l'aide d'un cadre établi en s'appuyant sur la littérature actuelle concernant les meilleures pratiques dans le domaine. Les objectifs nationaux pour un apprentissage et une garde des jeunes enfants de qualité sont décrits dans le cadre multilatéral pour l'apprentissage et de garde des jeunes enfants (Employment and Social

Development Canada, 2017) et chacun des cadres provinciaux pour l'apprentissage et de garde des jeunes enfants (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017; Ministère de la Famille, 2019).

Land Acknowledgement

I would like to begin by acknowledging that this paper was written while living and learning on stolen land, including the unceeded territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka, as well as the Tsuut'ina, Kainai, Siksika, Peigan-Piikani, Aamskapi Pikuni, and the Ĩyãȟé Nakón mąkóce Nations. I recognize that I benefit from systems established through colonialism and work within an education system that is rooted in genocide. I urge the Government of Canada to take tangible action in its responsibility to address systemic inequities relating to healthcare, clean drinking water, education, self-governance, and land rights for Indigenous peoples.

Introduction

Early learning and child care has recently become a more common topic of discussion with political parties in Canada, as the number of available childcare spaces continues to fall short of those needed and quality remains inconsistent across the country. In response, the *Multilateral Early Learning Framework* (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017) was created. This document identifies national goals for the field of early learning and child care in Canada, stating that "the evidence is clear that there are positive relationships between quality early learning and child care" (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017, p.1) and that "the further development of early learning and child care systems is one of the best investments that governments can make to strengthen the social and economic fabric of our country" (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017, p.1). The national goals for the field include increasing "quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility, and inclusivity" (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017, p.2) through further investments in the field.

There are concerns in the field that the existing underlying approach and public perception of the field will hamper efforts to enact widespread and lasting change to the quality and quantity of early learning and child care spaces in Canada (Howe & Prochner, 2012). This paper seeks to examine if current policies and professional development requirements for early childhood educators in Canada are reflective of the federal and provincial governments' stated goals for the field, of which quality is a major component.

Each of the Early Learning Frameworks puts forth a strong vision for quality early learning. The *Multilateral Early Learning Framework* (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017) defines high quality care as that which provides "rich early experiences and environments and views children as capable, competent, learners who are full of potential",

"values the importance of building strong, responsive, and respectful relationships in which purposeful interactions support optimal learning for children", and "recognizes the qualifications and training for the early childhood work force" (p.2). These indicators of quality are echoed by the provincial frameworks. Quebec's document, *Accueillir la petite enfance*, identifies the educator as the foundational component of quality, which consists of the sensitivity of the educator's interactions with children as well as the environment and materials the educator provides (Ministère de la Famille, 2019 p.30). Ontario's Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017) notes that "quality early years programs…recognize children as born learners and as citizens with rights who deserve to have beneficial experiences every day in enriching environments" (p.9). British Columbia's Early Learning Framework's vision for early learning includes an environment where "[c]hildren can experiment, investigate, and inquire in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them. They are provided with opportunities to enrich and deepen their relationships with place, land, and community" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019, p.12). Alberta's Early Learning Framework *Flight* (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014) describes such environments as "places of vitality" (p.7), where children are recognized as citizens and their innate dispositions to learn are strengthened.

This paper will use a post-modernist perspective (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005) to analyze documents relating to regulations and programming expectations in the four most populous provinces in Canada with regards to this established national vision for quality early learning and child care. First, current literature in the field that pertains to the state of early learning and child care in Canada will be summarized, including aspects such as the chronic educator shortages, overwhelmingly female-dominated nature of the field, low wages, and quality concerns

associated with minimal preservice training. Consideration will then be given to the dominant discourses present in the provincial Early Learning Frameworks and licencing regulations, analyzing expectations for the role of the educator in early learning settings and how these narratives may be related to requirements for the duration and depth of pre-service teacher training early childhood educators across the country. It will be argued that attempts to improve the quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility, and inclusivity of the field through superficial means such as increasing licensed spaces by awarding licences to previously unlicensed day-homes and ensuring educator certificates are quick and easy to obtain, will be unsuccessful in achieving national goals for the field given that early learning and child care throughout "North America has failed to evolve as a truly professional service with self-regulation based on a a substantial number of years of professional training, adequate compensation, and societal respect" (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p.231). For early learning spaces to be of sufficient quality and for the field to retain qualified educators, the underlying issues of low pay, narratives of substitute mothering, and minimal qualifications must be addressed. As such, the paper will explore how current policies and preservice teacher training for early childhood educators might be improved in order to more effectively achieve the federal and provincial vision for quality early learning and care.

Context

The National Vision for Early Learning

The Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers Most Responsible for Early Learning and Child Care acknowledge that quality early learning supports children's development and can have a lifelong impact on their learning and wellbeing (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017). They also describe educator qualifications as one of three main factors in quality early learning (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017).

The *Multilateral Early Learning Framework* is a document outlining a shared national vision for Early Learning and Child Care (also commonly referred to as Early Childhood Education) in Canada. It was developed as a collaboration between the Federal Government and the Provincial and Territorial Ministers Most Responsible for Early Learning and Child Care (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017). In addition to the national *Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework*, each province and territory has their own framework specifying priorities and goals; Ontario notably has two guiding documents for the field. The *Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017) highlights the importance of quality early learning experiences and the document *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014) provides details on guiding principles for programs in the province.

Each of the provincial early learning frameworks serve as an available resource that educators in the field may choose to draw from for their practice. Provincial policies relating to licensing regulations on the other hand, outline specific requirements for staff qualifications and training, student-educator ratios, and facility structures that are enforceable by regulatory bodies.

These policies, as well as post secondary educator training programs, need to align with the

Early Learning Frameworks and current best practices in the field if national goals for Early

Learning and Child Care are to be achieved.

The Early Learning Framework documents emphasize how quality early childhood

education (ECE) experiences support children's learning and overall wellbeing (Employment and

Social Development Canada, 2017; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019; Makovichuk,

Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014 &

2017; Ministère de la Famille, 2019). They highlight the critical role educators have in shaping

these ECE experiences. The Provincial Early Learning Frameworks (British Columbia Ministry

of Education, 2019; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Children

and Youth Services, 2014 & 2017; Ministère de la Famille, 2019) identify multiple areas in

which educators need to draw on their professional knowledge to make informed and thoughtful

choices in order to best support young children's learning, including but not limited to:

- Engage in practice that is ethical and inclusive, creating programs and spaces that support the
  equitable participation of all children

- Critically reflect on and challenge dominant discourses relating to power, knowledge, and
  education

- Maintain an awareness of current pedagogical philosophies and child development theories

- Affirm children as valued members of their local and global community

- Nurture positive and responsive relationships with children that support their emotional
  wellbeing

- Attend to children's daily needs with care, dignity, and sensitivity

- Create classroom environments that support children in exploring ideas, testing theories, and engaging in collaborative project work

- Demonstrate awareness of multimodal literacies specific to early years settings

- Scaffold children's learning and respond to their curiosities as a co-constructor of knowledge through providing intentionally chosen materials, asking thoughtful questions, and encouraging children to reflect on their thinking

- Respectfully collaborate with children's families, colleagues, and early learning support services in the community

- Regularly record observation notes and write pedagogical documentations in order to research, plan, and reflect on emergent curriculum

Literature Review

Introduction

An important aspect of achieving quality early learning as defined by the the Federal and Provincial early learning frameworks (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017) is the type of teacher training early childhood educators receive. Increased program duration and specialized course content of the teacher training program both correspond to early learning program quality. Despite this, few changes have been made to increase training requirements across the country.

Teacher Training Best Practices for Early Learning
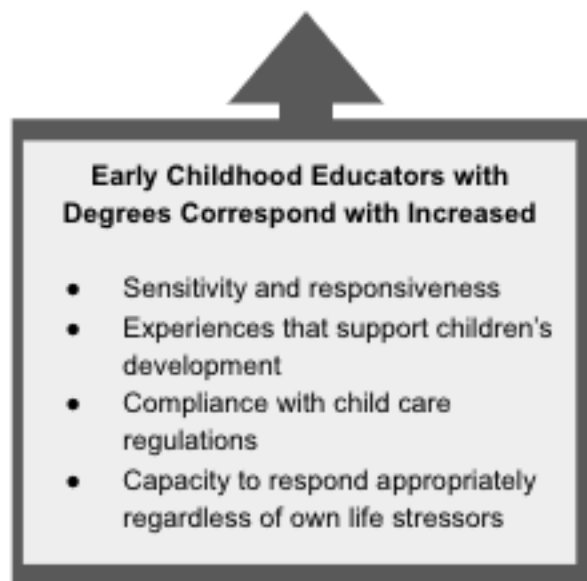
Program Duration

The duration of a pre-service teacher training program is associated with early learning program quality as defined by the *Multilateral Early Learning Framework* (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2017), which emphasizes educational experiences, environments, and interactions that are responsive and respectful of children. Teacher training for early childhood educators was found to be most effective when the number of hours of instruction were dispersed over an extended period of time such as semester based program rather than delivered over a shorter period of time such as workshops (Brunsek et al. 2020; Schacher, Gerde, Hatton-Bowers, 2019). Lower levels of pre-service teacher training related to the field of early learning such as a certificate is insufficient to make a notable impact on early learning program quality (Nocita et al., 2020; Howe, Jacobs, Vukelic, & Recchia, 2013; Norris 2010).

Early childhood educators with lower levels of teacher training are more likely to hold developmentally inappropriate behavioural expectations of young children and beliefs about

early learning that do not align with current best practice in the field compared to educators with

Bachelor's degrees (Lang, Mouzourou, Jeon, Buettner, & Hur, 2017; Press, Wong, & Gibson

2015). They are also more likely to exhibit negative emotional responses to children in their

classes and utilize inappropriate guidance practices (Lang, Mouzourou, Jeon, Buettner, & Hur,

2017). In contrast, educators with Bachelor's degrees that include a specialization in early

learning or child development are linked to indicators of high quality including educator's

responsiveness to children and compliance with child care regulations (Press, Wong, & Gibson

2015; Howe, Jacobs, Vukelic, Recchia, 2013; Norris 2010; Purcal & Fisher, 2007; Saracho &

Spodek, 2007).

Figure 1:

Aspects of High Quality Early Learning Experiences that are Linked to Increased Duration of

Preservice Teacher Training Programs for Early Childhood Educators

Early Childhood Educators with Degrees Correspond with Increased

- Sensitivity and responsiveness
- Experiences that support children's development
- Compliance with child care regulations
- Capacity to respond appropriately regardless of own life stressors

High levels of educator sensitivity, which involves interactions with children that are warm and lacking harsh behaviours, is also an important aspect of quality early learning and positive child developmental outcomes (Gerber, Whitebook, &Weinstein, 2007). Not only did higher levels of teacher training increase overall educator sensitivity, higher levels of training were also found to serve as a buffer for educators that were otherwise at risk for decreased sensitivity due to factors such as depression, with those educators maintaining their capacity to respond appropriately to children regardless of their own life stressors (Press, Wong, & Gibson 2015; Gerber, Whitebook, &Weinstein, 2007).

 Early childhood educators with specialized degrees also provide more classroom experiences that have been shown to support the cognitive and social-emotional development of their students, which positively influences young children's learning outcomes and school readiness (Press, Wong, & Gibson 2015; Norris 2010; Saracho & Spodek, 2007). These educators are also better able to provide cognitive development rationales for the classroom experiences they choose to provide (Norris, 2010).
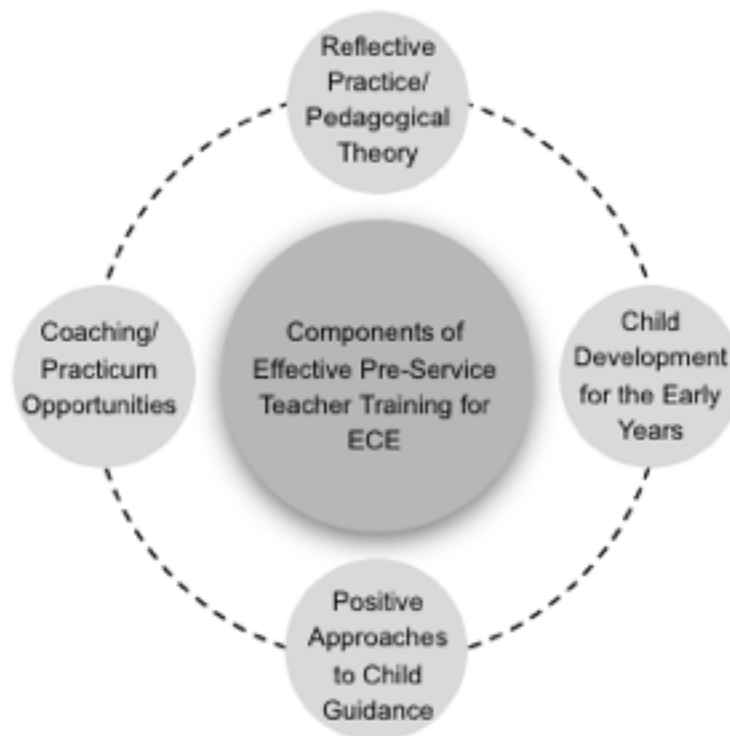
Program Content

The content of early childhood education teacher training programs also impacts early learning program quality. Early childhood education requires a skillset that varies from teaching for school-aged children, with quality early learning requiring a specialized understanding of how to incorporate education into a young child's play experiences as well as an in-depth knowledge of child development specific to the early years (Press, Wong, & Gibson 2015). A child-initiated learning perspective that focuses on child development, emotional wellbeing, language rich educator-child interactions, and play-based experiences is associated with children

exhibiting more prosocial behaviours and improved school readiness compared to more

traditional teacher-directed academic approaches to early learning (Lang, Mouzourou, Jeon,

Buettner, & Hur, 2017; Howe, Jacobs, Vukelic, Recchia, 2013; Norris, 2010). Lang, Mouzourou,

Jeon, Buettner and Hur (2017) note that "without specific training on children's emotional

development and supportive responses to children's emotional displays, teachers may interpret

children's negative emotions as disruptive...punishing children for these outbursts or dismissing

the importance of emotions" (p.84).

Figure 2:

Components of Effective Pre-Service Teacher Training for Early Childhood Educators

It is important that these programs offer instruction on reflective practice and opportunities for student educators to identify and challenge underlying assumptions about young children and teaching practices (Brunsek et al. 2020; Schacher, Gerde, Hatton-Bowers, 2019; Jensen & Iannone, 2018; La Paro, Schagen, King & Lippard, 2018; Baum & King, 2006). Such critical reflection should occur throughout a program in order to effectively influence educator practices in the field (Baum & King, 2006). Highly effective teacher training for the early years also involves a direct coaching component, where educators are able to practice program content learned during their training experience and receive ongoing feedback such as in programs that feature a practicum (Brunsek et al. 2020; Schacher, Gerde, Hatton-Bowers, 2019; Jensen & Iannone, 2018; La Paro, Schagen, King & Lippard, 2018).

Possible Contributing Factors to Low Training Requirements

Despite numerous updates to policies and curriculum frameworks over the years, the core attribute of minimal training requirements for early childhood educators has remained largely unchanged throughout North America since the 1970s (Howe & Prochner, 2012). Quebec was the first province to require any portion of the staff in child care have some postsecondary training related to early childhood education in 1997 (Mahon, 2009), a requirement that has not increased since its implementation.

Educator Shortage due to Low Wages and Poor Working Conditions

Across the country, Canada faces a chronic inability to attract and retain early childhood educators (Mahon, 2009). This is largely attributed to poor wages and working conditions (Press, Wong, & Gibson 2015; Mahon 2009). Modigliani (1986) outlines many of the working conditions that contribute to educator's leaving the field of early learning: lack of benefits, fast-

paced and high stress, minimal pay, exposure to contagious diseases, back pain, expected unpaid overtime, inability to take time off when ill due to an insufficient numbers of substitutes, and the work being perceived as babysitting despite high levels of qualifications. Thirty years later, these issues continue to be commonplace (Grant, Jeon, & Buettner, 2019).

The vast majority of early childhood educators make below 60% of the average wage for women in their respective provinces (Mahon, 2009). This has led provinces to implement a variety of wage enhancement programs and incentives in an attempt to promote improved staff retention and increase the qualifications of educators without mandating higher standards of qualification requirements (Mahon 2009). By failing to address the underlying requirements of the field, these government initiatives have prioritized quantity rather than quality- most new child care spaces being have been created through licensing in- home daycares rather than expanding and creating spaces in early learning centres (Varmuza, Perlman, & White, 2019). The incentive approach has been largely ineffective in addressing the educator shortage over the past decade, with available early learning spaces for children still remaining woefully inadequate throughout Canada (Varmuza, Perlman, & White, 2019).

Limited Availability and High Cost of Degree Programs

Another contributing factor may be the availability and accessibility of programs for early childhood educators to pursue more in-depth studies. Barriers to training can include geographical location of program, incompatible hours of the program with work, and high costs of the program (Howe & Prochner, 2012).

There are sixteen approved early childhood accreditation courses in Alberta; three offered by private career colleges and thirteen offered by public post-secondary colleges and universities Government of Alberta (2021). There are two programs in the province that offer a degree

related to early childhood education; Mount Royal University offers a Bachelor of Child Studies with a specialization in Early Learning and Child Care and MacEwan University's new Bachelor of Early Childhood Curriculum Studies program started as of Fall 2020 (MacEwan University, 2021).

There are twenty nine public and private post secondary programs, three continuing education programs, and nine distance programs that directly lead to early childhood educator accreditation in British Columbia (Government of British Columbia, 2021). Capilano University offers a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education, with the first year of the program leading to basic certification and the second to infant-toddler or special needs accreditation (Capilano University, 2021). There are other universities in the province that have degree programs with the option to specialize in early learning, such as the University of British Columbia (UBC). UBC offers a Bachelor of Arts with a minor in education and a specialization in early learning, however at the time of writing this degree program notably does not qualify graduates to be certified as Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) in the province (University of British Columbia, 2022).

Ontario has eight post secondary institutions that are approved to train registered early childhood educators, seven of which are universities that offer a degree specializing in early childhood education or child development (Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators, 2021). Training programs must demonstrate to the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators that their program reflects the detailed and current standards outlined by the college which align with the two guiding documents for early learning in the province (Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators, 2021).

Quebec has thirty five CÉGEP programs leading to a Diplôme d'études collégialestechniques d'éducation à l'enfance (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021). Concordia's Bachelor of Arts program with specialization in Child Studies or ECEE also meet the accreditation requirements to be an early childhood educator in the province (Concordia University, 2021).

Public Perception of the Field

Although there is a great deal of literature, advocacy, and government policy surrounding early childhood education in Canada as a means to support women's increased involvement in the workforce, little attention is afforded to the educators themselves- over 85% of which are women whose work is widely viewed as a form of replacement maternal care (Chang-Kredl, 2015; Sergent 2004) rather than that of a teacher. Educators who do not fit with this dominant perception of the field as substitute mothering, particularly cis men and genderqueer people, often face homophobia, suspicion, and doubts about their competency as educators from families, coworkers, and centre directors (Sergent 2004). The framing of educators as nurturing, women caregivers for whom the role comes naturally ignores the complex reality of an educator's work (Chang-Kredl, 2015; Press, Wong, & Gibson 2015; Sergent 2004). If the work of an early childhood educator is viewed as instinctual caregiving rather than teaching, the educational benefits of early learning are devalued, entry to the field for those who do not fit this "maternal" image is discouraged, and the importance of professional accreditation is overlooked (Chang-Kredl, 2015; Press, Wong, & Gibson 2015; Sergent 2004).

Framework

This discourse analysis will use a post-modernist perspective to examine how the expected responsibilities and qualification requirements of early childhood educators are discussed in both the provincial licensing regulations and early learning frameworks. Particular attention will be given to the manner in which these documents disrupt or perpetuate dominant discourses regarding the role of educators and how this relates to pre-service teacher training and national goals for the field.

It is important to reflect on education policies as they have "a considerable impact on shaping what happens on a daily basis in schools and colleges, and the lived experiences of those who study and work in those establishments" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p.8). Policies can be viewed in different ways, including as a process involving three aspects: context, text, and consequence (Taylor et al. 1997, as cited in Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p.12). Context refers to examining the contributing factors for a policy, such as the social, political, and economic environment (Taylor et al. 1997, as cited in Bell & Stevenson, 2006). The text aspect involves examining the explicit and implicit values within the document text (Taylor et al. 1997, as cited in Bell & Stevenson, 2006). The third aspect, consequence, refers to considering the variety of ways in which a policy can be interpreted and enacted in practice (Taylor et al. 1997, as cited in Bell & Stevenson, 2006). In this paper, the focus will be on the second aspect Taylor et. al. (1997, as cited in Bell & Stevenson, 2006) describe, the document text itself. This approach to policy has been chosen as it attends to and questions the underlying values and influences present in the policy itself, unlike other approaches that reduce policy to highly simplified measures of effectiveness that readily accept "the values underpinning policy as largely unproblematic" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p.15) and "ignore or downplay the role of implicit meanings, subjective

perceptions, and tacit or taken-for-granted understandings within the policy process" (Rosen, 2009 as cited in Sykes, Schneider, & Plank, 2009, p.267).

When policy is considered as a process consisting of a complex interplay between larger structural factors, it is recognized "that values by definition are not neutral" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p.19). Dominant discourses are the narratives that shape social norms and expectations for actions, thoughts, and ideals that are presented as objective truths (Moss & Petrie, 2002). "[D]iscourses provide a parameter within which notions of truth and knowledge are formed" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p.18). From this perspective, it is acknowledged that "particular policies may either reinforce or undermine dominant cultural beliefs and ideologies, either bolstering or challenging the existing social order" (Rosen, 2009 as cited in Sykes, Schneider, & Plank, 2009, p.270) and that policy "'solutions' are…shaped decisively by those who are able to define the problem, and set the parameters within which solutions might be considered possible" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p.20).

In the field of early learning in Canada, dominant discourses in early childhood education include "particular understandings of learning, childhood, [and] evaluation" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.18). "How we think about children and childhood, the value we place upon them, finds its way into how we act towards them" (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p.98). Currently, these understandings are often rooted in modernity, which posits that there are universal, discoverable truths and that all social problems can be solved through the correct application of technical practice (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This can be seen in the human capital approach, which is the "assumption that there is a national economic benefit to be gained from education and from having an educated and skilled work force" (Bell and Stevenson, 2006, p.43). Bell and Stevenson (2006), note that the human capital approach can often be found within the language used to

justify educational policies. This human capital approach to education policy is magnified in the

field of early learning, where there is also an emphasis on providing child care spaces in order to

allow parents, particularly mothers, increased presence in the workforce in order to benefit the

economy (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This approach is based off of a "logic of exchange, a

financially calculable trade off-between inputs and outputs" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.43).

Early learning, from a human capital lens, is reduced only to "finding the most efficient methods

to achieve predetermined ends" (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.35), "ensuring today's labour force

through 'childcare for working parents' and preparing tomorrow's through investment in 'social

and human capital" (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.49). From this view, the quantity of early

learning spaces must take priority in order to allow parents' continued participation in the

workforce with "little consideration to the benefits of education other than economic utility"

(Bell and Stevenson, 2006, p.52).

Bell & Stevenson (2006) discuss the current pressure for educational institutions to

respond to market demands of productivity and performance and that often "educational values

are forfeited as the priority is to maximize added-value" (Bell & Stevenson, 2006, p.34). It can

be argued that this phenomenon is even more evident within the field of early learning, which in

Canada currently has a "minimum standards approach to regulation…heavily influenced by

marketplace orientations to service provision" (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p. 230).

Early learning is typically viewed as a "commodity to be purchased, which allows

responsibility for children to be assumed, in a partial, temporary way by those other than

parents." (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p.85). Early learning spaces are reduced to "producers selling

services (ie: care) to consumers (ie: working parents)" (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p.43). The

format and quality of early learning experiences children have is "very much constrained by the

amount of extra income that it permits families to earn" (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p.81). As such, quality spaces are often the least accessible to families with the lowest incomes (Howe & Prochner, 2012); families "frequently have few alternative care options" (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p.129). Regulated spaces are largely provided by "under-financed community groups or relatively small-time entrepreneurs" (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p.54), resulting in early learning experiences that are "usually too mediocre to be consistently educational or developmental" (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p.54).

Dahlberg and Moss (2005) examine how modernity and the corresponding service-provision approach to early learning influences discourses surrounding early childhood educators. With regard to the role of educators, they note that from a modernist perspective, educators are regarded merely as technicians who provide child care services for working parents; there is no acknowledgement that "student learning is variable and complex and the relationship between schooling and learning is mediated by a host of interacting factors" (Rosen, 2009 as cited in Sykes, Schneider, & Plank, 2009, p.269). When this narrative is embraced, minimal, if any, pre-service teacher training is thought to be required for staff members who work directly with children as they are only expected to comply with predetermined rules for safety and tasked with providing sufficient supervision to ensure significant harm does not come to children in their care. Expectations for the job do not extend beyond completing fundamental care tasks such as feeding, toileting, cleaning, and administering first aid as necessary; the child care worker is merely a "technician whose task is to follow clearly laid down procedures" (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p.66).

This perception of educator's work as simple and easy also relates to the framing of educators as "substitute mothers" (Cumming Logan, & Wong, 2020; Moss & Petrie, 2002).

Although other areas have seen "significant shifts in gender discourses, the feminisation of the care and education of young children has been resistant to change" (Cumming Logan, & Wong, 2020, p.100). These "gender, and especially maternalistic, discourses continue to uphold the construct of ECEC as women's work – that is, as work 'naturally' conducted by women but also done for the benefit of women" (Cumming Logan, & Wong, 2020, p.101). This belief that maternal care, and by extension, the work of early childhood educators, is an innate and natural ability rather than work contributes to the ongoing "devaluation of the skills and emotional labour necessary to care for other people's children and an emphasis on the intrinsic satisfaction of caregiving as a just reward for the work" (Halfon and Langford, 2015, p.137 as cited in Cumming Logan, & Wong, 2020, p.101).

When early learning is considered from a post-modernist perspective, the role of the educator is recognized as involving notable complexity (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005). When using this lens, the responsibilities of the early childhood educator change from a technician to reflective practitioner, researcher, co-constructor of knowledge, culture and identity. (Moss & Petrie, 2002, p.137). As such, early childhood educators are expected to apply pedagogical knowledge and critical reflection to their daily practice in order to provide rich learning provocations that support the learning and wellbeing of the young children in their class. Educators need to have the ability to respond with thoughtfulness and sensitivity to the unique needs of each child and family they work with. From this perspective, daily tasks are viewed as opportunities to support children in developing self care and socio-emotional skills, rather than a chore to complete as quickly as possible. Emphasis is placed on pedagogical documentation, professional development, and critical reflection in order to identify and disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about children and childhood (Moss & Petrie, 2002). "Such professional

respectability, with a basis in substantial educational training… is found in Scandinavian countries and in some other parts of continental Europe, as well as in Aotearoa/New Zealand" (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p. 231). In places where early childhood educators are recognized as teaching professionals "a far more sophisticated and complex understanding of children and children's programs" is demonstrated (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p. 231).

With consideration to these two perspectives- educators as child care technicians and educators as teaching professionals- the licensing regulations and early learning frameworks for Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, and Quebec will be reviewed. First, the explicit requirements for educator certification will be summarized. Next, these documents will be analyzed by examining the discourses related to expectations for the role of early childhood educators, for example the skills and knowledge they are expected to apply to practice, and whether these align with narratives of educators as technicians or teaching professionals. These documents will be reviewed with attention given to sections that refer to the classroom environment/materials and interactions between educators and children.

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Early Childhood Education Policies Pertaining to Educator Qualifications

Alberta

Alberta has three levels of certification for early childhood educators in the province. Level 1 (assistants) are required to complete a brief online course at no cost. Level 2 (full educator) can be achieved through either a one year Early Childhood Education certificate or any diploma program that the government considers an approved educational equivalency. Approved diploma programs include Therapeutic Recreation, Kinesiology, Community Rehabilitation Assistant, Education Assistant, or Social Work (Government of Alberta, 2021). Notably, a diploma or degree in early childhood education is not considered adequate for employment in these fields, indicating that the program content and resulting professional qualifications are not equivalent. Level 3 (supervisor) is awarded for completion of either a two year Early Childhood Education diploma or any degree that the Alberta government considers equivalent including a Bachelor of Social Work and a Bachelor of Education (Government of Alberta, 2021). Again, it is important to highlight that a Bachelor of Early Childhood Education does not qualify an educator to work as a social worker or elementary teacher in any province in Canada. Only a single level three staff member is required for an early learning centre and this person serves as the director of the program (Government of Alberta, 2021).

British Columbia

Similar to Alberta, British Columbia has three levels of early childhood educator certification; Assistants, Educators, and Infant-Toddler/Special Needs Educators. Assistants are required to have completed one class at a recognized post secondary institution that relates to

child development, guidance, or health and safety. Fully certified Educators are required to have completed a one year course through a recognized post secondary institution. To obtain Infant-Toddler or Special Needs Educator certification, a two year diploma course is required. Ratios of educators vary by type of program and ages of the children present, however at no time is more than one fully certified Educator or Infant-Toddler Educator required per class (Government of British Columbia, 2021).

Ontario

Early Childhood Educators in Ontario must be registered members of the province's College of Early Childhood Educators. To become a Registered Early Childhood Educator, an applicant must have completed an approved diploma or degree program in Early Childhood Education, Early Learning, Child Development, or Child, Youth and Family Sciences- Child Stream (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2021; Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017). One of every three staff members for infant and toddler age groups, and two out of three for the preschool age group, are required to be a Registered Early Childhood Educator (Government of Ontario, 2022)

Quebec

Early Childhood Educators in Quebec must hold either an Attestation d'études collégiales- techniques d'éducation à l'enfance combined with three years of experience working in a licensed child care setting, a Diplôme d'études collégiales- techniques d'éducation à l'enfance, or any Bachelor's degree with 30 credits of ECE related coursework. Two of every three child care staff members in an early learning program must be an early childhood

educator (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021).

Table 1:

Qualification Required to Work in Early Childhood Education Settings and Corresponding

Minimum Training Requirements

	Qualification Required to Work in an ECE Setting	**Minimum Training Requirement for Qualification**
Alberta	Level 1 - Assistant	Online Child Care Orientation Course *or* Approved Alberta high-school coursework *or* Approved early learning and child care coursework (3 credits)
British Columbia	Assistant	Approved college course in child development, guidance, or health and safety (3 credits)
Ontario	Child Care Staff Member	Child First Aid Course
Quebec	Childcare Staff Member	Child First Aid Course

Table 2:

Level of Qualification Required to be an Early Childhood Educator and Corresponding

Minimum Training Requirements

	Qualification Required to be an Early Childhood Educator	**Minimum Training Requirement for Qualification**
Alberta	Level 2- Early Childhood Educator	Approved one-year Early Learning and Child Care Certificate *or* Disability Studies Diploma *or* Educational Assistant Diploma *or* Kinesiology Diploma *or* Rehabilitation Assistant Diploma *or* Therapeutic Recreation Diploma *or* Social Work Diploma
British Columbia	Early Childhood Educator	Approved One-Year Early Learning and Child Care Certificate
Ontario	Registered Early Childhood Educator	Approved Diploma and Registration with the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators
Quebec	Early Childhood Educator	Approved One-Year Attestation d'études collégiales- techniques d'éducation à l'enfance AND Three years of work experience *or* Approved Diplôme d'études collégiales- techniques d'éducation à l'enfance

Table 3:

Required Staff to Child Ratio in Early Childhood Education Settings

	Infant	**Toddler**	**Preschool**
Alberta	Under 12 months **1:3** 12 to 19 months **1:4**	19 months to 3 years **1:6**	3 to under 4 years 1:8 4 years and older **1:10**
British Columbia	Under 36 months **1:4** At least one educator must have a diploma with infant-toddler specialization	Under 36 months **1:4** At least one educator must have a diploma with infant-toddler specialization	Over 30 months **1:8** No more than two children under 36 months
Ontario	Under 18 months **3:10**	18 months to under 30 months **1:5**	30 months to under 6 years **1:8**
Quebec	Under 18 months **1:5**	18 months to under 4 years **1:8**	4 years to 5 years **1:10**

Table 4:

Maximum Class Size

	Infant	Toddler	Preschool
Alberta	Under 12 months **6** 12 to 19 months **8**	19 months to 3 years **12**	3 to under 4 years **16** 4 years and older **20**
British Columbia	Under 36 months **12** At least one educator must have a diploma with infant-toddler specialization	Under 36 months **12** At least one educator must have a diploma with infant-toddler specialization	Over 30 months **25** No more than two children under 36 months
Ontario	Under 18 months **10**	18 months to under 30 months **15**	30 months to under 6 years **24**
Quebec	Under 18 months **15**	18 months to under 4 years **30**	4 years to 5 years **30**

Analysis

The view of early childhood educators as child care service providers rather than educational professionals is evident in the minimal preservice training requirements outlined in the regulations, as well as the overarching manner in which the role of the educator is discussed in these documents. In each of these provinces, a diploma grants the highest level of educator certification for those who work with directly with children five and under (Government of Alberta, 2021; Government of British Columbia, 2021; Gouvernment du Québec, 2021; Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017). By contrast, each province requires at minimum an undergraduate degree in order to become a teacher at the elementary level, working with children five and older.

The underlying goals within these policies seem to be founded in modernity and the human capital approach, with low levels of qualification requirements ensuring pre-service training for educators is quick and affordable thereby expediting entry into the workforce and ensuring maximum availability of child care spaces. This strategy reveals "a reluctance to rethink work with children, starting with asking basic questions about what type of worker we need for working with children…relying instead on incremental change within an unchanged framework" (p.145).

Addressing Canada's shortage of early learning spaces by minimizing the qualification process for educators or limiting the number of staff members that are required to be qualified educators drastically oversimplifies the complex issue of early learning and early childhood educator shortages. The chronic lack of qualified staff is much deeper than an insufficient number of qualified workers entering the field; low staff retention is largely associated with low wages, undesirable working conditions, high rates of burnout, and poor public perceptions of the

field. Policy changes that focus on such quick-fixes to space shortages without addressing the

underlying issues with the field have been notably ineffective; "[s]ystems that focus primarily on

rapid expansion of access tend to downgrade quality" (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p.102). This

simplified approach to the issue conveys a "belief in the ability to remedy persistent educational

problems with technocratic solutions" (Rosen, 2009 as cited in Sykes, Schneider, & Plank, 2009,

p.271) and fails to acknowledge education is "more than the production of human capital. It is

about values and beliefs, ethics, social justice and the very nature of society both now and in the

future" (Ball & Stevenson, 2006, p.56).

The Role of an Early Childhood Educator: Provincial Licensing Regulations and Early

Learning Frameworks

Alberta

The Alberta licensing regulations only briefly address concepts of early learning within

its licensing regulations, stating that it is required "that books, toys and play equipment that

support early learning, literacy development, physical activity and child development are

available to children" (Government of Alberta, 2021, p.25). Educators must ensure "all the

children are, at all times, under supervision that is adequate to ensure their safety, well-being and

development" (p.25). The educator is also required to use guidance methods that are

communicated to parents, are "reasonable in the circumstances" (Government of Alberta, 2021,

p.11), and are not abusive. There is a notable disconnect between the rich pedagogical theory

presented in Alberta's early learning framework *Flight* (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas,

2014) and the image of the field put forth by the licensing regulations, which does not outline

any expectations for educational programming (Government of Alberta, 2021). *Flight*

(Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014) emphasizes that "work as educators is more

than love, caring, and joy—it is work that is multifaceted, complex, and dynamic" (p.50) and

defines the role of the educator as "a colearner, a co-researcher, and a co-imaginer of

possibilities" (p.50). According to *Flight* (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014)

educators are expected to possess the skills and understanding of pedagogical theory required to

effectively "guide, scaffold, nurture, model, and facilitate children's learning" (p.53),

"demonstrate flexibility and responsiveness through careful listening and thoughtful observation"

(p.54), "advoc[ate] with and on behalf of families" (p.54), use "observation, investigation,

reading, and reflection to inform [their] curriculum decisions" (p.55), "create responsive

environments" (p.56), and draw on "knowledge of child development, theories of learning, and

curriculum values, principles, goals, and dispositions to learn" (p.56).

British Columbia

     In addition to expectations for appropriate guidance and supervision, the British

Columbia licensing regulations outlines a fairly comprehensive list of programming expectations

for early childhood educators to implement in their classrooms, which was introduced in 2021.

This includes requirements that ECE programs support children in developing motor skills,

health and safety habits, self help skills, creativity, problem solving, positive self concept, social

skills, and sense of belonging (Government of British Columbia, 2021). The British Columbia

Early Learning Framework (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019) explains that "[t]he

role of the educator has shifted away from being a transmitter of knowledge toward being a

collaborator who creates conditions so that children can invent, investigate, build theories, and

learn" (p.18); educators "need to challenge accepted mainstream knowledge to explore different

understandings and worldviews" (p.49), "examine their practices and expectations to consider

their biases and expectations and how these may perpetuate racism or prejudices" (p.18), "use

pedagogical narrations to critically reflect on children's play and to notice when play is unfair, or

when uneven relationships of power or injustices are enacted" (p.25) and "make intentional

choices inspired by the pedagogical approaches in the [BC Early Learning Framework]" (p.18).

Educators, according to the British Columbia Early Learning Framework (British Columbia

Ministry of Education, 2019), use a "pedagogy of listening" (p.48) to co-construct knowledge

through "living inquiries" (p.51), write "pedagogical narrations" (p.51) that challenge the

"dominance of child development theories formulated within the discipline of developmental psychology" (p. 11), demonstrate an understanding of "common worlds frameworks" (p.21) and "rhizomatic" learning (p.25), and draw on a variety of perspectives such as "Indigenous theories, socio-cultural theories, and post-foundational theories" (p.28).

Ontario

The province of Ontario has also updated their regulations to include program requirements that pertain to the educational aspects of early childhood centres, in alignment with the two provincial early learning frameworks. Section 46 of Ontario's Child Care and Early Years Act (Government of Ontario, 2022) outlines that early childhood educators' programming should "foster the children's exploration, play, and inquiry", "provide child-initiated and adult-supported experiences", "encourage the children to interact and communicate in a positive way and support their ability to self-regulate", and "create positive learning environments and experiences in which each child's learning and development will be supported and which is inclusive of all children, including children with individualized plans". In addition, Section 19 of Ontario's Child Care and Early Years Act (Government of Ontario, 2022) describes that educators should provide materials "of such type and design to allow the children to make choices and to encourage exploration". The Renewed Early Years and Child Care Policy Framework (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2017) describes educators as being responsible for cultivating "caring relationships and connections to create a sense of belonging" (p.25), supporting "children's healthy development and…their growing sense of self" (p.25), providing "environments and experiences to engage children in active, creative, and

meaningful exploration, play, and inquiry" (p.25), and fostering "communication and expression in all forms" (p.25). How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014) expands on this, describing how early childhood educators "participate as co-learners with families and children – learning with children, about children, and from children" (p.19) and engage in "pedagogical documentation" (p.21) "critical reflection" (p.20), and "collaborative inquiry" (p.20) in order to "test long-standing views and taken-for-granted practices and consider new approaches and ways of thinking about their work" (p.20).

Quebec

Chapter 1.2 of Quebec's licensing regulations outlines the provincial expectations for early learning programming, which include "fostering the children's feeling of emotional security", "promoting experiences initiated by the children and supported by the persons applying the educational program", and "encouraging exploration, curiosity, free play, and play initiated by the children" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021). The province's early learning framework notes that the quality of an early learning program is determined by the educators providing it, stating "[l]es spécialistes du domaine de la petite enfance s'entendent pour dire que la composante de la qualité la plus déterminante pour le développement des jeunes enfants est l'interaction du personnel éducateur ou des RSG avec ceux-ci" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019 p.30). Specifically, the early childhood educator is responsible for fostering a positive environment for young children by interacting with them in a manner that demonstrates a high level of sensitivity; the document explains that educators "crée un climat positif dans son groupe

à travers des relations respectueuses, une attitude enjouée et enthousiaste ainsi que des communications positives empreintes d'un intérêt authentique à l'égard de chacun" (Ministère de la Famille, 2019 p.30). The framework recognizes early childhood educators as the most important factor of quality in an early learning setting. It acknowledges that high quality early learning is dependant on having an educator who conveys respect and sensitivity during their interactions, in alignment with current literature on best practice in the field (Press, Wong, & Gibson 2015; Howe, Jacobs, Vukelic, Recchia, 2013; Norris 2010; Purcal & Fisher, 2007; Saracho & Spodek, 2007).

Analysis

Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia have recently included sections in their provincial licensing regulations which require early childhood programs to provide experiences that support children's learning and development. The changes to these documents brings each of these provinces more closely in line with their respective early learning frameworks and the overall goals of the federal government with regards to quality, however there are still some discrepancies.

The phrasing of Ontario's current licencing regulations is closely aligned with the province's early learning framework documents. Rather than offering prescriptive requirements for activities and goals, the document emphasizes the importance of positive and responsive relationships and respect for each child's unique preferences and needs (Government of Ontario, 2022). This vision of the role of early childhood educators is in alignment with the philosophies outlined in the provisional early learning frameworks, framing them as educational professionals with corresponding responsibilities.

Similarly, Quebec's licencing regulations and early learning framework include acknowledgement that the early childhood educator is responsible for creating positive experiences that support young children's wellbeing, learning, and development. The province mandates within its licencing regulations that educators must engage in "observation, planning and organization, educational action, as well as reflection and feedback" (section 6.2, Gouvernement du Québec, 2021) It also specifies aspects of child development that are to be incorporated into programming by the early childhood educator, for example "social and emotional development, which includes (a) self-confidence; (b) self-esteem; (c) autonomy; (d) identity building; (e) emotional and social skills" (Section 6.10, Gouvernement du Québec, 2021). The document also includes phrasing that conveys certain taken-for-granted assumptions about the children and educators who are attending these programs. Educators are required to provide programming that is "adapted to the age of the children" and includes the "development of the following 5 senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste" as well as "oral language" (Section 6.10, Gouvernement du Québec, 2021). It also frames methods of communication other than reading, writing, speaking, and graphic development as "prelinguistic language". This wording with narrow, prescriptive expectations for educational programming content erases and devalues other methods of communicating and interacting with the world. Quebec's Early Learning Framework is also heavily focused on assessing, documenting, and planning interventions for children's development based on rudimentary theories of child development. The other three frameworks however, encourage educators to use pedagogical documentation to critically reflect on dominant discourses and the potentially problematic biases found in these theories.

British Columbia's licensing regulations (Government of British Columbia, 2021) contain some aspects of modernity and the human capital approach present in the documents' phrasing. For example, the regulations include some required programming expectations that contrast the vision for early learning programming presented by the provincial framework. These include mandating that early learning programs provide "modelling of good language and listening skills" and "age-appropriate activities" (Government of British Columbia, 2021, Schedule G), phrasing that implies definitions of good listening, good language, and age appropriate activities are both self evident and objective.

When viewing these documents from a post-modernist perspective, questions arise about the underlying values and beliefs that certain phrases reflect, particularly in a country with an education system linked to genocide; "residential schooling was intended to root out and destroy Indigenous knowledge, languages, and relationships with the natural family to replace them with Eurocentric values, identities, and beliefs" (Battiste, 2013, p.56). Battiste (2013) describes the cognitive imperialism still present in the Canadian education system, noting that "a Eurocentric foundation is advanced to the exclusion of other knowledges and languages" (p.26).

With this in mind, are definitions of language and concepts of 'good listening' in these documents rooted in neurotypical and Eurocentric assumptions about communication? If there is 'good listening', what is considered 'bad listening'? Ontario's early learning framework *How Does Learning Happen?* (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014) resists limiting definitions of language, instead describing that early learning programs "foster communication and expression in all forms" (p.41) and support children in engaging "in meaningful interaction and communication with peers and adults" (p.43). Similarly, British Columbia's early learning framework discusses communication and literacy as children having opportunities to "use

multiple modes of expressive languages to communicate ideas, participate in relationships, and make meaning in their homes and communities" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019, p.66).

Another concept to examine is that of 'age appropriate activities', as discussed in the Quebec and British Columbia licencing regulations. Given that perceptions of children and childhood are highly varied, who determines what activities are considered appropriate for a given child's age? Are generalized assumptions about a child based on their age conducive to supporting their unique needs, abilities, and interests? Are 'activities' even beneficial for young children's learning, much less so essential that they must be a mandated component of programs? Notably, the British Columbia Early Learning Framework (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019) resists the concept of 'activities' entirely. Instead, the framework discusses concepts of "living inquiries, pathways, and reflective questions" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019, p.64) and notes that these "inquiries have no preset outcomes but emerge organically as children and adults think alongside one another" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019, p.103), which poses as a notable contradiction to the requirements outlined in the province's licencing regulations.

The addition of educational requirements to the licencing regulations can be viewed is an important step in reframing public perception of early childhood educators, disrupting dominant discourses that posit educators as child care service providers rather than as teaching professionals. However, the phrasing of such additions should still be carefully reflected on as they still have the potential to perpetuate dominant discourses about educators, children, and education that the provincial early frameworks simultaneously seek to disrupt. It should also be noted that British Columbia and Quebec have not raised the minimal provincial requirements for

educator qualifications to reflect these increased expectations for educator competencies. It is possible that given these mandated expectations for educational program content, future increases to duration and depth of preservice teacher training programs may be more readily justifiable to ensure educators have the professional knowledge to meet these requirements.

The licencing regulations of Alberta make little reference to expectations for early childhood educators beyond providing materials and supervising the children, leaving a very wide gap between the educational ideals for the field put forth in the provincial early learning framework and in-service expectations for practice. Alberta awards educator certification for diplomas in fields other than education, assistant certificates for a brief online course, and has no requirements for in-service professional development (Government of Alberta, 2021). As such, it is unclear how educators in the province are being equipped with sufficient expertise to fulfill the early learning goals outlined in the provincial framework. The framing of educators within these provincial licensing regulations perpetuates dominant discourses of educators as child care service providers rather than teachers. All that "is called for from… [the early childhood educator] is conformity to the prescriptions of the code and the terms of the contract through the application of correct technology" (Dahlberg & Moss, p.68); thoughtful engagement with pedagogical theories and critical reflection on practice is unnecessary. From such a perspective, in-depth preservice teacher training is not needed as staff members are not expected to apply knowledge of child development and early learning to their daily practice.

Table 5:

Concepts Included in Provincial Licensing Regulations and Early Learning Frameworks

	Alberta	**BC**	**Ontario**	**Quebec**
• Ensure adequate supervision	Licensing Regulations	Licensing Regulations	Licensing Regulations	Licensing Regulations
• Non-abusive guidance	Licensing Regulations	Licensing Regulations	Licensing Regulations	Licensing Regulations
• Provide materials	Licensing Regulations & Framework	Licensing Regulations & Framework	Licensing Regulations & Framework	Licensing Regulations & Framework
• Support children's wellbeing, learning, and development	Framework	Licensing Regulations & Framework	Licensing Regulations & Framework	Licensing Regulations & Framework
• Defined Image of the Child	Framework	Framework	Framework	Framework
• Engage in observation and reflective practice	Framework	Framework	Framework	Licensing Regulations & Framework *
• Co-construct curriculum based on children's interests	Framework	Framework	Framework	Framework
• Write pedagogical documentations	Framework	Framework	Framework	Framework*
• Demonstrate knowledge of child development and pedagogical theories	Framework	Framework	Framework	Framework*

* Note*: Although Quebec's Early Learning Framework encourages observation, documentation, and reflection, this process is used for assessing children's level of development relative to standardized norms and planning targeted interventions. The other three frameworks use these terms to refer to the process of critically reflecting on taken-for-granted assumptions about children and their development.

Discussion

The framing of educators as early learning specialists is more common in many European countries, with reflective practice, pedagogical documentation, and an awareness of pedagogical philosophies often being expected content for pre-service educator training (Jensen & Iannone, 2018). Although these concepts are identified as important aspects of early learning throughout the Provincial Early Learning Frameworks (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2019; Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014; Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014 & 2017; Québec Ministère de la Famille et des Aînés, 2007), the current landscape of early learning in Canada does not reflect this. In 2007, the Federal Government's advisory committee acknowledged that efforts to create more child care spaces would not be sustainable without addressing the nationwide issues of low wages, lack of benefits, lack of professional development training and advancement opportunities that hamper staff retention and make the field unattractive for new educators (Mahon, 2009). More recently, international studies such as those conducted by the OECD and UNICEF that examine quality and accessibility of early learning programs, state that Canada is consistently and significantly behind similarly affluent countries (Howe & Prochner, 2012).

Multiple studies indicate that although licensed centres across the country generally offer a physically safe environment for children the experiences provided are largely of insufficient quality to have any notable positive influence on children's development and lifelong wellbeing in the manner the Canadian government desires (Howe & Prochner, 2012). In order for early childhood programs to "enhance social, emotional, motor, and cognitive skills, educators in both centre-based and home based daycares must be better trained and equipped to deal with the many aspects of child development" (Howe & Prochner, 2012, p.303). Furthermore, no province in

Canada provides enough licensed spaces for all children in need of care (Varmuza, Perlman, & White, 2019; Mahon, 2009). Unlicensed child care is associated with poor quality care and is sometimes fatal to the children receiving care (Varmuza, Perlman, & White, 2019; Mahon, 2009). Unlicensed child care is disproportionately used by lower income families who are often unable to secure spaces in quality licensed centres due to lack of availability and financial constraints (Varmuza, Perlman, & White, 2019).

The recommended components of effective teacher training (Brunsek et al. 2020; Schacher, Gerde, Hatton-Bowers, 2019) are most closely reflected in the approach to teacher training offered by early learning diploma and degree programs in Canada that include a practicum component. ECE certificates that are provided after attending a limited number of training hours are not supported as effective by literature on this topic and are not linked to high program quality as described by the national goals for early learning in Canada. Despite the ineffectiveness of such formats of program delivery, short term pre-service teacher programs that provide only an rudimentary level of training still fulfil the vast majority of educational requirements outlined in the provincial licensing regulations for early childhood educators across the country. By failing to mandate increases to post secondary program duration and complexity of content for early childhood educators, Canada continues to actively impede professional growth within the field.

Recommendations

Given that the majority of early childhood educator pre-service training requirements and early learning program content in Canada does not currently align with recommendations for best practice provided by literature in the field, it is recommended that updates are made to each

of the provincial child care licensing regulations in order to mandate improvements to early

childhood educator teacher training programs.

Prior short-term initiatives aimed at increasing quality, staff recruitment, and staff

retention introduced over the past decades have been insufficient in creating lasting changes in

the field (Howe & Prochner, 2012). Looking internationally, changes that have focused on

shifting away from fragmented systems of service provision towards "more coherent and

coordinated systems that still understand, appreciate, and support the importance of diversity and

flexibility at the local level" have seen greater transformative success (Howe & Prochner, 2012,

p. 240).

Finland, Norway, and Sweden consistently receive top rankings in global comparisons for

the quality and accessibility of early childhood education (Boyd, 2020; Harju-Luukkainen,

Kangas, & Garvis, 2022). In these countries, early childhood education is available to all young

children through the public system and there have been several updates to policies over the years

to ensure that these ECE programs reflect international research for best practice in the field

(Boyd, 2020). Each of the Nordic countries requires early childhood educators to have at a

specialized university degree that includes a practicum component of seventy five days or more

(Boyd, 2020). In Finland, early childhood educators will be required to have a master's degree

by 2030 (Boyd, 2020). Teacher training programs in the Nordic countries emphasize pedagogical

theories including the co-construction of knowledge, planning and documentation; the

importance of sensitivity in interactions, the careful preparation of classroom environments, and

supporting play-based learning are key features of program content. (Boyd, 2020; Harju-
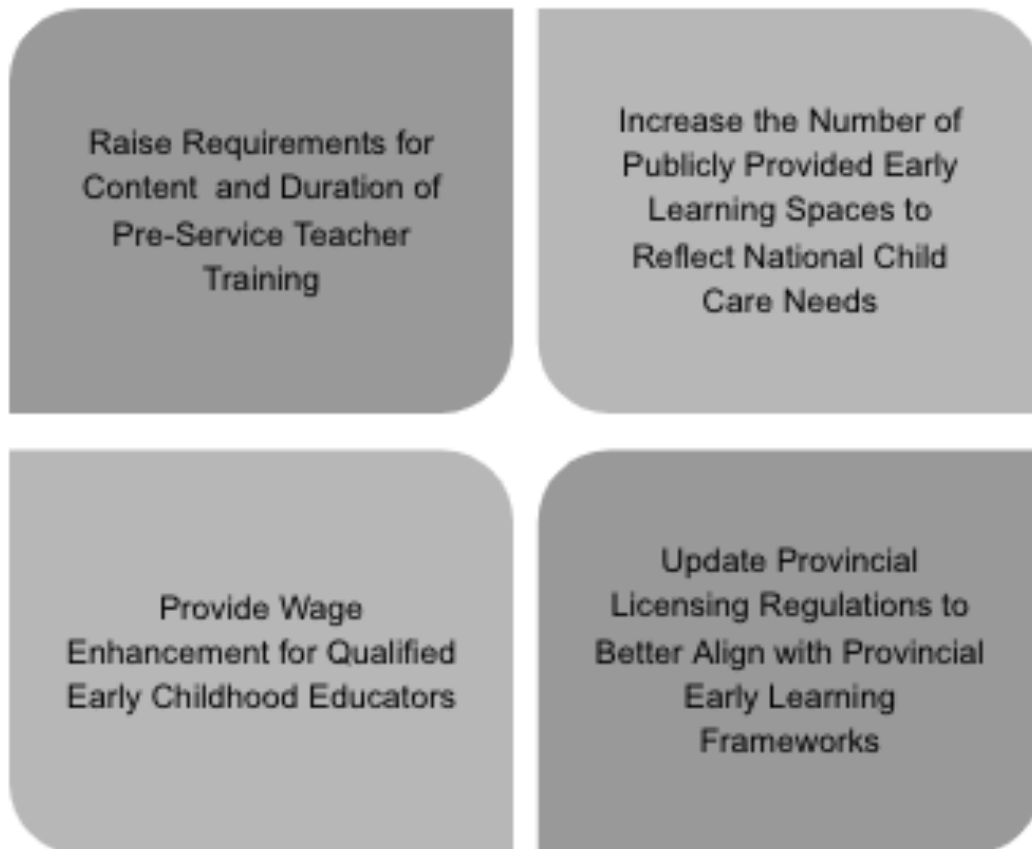
Luukkainen, Kangas, & Garvis, 2022).

Further attempts at change in Canada may be more successful if they adopt an approach that addresses the underlying foundations for the field as Finland, Norway, and Sweden have done. This would require changing the fragmented, market-based system of early learning in Canada by increasing the number of early learning spaces provided by the public education system to better reflect the high level of need for early learning spaces across the country.

I also recommend that provincial licensing regulations are updated to include requirements for increased duration and improved content of early childhood educator teacher training programs, modelled after those in Finland, Sweden, and Norway. Increases to teaching training requirements is a foundational part of reframing of educators as teaching professionals rather than service providers. The existence of a well written provincial early learning framework is insufficient to improving quality; these frameworks must be accompanied by early childhood educators who received an sufficient length and depth of pre-service training that they are empowered to understand and apply the concepts of their respective early learning frameworks in their daily practice (Howe & Prochner, 2012). Pre-service teacher training content should focus on child development, educator responsiveness/sensitivity to children's emotional expression, reflective practice, and coaching/practicum experiences as these are the areas identified as most impactful to early learning program quality, and by extension the goals identified in the national and provincial early learning frameworks. Such program content would support educators in developing the professional knowledge necessary to effectively implement the pedagogical theories discussed in the early learning frameworks in order to foster the learning and development of the young children they work with.

Figure 4:

Recommendations for Improvements to Early Learning in Canada in Order to Better Reflect

National Goals for the Field

Raise Requirements for Content and Duration of Pre-Service Teacher Training

Increase the Number of Publicly Provided Early Learning Spaces to Reflect National Child Care Needs

Provide Wage Enhancement for Qualified Early Childhood Educators

Update Provincial Licensing Regulations to Better Align with Provincial Early Learning Frameworks

In addition to increases in preservice teacher training requirements, the provincial licensing regulations should also include more detailed reference to their respective early learning frameworks. The provincial early learning frameworks are more reflective of current best practice in the field, and requiring educators to apply that pedagogical knowledge to their practice could be extremely beneficial to creating change within the field.

Finally, given that literature has identified increases to educator wages is an important factor for both educator retention as well as changing the dominant discourses of educators as teaching professionals rather than substitute mothers or babysitters, increased pay that is reflective of these increased qualification requirements provided through wage enhancement programs would also benefit the achievement of national goals for the field.

Conclusion

In order for early learning to support children's development and create a foundation for lifelong wellbeing as desired by the Provincial and Federal governments, the experiences children have must be of sufficient quality. An educator's ability to apply knowledge of child development and pedagogy with high levels of sensitivity is crucial for achieving this level of quality, which is largely influenced by their preservice training. Ontario's requirement that educators hold at least a diploma in the field and be members of the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators, combined with updates to provincial licensing regulations that require educational programming in early learning centres, shows strong potential to serve as a model for other provinces going forwards. Although British Columbia and Quebec have also recently incorporated educational programming requirements into their provincial licensing regulations, these expectations are unlikely to be effectively implemented in practice unless also accompanied by preservice teacher training of sufficient duration and depth of content to adequately prepare educators. As such, at this time there is little indication that the goals outlined for early learning by the Provincial and Federal governments can be achieved on a national level without significant changes to foundational aspects of the field, particularly requirements to preservice teacher training requirements and educational expectations for early learning programming.

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