EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES WITH AND PERSPECTIVES OF
THE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE SUPPLEMENT IN THE PROVINCE OF
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

by

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ABSTRACT

Early Childhood Educators' Experiences with and Perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador

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Master of Arts in the Program of Early Childhood Studies
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This major research paper presents findings from a qualitative study with eight early childhood educators working in licensed childcare settings in St. John's Newfoundland and Labrador. The study used the political economy of care and feminist ethics of care theory to interpret participants' experiences with and perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Supplement in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Based on participants' views, this study's primary findings suggest that participants perceived the ELCC Supplement as an incentive or bonus to top off the low wages of an early childhood educator. Second, participants articulated a shared appreciation of some features of the ELCC Supplement. At the same time, they asserted several dislikes. As we dug deeper, participants reported a significant number of abuses in the distribution of the ELCC Supplement. Finally, the participants shared their thoughts on recommendations for changes to be made to the ELCC Supplement.

Key words: Early learning and child care supplement, early childhood educator, early childhood education and care, childcare, care, carework, political economy of care, feminist ethics of care

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DEDICATION

To the early childhood educators of Newfoundland and Labrador,

I dedicate this major research project to all the early childhood educators (ECEs) in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador who have ever felt devalued because of the work you do, your gender, or race. I thank you for taking a profound responsibility for caring for our youngest children and their futures. I am eternally grateful for your dedication to the early childhood education and care sector. I hope that this MRP, in some way, reinforces the value of what you do, day-in and day-out. I am humbled to know some of you, and I am incredibly grateful to work alongside you in advocating for our worth. I hope this project helps to empower you to use your voice and share your experiences working in the early childhood education and care profession - it can and will make a difference.

I hope that this research reaches the ears of those who need to hear it and begins to identify us as valuable professionals who greatly impact the lives of children today, tomorrow and every day. We are long overdue for a universally accessible, publicly funded, high-quality, inclusive early childhood education and care system in Newfoundland and Labrador, and in Canada. There is a place for us in childcare advocacy, but we must realize it first and support one another. There is power in our voices because we know, better than anyone, that children can flourish in quality childcare programs because we have seen it in the children we care for.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melissa Russell".

Melissa Russell (she/her), RECE

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Chapter One - Introduction

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador is facing significant challenges with the recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood educators (ECEs). According to Neil (2015), the gender pay gap in Newfoundland and Labrador between the average male wages, and average female wages is the highest in Canada, with women earning 66% percent of male salaries. Women in female-dominated professions, particularly childcare and home support workers earn the lowest wages, where 96.2% of staff are women, make \$402.65, less than half the average salary of \$966.33 (Neil, 2015). Statistics show that one in five early childhood educators choose to leave the childcare sector because of the low wages and the underrecognition of their working conditions and education credentials (Bryant, 2018). In response to this problem, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (2017) introduced the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Supplement. The ELCC Supplement aims to increase the number of qualified ECEs in regulated childcare settings through incremental financial incentives. According to the *Early Childhood Education Report* by the Atkinson Centre (2017), early childhood educators in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador earn 69% of a teacher's salary. Anecdotally, many ECEs have claimed that the amount of additional funding granted to early childhood educators based on their level of certification in the ELCC Supplement does not adequately reflect their educational qualifications. To explore this claim, this study modestly contributes to critical dialogue around one central research question: what are early childhood educators' experiences with and perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador?

According to the provincial government's ten-year childcare strategy, *Caring For Our Future* (2013) early childhood educators reported that, "wages, benefits, and working conditions

affect both the recruitment and retention of qualified ECEs. There was general consensus that the educational level of ECEs is strongly linked to quality services, with higher levels of education being more desirable” (p. 4). In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, certified ECEs, administrators, and monitors working in regulated childcare settings are eligible for the ELCC Supplement that increases their pay on a sliding scale model based on their level of educational qualifications. There has been no formal documentation regarding ECEs’ experiences with the ELCC Supplement. This qualitative study seeks to contribute to understanding the challenges of the ELCC Supplement as a means of addressing recruitment and retention issues in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with eight St. John's Newfoundlanders, to gather early childhood educators' experiences with and perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement. A social constructivist worldview was used as a research approach for this project. When a researcher applies a social constructivist approach in research, they gather the meaning of a phenomenon from the participant's worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Charma (2017), “this method aids in explicating research participants' implicit meanings and actions along with those buried in policies and organizational texts” (p. 39).

The motivation behind this study is my desire and ambition to better understand the political and economic infrastructures that are in place in St. John’s Newfoundland that contribute to early childhood educators’ low pay and poor working conditions. Early childhood educators' voices and experiences are far too often marginalized in the dominant society perpetuated by myths and misconceptions regarding what goes on in a childcare centre. Many hold preconceived notions that early childhood educators are glorified babysitters because the training is perceived to be easy, not requiring specific skills or education. Therefore, being an

ECE is seen as a job that anybody can do. However, many early childhood educators hold two-year college diplomas and university bachelor's degrees to work in regulated childcare settings, and the skills required to do this work well are many.

This study aims to give voice and space to early childhood educators to share their experiences and lived realities with the ELCC Supplement. The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of the ELCC Supplement on the lives of ECEs in Newfoundland and Labrador. This study will modestly contribute to a growing body of literature seeking to redress the recruitment and retention issues in the early childhood education and care profession.

Context

It is a pivotal time for advocates, policymakers, researchers, theorists, and practitioners in the early childhood education and care sector with the economic crisis looming from the COVID-19 pandemic. Although childcare centres are closed, the overlooked childcare crisis in Canada is finally becoming visible to the public eye. Scholars suggest that building a national childcare system in Canada will be the foundation for parents to return to work and thus for economic and social recovery (Bezanson, Bevan, & Lysack, 2020). Since 1989 the Association for Early Childhood Educators for Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL) has been collectively representing the issues of qualified early childhood educators by advocating for improved wages and working conditions (AECENL, 2015). When licensed childcare centres are responsible for balancing staff salaries and operating expenses, staff wages are reported to be the first item cut when financial problems arise (Belec, 2014; Ministry of Education 2017). Hence, increased government funding for childcare programs has positive outcomes on ECE wages and recognition for their education qualifications (Belec, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2017). However, addressing the issue of low wages in the early childhood education sector with

provincial government wage enhancements has been identified as a short-term, "Band-Aid" solution (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016).

Friendly (2010) suggests that there is a growing discussion between policymakers, researchers, and educators to "join-up" early childhood education with the public school system. It is claimed that this would improve the quality of children's programs and standardize and regulate early childhood educators' qualifications, pay and status. Researchers suggest it is time to stop making care secondary to and not as important as education and reassert its worth in practice and policy by making care and education synonymous (Ailwood, 2017; Langford, Richardson, Albanese, Bezanson, Prentice, & White, 2017). If childcare continues to remain an afterthought in government policy and legislation, this will be devastating for children, families, and educators in the post-COVID-19 economic recovery in Canada. Notably, political, and ethical decisions are made for the childcare sector without consultation with early childhood educators. Hence, this contributes to the oppression and marginalization of women's voices in the social policy making. These workforce sector issues exist because there is no public funding for early childhood education and care, and childcare is still perceived as women's work, which is largely undervalued in society (Moss, 2006; Fitz Gibbon, 2002).

Provincial ECE Education Qualifications

In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, there are five levels (Trainee Level, Level I, Level II, Level III, and Level IV) of certification to work as an administrator, early childhood educator, or monitor in a regulated child care service or agency. Each level requires different training and education to obtain early childhood education certification with the Association for Early Childhood Educators for Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL). The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Education and Early Childhood

Development (2017), states the following requirements to work in regulated group childcare settings:

i. **Trainee Level**

An applicant may be granted trainee level certification to be a Caregiver in a child care centre where the applicant has successfully completed an orientation course and provides proof of registration at a post-secondary institution in early childhood education approved by the Minister.

Trainee certification to be a Caregiver in a family child care service may be granted where the applicant has successfully completed the associated orientation course.

Entry level certification issued under the Child Care Services Act will be considered to be trainee certification on the coming into force of the Child Care Regulations.

ii. **Level I**

Level I certification may be granted where an applicant holds a diploma from a postsecondary institution in a one year program in early childhood education approved by the Minister and, where assessed to be required, successfully completed the applicable orientation course(s).

iii. **Level II**

Level I certification may be granted where an applicant holds a diploma from a postsecondary institution in a two year program in early childhood education approved by the Minister and, where assessed to be required, successfully completed the applicable orientation course(s).

iv. **Level III**

Level III certification may be granted where an applicant holds a diploma from a postsecondary institution in a three year program in early childhood education approved by the Minister and, where assessed to be required, successfully completed an orientation course.

Level III certification may also be granted where an applicant holds a diploma from a post-secondary institution in a two year program in early childhood education approved by the Minister and a one year post-diploma specialization. The applicant may also be required to complete an orientation course where assessed to be required.

Level III certification may also be granted where an applicant holds a degree from a university approved by the Minister and a diploma from a post-secondary institution in a one year program in early childhood education approved by the Minister. The applicant may also be required to complete an orientation course where assessed to be required.

Level III certification classification may be granted where an applicant holds a degree in Education from a university approved by the Minister and has successfully completed the applicable orientation course(s). This level will be limited to the school age range classification only.

v. **Level IV**

Level IV certification may be granted where an applicant holds a degree in early childhood education from a university approved by the Minister.

Level IV certification may also be granted where an applicant holds a degree from a university approved by the Minister and a diploma from a post-secondary institution in a two year program in early childhood education approved by the Minister. (p. 5-7)

According to Taylor (2020), the AECENL certification database represents 5,200 people, including everyone from the database's creation in the year 2000. Currently, early childhood educators holding valid certification represent 1,783 people (34%). The breakdown for each level of qualification is as follows: Entry/Trainee Level (29%), Level I (11%), Level II (49%), Level III (5%), and Level IV (6%). Individuals holding expired certification represent 3,417 people (66%). The breakdown of the expired level of qualifications is as follows: Entry/Trainee Level (64%), Level I (6%), Level II (21%), Level III (6%), and Level IV (3%) (S. Taylor, personal communication, April 24, 2020). Ultimately, the database shows that there has been a significant drop in people holding entry/trainee levels and an increased number of individuals holding a higher level of qualifications with Level I and Level II early childhood education certifications. However, there has been no remarkable changes with the percentage of individuals obtaining Level III and Level IV early childhood education certification. The database might indicate that financial incentives from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, such as the ELCC Supplement and the Early Childhood Education Graduate Bursary Program, encourage individuals working in the childcare sector to go back to school to increase their level of certification. This also might indicate that the ELCC Supplement is not a driving factor for early childhood educators to obtain higher education towards a Level III or Level IV early childhood

education qualification. This research study will be critical for determining how the educators themselves perceive the ELCC Supplement. The amount granted to individuals with the ELCC Supplement, is as follows:

The full annual Supplement amounts (effective April 1st, 2018) are:

Position	Level	Full Annual Supplement Amounts Effective April 1 st , 2018
Early Childhood Educator (Child Care Centre) and Early Childhood Educator (Family Child Care)	One	\$ 11,600.00
	Two	\$ 13,100.00
	Three	\$ 13,600.00
	Four	\$ 14,100.00
Administrator (Child Care Centre) and Monitor (Family Child Care Agency)	Two	\$ 14,600.00
	Three	\$ 15,100.00
	Four	\$ 15,600.00

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017, p. 4).

Theoretical Framework

To gain better insight into this study's research focus, questions and findings, political economy of care (PEC) and feminist ethics of care (FEC) theories were used as a theoretical framework. The PEC and FEC theories were applied to better understand the political infrastructures that are currently in place that suppress professional pay and decent working conditions for a highly feminized, early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce in Canada. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) and many others, a feminist perspective examines policy issues that relate to women's social justice and stands for change, with the aim of improving women's lives. The political economy of care theory takes on a feminist perspective because it is predominately concerned with women's unpaid (as mothers) and paid work (as early childhood educators) in a private economic sphere. Traditionally, childcare in Canada has been a private family responsibility that resulted in decades of Canadian families struggling to find quality, accessible, and affordable ECEC. In Newfoundland and Labrador,

childcare is a private profitable market, with 64% percent of childcare centres operating in for-profit facilities (Atkinson Centre, 2017). Having said this, the provincial government of Newfoundland Labrador has introduced public incentives such as the Child Care Services Subsidy Program, Operating Grant Program, and the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement. However, the distribution of staff wages and benefits is still treated as a private responsibility for individual childcare centres. Many childcare centres in Newfoundland and Labrador cannot access additional funds for staff wages and benefits unless they increase parent fees (Belec, 2014). Thus, childcare and carework are not conceptualized as a collective, social responsibility, but rather are considered private concerns. Inevitably, this reinforces the notion that childcare and carework has little value in an economic system.

The Political Economy of Care and Feminist Ethics of Care

The political economy of care is an approach that describes the place of care and carework in a society and assesses to what degree carework is valued in relation to social and economic infrastructure, organization and social reproduction (Mahon & Robinson, 2011).

Brugère et al. (2019) explain that the ethics of care involves:

“caring about” and as “caring for,” deconstructs the possibility of a collective master narrative involving each and every individual in an impersonal and indiscriminate way.

The assertion of our freedoms and of a spirit of autonomy must be reassessed in the analysis of forms of vulnerability and the injustice they entail in an interdependent world” (41). (p. 3)

Within this larger global context, Mahon and Robinson (2011) suggest that:

Unlike a women’s rights approach, a critical care ethics approach can help us to understand *why* women are economically and physically exploited and subject to

violence through elucidating the connections between femininity and subservience, on the one hand, and masculinity and autonomy, on the other. (p. 144)

Mahon and Robinson (2011) argue that “care” has two relative meanings: first, care can refer to, “a set of activities and a form of labour focused on social reproduction including elder care, childcare, as well as other forms of household and domestic work;” and second, care can be understood, “as the basis of a system of ethics in an economy” (p. 1). However, it is important to note that not all care is caring or good. From a feminist ethics of care perspective, Brugère et al. (2019) state that “some forms of caring do not specifically pertain to ethics and can be characterized in a neoliberal and undemocratic fashion” (p. 68).

The practice of good caring requires constant critical, ethical, and political decision-making in every interaction concerned with childcare and thus between everyone at the practice, policy, and political level (Langford & White, 2019). At the practice level, Monchinski (2010) comments that “to fail to care for oneself impairs one's capacity to function as a fully responsible moral agent” (p. 98). This implies that carework is far more complex than what we imagine it to be. For an early childhood educator to be ethically caring, they must be able to care for themselves by recognizing and identifying when their own needs need to be met by others at a policy level so they can adequately care for others. Carework requires high levels of emotional intelligence that involve listening, engaging with, and building relations to understand better what care needs are best suited for a care receiver's wellbeing. Langford and White (2019) draw on Nodding (2010) three stages of caring for others: (1) recognizing, (2) giving, and (3) receiving, which are part of a continuous process, and always in the making.

At the policy and political levels, Mahon and Robinson (2011) argue that care and care relations are shaped by power relations that vary through time, space, and context. Similarly,

Tronto (2015) notes that power and politics is at the core of care, stating that: “Care is always infused with power. And this makes care deeply political” (p. 9). Zembylas, Bozalek and Shefer (2014) argue that “privileged irresponsibility means that the needs of the other are ignored or denied. This is particularly so when it comes to the actual hands-on work of caregiving” (p. 206). Zembylas, Bozalek and Shefer (2014) use Tronto’s (2013) notion of privileged irresponsibility which can describe the nature of childcare services, “where those receiving caring services for their needs do not acknowledge that they are dependent on these services in order to live well in the world” (p. 205). In Canada, when the childcare crisis became visible to the public eye during the COVID-19 pandemic, this was an example of privileged irresponsibility when there was a realization that our economy cannot function well without childcare with many families taking on dual roles, caring for their children and working full-time from home.

The political economy of care (PEC) and the feminist ethics of care (FEC) theories offer new possibilities for understanding and positioning carework and the political and economic underpinnings of providing care in democratic societies. For this study, the PEC and FEC will be integral when examining research findings that must situate within the context of a neoliberal market-driven economy.

Care in a Neoliberal Market-Driven Economy

A PEC analysis provides insights into how a neoliberal market economy treats care as a commodity to be bought and sold. The payment of care and care workers' wages fall under monetization and commodification. The monetization of care refers to care workers’ wages provided through public funds. In contrast, under commodification, care services are accessed through the market. The commodification of care services can be found in private/ non-government childcare facilities. Neoliberalism, as a policy is marked by a shift from a strong,

welfare state to a political agenda focused on enhancing economic efficiency, competitiveness, and facilitating the market provision of goods and services (Larner, 2000, p. 6-7). According to McGrane (2014), the province of Newfoundland and Labrador represents a neoliberal childcare model. The province ranked last for having the most generous and advanced early childhood education and care system in Canada (McGrane, 2014). Brugère, Chrétien, Cooper-Hadjian and Heffernan (2019) suggest that in a neoliberal world, two circuits of care coexist, first, “an informal circuit in which care is handled internally as a private means to preserve in social life, generally to the disadvantage of women” (p. 72). And secondly, care for paid professions like ECEs in neoliberal world can be understood as “an external circuit in which care is externalized or carried out by often underpaid outside professionals” (p. 72). Yeates (2005) argues that, “Social relations of inequality and labour exploitation among women are key features of this re-organized division of social reproductive labour” (p. 232). While considering the PEC and FEC theory, I seek to examine how the ELCC Supplement as a macro-policy program plays out in the day-to-day work experiences of early childhood educators in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

This chapter aims to provide a summary of the key concepts, theories, and findings from the literature that pertains to this research area. This paper reviews literature on the care and education divide, childcare work as a site of economic exploitation, and on recruitment and retention in ECEC. The literature explored aligns well with the key features described in both the political economy of care and feminist ethics of care theories. This chapter aims to answer the following questions: 1) Why is the work of an early childhood educator devalued? 2) What makes caring labour a site of economic exploitation for early childhood educators? And 3) What are the recruitment and retention issues in ECEC in Canada and specifically in Newfoundland and Labrador? For this paper, exploitation refers to the unequal distribution of early childhood educators' wages that stem from gender and class discrimination and inequities based on low regard for carework (Andrew & Newman, 2012).

The Care and Education Divide

Due to Canadian federalism, national and regional policies on care and education have developed differently, with the responsibility of diverse services falling under different ministries (Bennett, 2003). For example, in some jurisdictions, like in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, education (primary to post-secondary) falls under the Department of Education, while early childhood education and care was formerly the responsibility of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. Despite these differences and divisions, care scholars argue that care and education in ECEC must go hand-in-hand, and that the divide between the two must be bridged (Van Laere, Peeters, Vanderbroeck, 2012; Ackerman, 2006, Broströ, 2006).

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador is taking comprehensive steps to address the division between care and education services. According to the Atkinson Centre (2014), in

September 2014 regulated childcare services and family resources centres in Newfoundland and Labrador went from the responsibility of the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services to fall under the newly developed Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. However, there remains a significant pay gap between an early childhood educator's salary and a teacher's salary in the province (Atkinson Centre, 2017). Shdaimah, Palley and Miller (2018) argue that “in the conversation about childcare and early education policy the voices of providers are often absent (van Laere and Vandebroek 2017), despite the crucial importance of their perspectives (Shulman and Blank 2005)” (p. 1).

According to Boyd (2013), the rate of pay for early childhood educators does not always correspond to objective criteria such as years of experience, training, or educational qualifications. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (2017) ELCC Supplement illustrates no significant pay difference between ECEs Level (I, II, III, IV) of certification and educational backgrounds. For example, an educator obtaining a Level-IV university degree is only compensated one-thousand dollars more a year than a Level-II educator with a community college diploma in the ELCC Supplement (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2017, p. 4). There is a large and ongoing gap between childcare workers and school teachers' wages, with lower pay and status for early childhood educators compared to primary school teachers (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2006).

Langford, Prentice, Richardson and Albanese (2017) note that part of the problem lies in the fact that the carework done by early childhood educators is perceived to be part of the private sphere and a private responsibility, while education in Canada is part of the public sector and viewed as a more public responsibility. They explain that ECEs’ “professional status is problematic because it is discursively constructed at the intersection of gender and class and

predominantly located within the private sector" (p. 348). Tronto (2013) describes that in the earlier part of the 20th century "politics was something that happened in public, care was something that happened in private" (p. 1). This public and private divide has relegated women primarily to the private sphere of paid and unpaid carework (Armstrong & Armstrong, 2005). Advocates, scholars and researchers propose that in order to address this public and private divide, ECEC must be seen as a public responsibility, a public system, with public funding (Langford, Richardson, Albanese, Bezanson, Prentice, & White, 2017).

Laere, Peeters and Vandenbroeck (2012) argue that there is a hierarchy between education and care, with education squarely (and unfairly) valued ahead of care. As a result, there is an increasing desire for 'schoolification,' to prepare children for compulsory school in the early childhood years. Laere, Peeters, and Vandenbroeck (2012) suggest that, "When holistic education is embodied in practitioners with complementary tasks, it is of crucial importance to make sure that the caring and learning functions are equally valued" (p. 534).

In Canada, increased professionalization has both expanded and limited opportunities for ECEC as a profession (Langford, 2010; Pacini Ketchabaw & Pence, 2006). That is, researchers suggest that the movement towards professionalization of early education and care has resulted in increased education, training and skills of the workforce; however, the problems of low wages, few if any benefits, and poor working conditions persist (Johnson, 2019; Moss, 2010). Today, there is fear that the caring roles of an ECEC will be neglected because of professional development initiatives that are solely based on professionalizing the learning roles (Barkham, 2008). Broström (2006) argues that schoolifying the early years risks educational practices becoming merely places for 'adjustment' instead of places where educators, children and parents can participate in democratic practices.

In one Canadian province, the professional association for early childhood educators is working to bridge the divide between the childcare and education sector. The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario Professional Pay and Decent Work Campaign is aimed at closing the professionalization gap in ECEC (AECEO, n.d.). The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (n.d.) Professional Pay and Decent Work Campaign vision of decent work for ECEs is as follows:

decent wages; full-time, stable jobs; health benefits and pension coverage no matter where they work in the sector; working conditions that support staff to provide high quality programs including safe and healthy facilities, paid preparation time, lunch breaks and access to on-going training and professional learning opportunities. (A Shared Vision of Decent Work, para. 3)

As part of the campaign, the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (2016) completed a study with Ontario ECEs to gather their perspectives on decent work in the ELCC environment. A designated early childhood educator (DECE) working in a full-day kindergarten (FDK) program which is part of the education system reported that, “We will not be recognized as professionals if ECEs in FDK and child care continue to be against one another, we need to come together as a united workforce.” (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016, p. 4).

Other studies have found that ECEs are highly concerned about differences in wages between childcare and education sectors. One of the only pan Canadian studies that gathered data on the ECEC workforce found that 89.6% of ECE respondents held a post-secondary early childhood education related credential, 11% of which received their credentials from a university program (Flanagan, Beach, Varmuza, & Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2013).

The study also found that the average hourly median wage for ECEs in Canada is \$16.50 and 25% of program staff earn below \$14.00 an hour (Flanagan, Beach, Varmuza, & Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2013). Research completed with post-secondary students studying early childhood education found that many students choose to change careers, drop-out of their two-year diploma, or continue their education to leave the childcare sector. The students reported that low wages and high demands of the job are the reason for these choices. Many students' respondents reported that they feel should be compensated well after the completion of their post-secondary studies (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2017; Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2016).

Summarizing this section, the divide between care and education is evident in the value accorded to and pay gap between early childhood educators' wages and a school teacher's wages. Regardless of education obtained or years of experience an ECE holds the literature reinforces that the work and education of an early childhood educator is devalued. Additionally, despite the increasing professionalization of the ECE workforce and the requirement for more education and professional development hours, there has been little change in the wages, benefits, or working conditions of ECEs.

ECEC as a Site for Exploitation

ECEC as Gendered. The first reason ECEC is a site for exploitation has to do with the way carework is perceived as women's work. PEC care scholars argue that social reproduction labour is a site of exploitation for women and ethics of care scholars argue that the care ethics can help us to uncover and understand the moral worth of this labour (Andrew & Newman, 2012; Mahon & Robinson, 2011; Yeates, 2005). The exploitation of early childhood educators is a result of gendered and classed discourses and inequities around caring labour (Andrew &

Newman, 2012). Carework in society, especially caring for young children, is significantly undervalued, carrying the assumption that caring is somehow “women’s work” (Tronto, 1998). Because care appears “natural” for women in the domestic sphere, it is not readily understood as public and/or political matter (Tronto, 2013). We do not see care as political because of the traditional association between women and carework or more specifically the framing of care as “women’s morality” (Tronto, 1998). The reality of poor pay and working conditions in ECEC is intricately linked to the assumptions that care is natural for predominately feminized workforce, unskilled, and not valuable (Bennett, 2006).

ECEC Precarious Employment Conditions. The second reason ECEC is a site of exploitation is due to the precarious employment conditions with long hour workdays, limited breaks, lack of planning time and healthcare benefits. Halfon and Langford (2015) suggest that educators entering the ECEC sector are blinded by the realities of the precarious employment that exist. Anving and Eldén (2016) define the conditions of precarious care labour as, “poorly paid and incapable of sustaining a household” and “precarious work is a gendered phenomenon” (p. 3). Some studies found that regardless of poor working conditions, educational qualifications and years of experience, early childhood educators report high job satisfaction and identify their work as valuable (Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Royer & Moreau, 2016). However, personal circumstances such as personality traits, marital status, years of experience, and stress coping mechanisms can also contribute to high or low job satisfaction in ECEC (Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin, & Vanderlee, 2013; Bullock, Coplan, & Bosacki, 2015; Wagner et al., 2013). Though Davidson’s (2007) research is centered around primary teacher motivation, the participants suggest that when they are able to spend more one on one time with children, both the teacher and the child are more motivated to interact and learn. From an ethics of care perspective,

Langford and Richardson (2020), state that “the ability to navigate and respond to the complexities of care is precisely what makes work in early childhood settings both challenging and valuable” (p. 34). Chan and Tweedie (2015) argue that, “precarious working conditions enable people to make long-term decisions like family formation even with the advantages that education and professional status confer” (p. 7). Similarly, a study by the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (2016) found that early childhood educators' low wages impact their ability to pursue personal goals such as having a family of their own one day.

ECEC Workforce as Racialized. The third reason ECEC is a site of exploitation has to do with the racialization of the ECEC workforce. While there has been more research in relation to the feminization of the ECEC workforce there remains a gap when looking at the racialization of the ECEC workforce in Canada. The Canadian Union of Public Employee (CUPE) (2017) highlights that more than 20% of public employees in Canada identify as racialized or as part of a visible minority (para.1). As a result, CUPE (2017) indicates that “being racialized [and working] in Canada still comes with a hefty price in terms of lower incomes and wages, as well as other forms of discrimination” (para. 2). CUPE (2017), using the 2016 Census, estimates that racialized employees make about 30% less than the average white Canadian (para. 2). Armstrong and Armstrong (2005) highlight that women who engage in carework are often immigrant women, women from racialized minority groups and are those with the least power.

Kashen, Potter and Stettner (2016) emphasized that in the United States individuals who work in ECEC are not only female but are disproportionately women of colour working in low paying jobs. Palley (2012) found that some childcare advocacy groups in the United States framed the childcare movement as a poverty issue, women’s right violation, and children’s educational rights breach. Shdaimah, Palley and Miller (2018) argues that “policymakers failed

to recognize the importance of the services they provide, not only to families but also to the broader society” (p. 5). Boyd (2013) argues that increasing wages and benefits must be central to the ECEC movement; anything less suggests exploitation, not professionalization. These authors argue that more attention and deliberate action needs to be taken to improve and increase perceptions of the value of care.

To summarize this section, ECEC is a site of exploitation due to the feminization, precarious nature of the work, and racialization of the workforce. The exploitation of the early childhood education sector certainly occurs, primarily due to the way society perceives care and carework. Feminist ethics of care scholars show that exploitation in carework happens due to gender and class discourses and experiences regarding caring roles. With care viewed as a natural role carried out by women, caring work is viewed as a job that anybody (especially women) can do. As a result, carework is underpaid and undervalued.

Recruitment and Retention in ECEC

At a federal level, Canada fails to provide a framework for a universal childcare system (UNICEF, 2008). Instead, in Canada, the provinces and territories are responsible for early learning and childcare, and even there, universal programs are absent. Quebec is the only province in Canada with a universal childcare system in place (Kohen, Dahinten, Khan, & Hertzman, 2008). However, I believe the federal government can show leadership in providing a framework for a universal system and transferring funding to provinces to build a universal system.

The provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2017) is responsible for funding, licensing, and developing policy to support the provision of licensed childcare. However, as mentioned before, the rolling

out of hourly wages and benefits of early childhood educators are the responsibility of individual childcare centres, or in a few cases, a result of negotiations between centres and a union. The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (n.d.) found that in Newfoundland and Labrador, the complicated relationship between childcare revenue, employment and labour issues, system design, and public policy impacts early childhood educators' wages. As professionalization of the ECEC workforce sector continues to grow, the wages and working conditions have not kept pace. For this reason, ECEs are leaving the field.

Recruitment and Retention. Recruitment and retention issues in the ECEC profession are caused by poor working conditions, working long hours, dissatisfaction with low wages, high work expenses and the lack of respect towards ECE education or experience in the sector (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario; 2016; Boyd, 2013; McKinlay, Irvine, & Farrell, 2018; Ministry of Education, 2017). The low wages of educators serve to lessen the already high parent fees (commodity) yet many educators leave the sector as they cannot afford to live on their own wages (Child Care Now, 2018; Suh & Folbre, 2016). A workforce study for early years and childcare employees in Newfoundland and Labrador reported that the recruitment and retention challenges facing the sector are not new; the same problems have persisted for decades (Ministry of Education, 2017). Overall, due to the lack of compensation an early childhood educator earns, they are often faced with significant challenges when saving and managing money, which leads to sacrificing a job they enjoy because of their low wages.

Low, Gendered Wages. The Ontario Gender Wage Gap Strategy Steering Committee reported that wages in female-dominated sectors continue to be low although their work may require educational and professional qualifications (Austin, David, Heyninck & Singh, 2020). Statistics Canada (2015) found that women's experiences of paid work tend to differ from those

of men, which are shaped to a greater extent by their caregiving roles or their employers' presumptions of these roles. As a result, feminized professions are associated with lower wages, less advancement, and less job security – in other words, poorer economic security for women (Child Care Now, 2019). Many women in the childcare sector face significant challenges when finding professional pay and decent working conditions. They may feel financially pressured to stay in a position where they feel devalued and deserve more. Unfortunately, due to the lack of career advancement with low, gendered wages in ECEC, this does not always mean ECEs will leave the sector because there are limited opportunities for these women.

The Incongruity Between Educational Credentials and Pay. Research by Gable and Halliburton (2003) found that childcare providers recognized the need for further education and training, but they also believe “higher education warrants higher levels of compensation” (p. 188). Similarly, Vance (2010) reports on the challenges of hiring qualified early childhood educators due to low wages, minimal benefits, and limited chances for upward career mobility. Vance (2010) remains committed to building professional skills and competencies as the route to better wages and benefits. Shdaimah, Palley, and Miller (2018) found that ECEs low wages contributed to staffing challenges and it meant hiring workers who had little knowledge of professional workplace in ECEC. Some international studies found that individuals who work in childcare centres that have higher-education and a greater number of years working in ECEC provide better care and educational practices with children (Gialamas et al., 2014; Honig & Hirallal, 1998; Setiawan, 2017). However, these studies did not mention the role or value of ethical care practice in ECEC. Hence, I believe ECEs must begin having critical conversations about the ethical work they do as caregivers, aside from the foundational work they do for early education and children’s life-long learning. Overall, the incongruence between educational

credentials and pay leads to recruitment and retention issues because educators who complete their schooling anticipate livable wages. Because this is not the case in ECEC, educators find themselves in the position to search for jobs elsewhere that can offer that.

Compensation in ECEC. According to Langford, Richardson, Albanese, Bezanson, Prentice, and White (2017), “provincial and national groups stress that quality of the system depends on early childhood educators, who deserve to be well-educated, well-respected and fairly compensated” (p. 320). Andrew and Newman (2012) suggest that, “by recognising the unequal distribution of wages across the education sector and significantly increasing the pay of early childhood staff will early childhood services deliver the educational advantages hoped for by governments” (p. 242). Some studies recommend that to fund ECEC adequately, the government should merge all the grants, wage enhancements, and subsidies together and implement a wage scale (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, 2016; Ministry of Education, 2017). Those who provide childcare, whether within their own countries or as migrant workers, are not victims, but women seeking to achieve the best outcomes for themselves and their families within the constraints of local and global power structures (O’Connor & Goodwin, 2002; Salazar Parreñas, 2002). By offering educators compensation that reflects their education credentials and work experience, this can lead to the recruitment and retainment of a more qualified ECEC sector.

Overall, the recruitment and retention of qualified ECEs is an ongoing challenge in the childcare sector throughout Canada. The unequal distribution of ECEs wages based on experience and education and limited benefits contribute to the high staff turnover in the ECEC profession. A key theme that is constant throughout the literature is that all caregivers feel that they deserve the right to a liveable wage and health benefits, but they are not receiving that. In

order to further understand recruitment and retention in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, I interviewed eight ECEs in St. John's to answer the following research question: what are early childhood educators' experiences with and perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador?

Chapter Three - Methodology

To recap, the main research question driving this study is: what are early childhood educators' experiences with and perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador? To answer this question, I explored the views of a sample of eight early childhood educators on their perspectives of the ELCC Supplement. Self-identifying early childhood educators with a diverse range of levels of certification and educational backgrounds, working in a variety of ECEC programs in the City of St. John's Newfoundland and Labrador were recruited to participate in this qualitative study. The participants in this study engaged in a one hour, Zoom communication open-ended interview with semi-structured questions. These interviews were the primary source of data collection. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, coded, and analyzed to identify recurring themes in the data set. Thematic analysis, as discussed by Braun and Clark (2006), is an analytic method for qualitative research. The themes that emerged from the data were discussed using Charma's (2017) and Creswell and Creswell's (2018) social constructivist worldview approach. As discussed previously in this paper, data was interpreted through the theoretical lens of the political economy of care and feminist ethics of care. By conducting a qualitative study, I was able to learn about ECEs' understandings and perspectives of the ELCC Supplement and other emerging related topics that arise related to this government policy.

Participants

Leavy (2017) states that sampling in qualitative research must be justified and rationalized so that the sample is sufficient to meet the needs of the research purpose. Kvale and Brinkman (2013), as cited by Leavy (2017), highlight that qualitative researchers should adhere to the notion of "interviewing as many subjects as necessary to find out what you need to know"

(p. 77). Yilmaz (2013) states that qualitative research typically requires a small sample size so the researcher can yield rich, detailed information directly from the participants about the topic. In addition, the time constraints in producing a master's level major research paper (MRP) resulted in a smaller sample size. Nevertheless, I believe that a relatively small sample size can provide robust and meaningful data for analysis. Criteria for participation included: (1) Participants must self-identify as an early childhood educator holding Level I, Level II, Level III, or a Level IV ECE certification with AECENL (2) Participants must currently receive the ELCC Supplement, and (3) Participants must be working in regulated childcare service or agency within the city of St. John's Newfoundland and Labrador.

Following review and approval from the Ryerson University research ethics board (more on this below), my sample included a total of eight ECEs who are certificated by the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador and are currently receiving the ELCC Supplement. My sample consisted of five-Level II, one-Level III, and two-Level IV early childhood educators in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Ten participants responded during the recruitment process. However, only eight participants were included in the study. Due to the challenges of caring for children full-time during the COVID-19 pandemic, two participants had to withdraw their consent to participate in this study. Each participant, representing one level of certification was invited to share their experience with the ELCC Supplement. Given that the eight interviews yielded a good range of experiences and that I felt that I reached saturation (many recurring themes emerged), it seemed methodologically sound to stop data collection when eight in-depth interviews were completed. Participants worked with different age groups (toddlers, preschoolers, and school-aged) and in several ECEC programs ranging from licensed home childcare, licensed centre-based childcare, and in both for-profit and

non-profit childcare centres. Although I did not collect demographic information from the participants, all eight participants identified as female.

Procedure

Recruitment Method. After receiving the research ethics board (REB) approval (Appendix A), purposeful and convenience sampling was used as methods to recruit participants from St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Patton (2002) explained the strengths of purposeful sampling as follows:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations. (p. 230)

For this study, ECEs were recruited because of their lived experiences working in licensed childcare settings and earning the ELCC Supplement. Convenience sampling, according to Visser, Krosnick, and Lavrakas (2000) is a type of nonprobability sampling typically consisting of persons either known by the investigators and/or readily available to the investigators.

The initial recruitment strategy for this study firstly involved emailing the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL) executive director and the Facebook administrator of the Newfoundland/Labrador Early Childhood Educators Facebook page for approval to advertise this research study through their communication tools. Upon their consent to promote this study, a recruitment letter (Appendix B) was sent to all members of the AECENL. Then, on the AECENL Facebook page and Newfoundland/Labrador Early Childhood Educators Facebook page, the participant recruitment flyer (Appendix C) was advertised. Both

the recruitment letter and recruitment flyer asked that interested participants reach out to me via my Ryerson University email for more information.

As previously mentioned, ten self-identified ECEs contacted me via my Ryerson University email, and of the ten, two had to withdraw due to personal reasons related to the COVID pandemic. I sent the remaining eight participants a consent form (Appendix E) with a study description, sample questions, and highlighted that participants were encouraged to ask questions. To ensure participants felt confidentiality and privacy rights were respected, the consent form highlighted all steps taken for participant's protection. Participants were informed that participation in this study was confidential and voluntary and that they were able to withdraw consent at any time. The participants were reminded that withdrawing their consent in this study would not affect their relationship with Ryerson University, the School of Early Childhood Studies, myself, and my research supervisors Dr. Rachel Langford and Dr. Patrizia Albanese. Once the participants read the consent form and confirmed they were interested in participating, a time was set up for the Zoom communication interview.

Setting. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a qualitative research approach happens in a participant's naturalistic setting, which allows the researcher to gain information whereby the environment is not manipulated or controlled for variables. During qualitative interviews, the researcher can pose open-ended questions that can allow for elaboration into further details (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Maxwell (2009) explains that qualitative research is a flexible design, and participants' perspectives and goals are of value. Hence, by giving ECEs the voice and space to talk openly about their viewpoints about the ELCC Supplement via Zoom communication, the emergence of themes and topics helped the researcher organize codes and themes in the data source.

Given that we were living through a global pandemic, the interviews for this study took place on Zoom communication while I was in a private office in my home. The participants were at a place of their choosing (this was done to ensure confidentiality for the participant). I ensured that all consent forms were signed prior to the start of any interviews. After each recorded interview on Zoom, the audio was transferred to my Ryerson University Google Drive with two-factor authentication. Each of the recorded interviews on my Ryerson Zoom account was deleted immediately following the transcription. The interviews ranged in time from one-hour to one-hour thirty minutes.

Data Collection and Tools

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner using open-ended questions. Semi-structured interview questions offer a focused structure for the interview discussion but do not have to be followed strictly (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). According to Galletta and Cross (2013), a key benefit to semi-structured interviews is the ability to "attend to lived experiences while also addressing theoretical driven variables of interests" (p. 24). The semi-structured interviews allowed me to address specific issues pertaining to the ELCC Supplement while having the flexibility to attend to the emergence of unexpected themes and issues brought up in conversation. The data collection tool was developed to give space and voice for participants to openly share their understandings and perspectives based on their lived experiences with the ELCC Supplement. The data collection tool (Appendix F) was developed using fourteen open-ended questions, which outlined general lines of inquiry and topics to be discussed during the interview. Qu and Dumay (2011) highlight that in semi-structured interviews, both the researcher and participant engage in discussion, construct questions, and share their perspectives through multifaceted dialogue. During my eight interviews, each of the

participants brought forward critical points regarding the ELCC Supplement, which generated new questions and ideas throughout the interview process. Ultimately, the ability to loosely follow the data collection tool contributed to critical data that the researcher may not have anticipated otherwise.

Data Organization

All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. During the transcription process, and following the Ryerson University research ethics board protocols, pseudonyms were given to the participants to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality (See Table 1). Although, some participants shared their current and previous places of employment for this research study that was not necessary to include. Therefore, some changes were made on the transcriptions to help further anonymize the data and ensure confidentiality and privacy of the participants. According to Gordon (2019), anonymity in feminist research:

has the power to support women's collective action. Anonymity can encourage solidarity and greater understanding about women's experiences and amplify women's voices, but still maintain women's safety when the issues under discussion are subject to intense debate and scrutiny. (p. 544)

For this study, I transcribed all interviews and verified the transcription, which allowed me to go back and repeat the audio recorded interviews to ensure nothing was left out in my transcriptions. By transcribing my interviews, I have better knowledge and insight into the content (Wellard & McKenna, 2001). Verbatim transcription also ensured that I avoided selective transcription, which can lead to a bias in the participants' responses based on the sections I chose to include in the research results (Leavy, 2017). Following the transcription, the

audio-recordings were deleted, and transcripts were only accessible to my research supervisor and me. All data and information pertaining to the study, and participants were kept on my Google Drive, enabled with two-factor authentication.

Research Design

The research was conducted using a qualitative research design and a constructivist worldview approach. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), a social constructivist worldview refers to a researcher's ability to understand their participant's interpretations based on their lived experiences. The goal of a social constructivist researcher is to openly gather as much of the participant's view as possible of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The constructivist theory allows the research and the research process (data collection, data analysis, and theory) to stand in reciprocal relationships (Charmaz, 2011; Gordon Finlayson, 2010; Martin & Barnard, 2013). As defined in Charmaz (2017), grounded theory is a “systematic method consisting of several flexible strategies for constructing theory through analyzing qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967)” (p. 299). Charmaz (2017) argues that constructivist grounded theory “provides ways of showing and theorizing how meaning and action influence each other, albeit not always in predictable ways. And further, “meanings, actions and events are emergent and, thus, novel meanings and new actions can arise” (p. 38).

Since this study takes on a social constructivism worldview, the participant's experiences, understandings, and perspectives of the ELCC Supplement are central to the interpretation of data collection and research findings. Furthermore, I used the political economy of care and feminist ethics of care theory to understand the value of care and carework in the context of Newfoundland and Labrador's neoliberal market-driven economy. Similar to a social constructivist worldview, the PEC and FEC theories are concerned with critiquing social

injustice by examining gendered and racialized historical and social hierarchies in order to shape the ways positively change the world (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Taking action to examine ECEs' understandings and perspectives of the ELCC Supplement and disseminating this knowledge to the Newfoundland and Labrador government and ECE community can potentially address social injustices and inequalities and contribute to more systematic changes in the working lives of ECEs.

Research Bias

The role of the researcher in qualitative studies raises some concerns regarding their personal bias that may jeopardize the quality of a study (Chenail, 2011). A researcher's personal beliefs, values and experience are reflected in the interpretation of findings but also in the choice of research topic (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mehra, 2002). However, researcher bias and subjectivity are understood as inevitable and important within qualitative research as the knowledge and experiences of the researcher adds depth to the overall study (Mehra, 2002). According to Merriam and Grenier (2019), instead of trying to eliminate bias and subjectivity in research, it is "important to identify them and monitor them as to how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data" (p. 5). In this regard, I must be self-reflexive and critically present my personal connection to this research area. Since I formerly worked as an ECE in Newfoundland and Labrador and earned the ELCC Supplement, I entered this research with my own critical experiences and viewpoints on the ELCC Supplement. The research process forced me to become more open and honour different perspectives, which gave me a broader sense of how ECEs feel about where they stand on the ELCC Supplement awarded in a neoliberal market-driven economy.

Data Analysis

Research transcripts were clearly labelled and marked to identify when the participant was speaking, and when the researcher was speaking. Each transcript was stored in separate folders on my Ryerson University Google Drive with two-factor authentication. The first step of this process began with acknowledging authenticity and trustworthiness in the transcription process. This was done by reading each transcribed interview and cross-checking the content to make any necessary changes. The transcripts were stored in eight separate folders shared between the participant and me. As a type of member checking, each participant had the opportunity to read through their transcription and make any challenges or add any final thoughts that they may have missed during the interviews (Leavy, 2017). However, only minor changes were made on the transcriptions by participants. Once the transcription process was complete, I organized all transcripts into one Google Docs folder to begin the analysis process.

Once I completed my check for authenticity, I began a two-step process by thoroughly examining raw data and then I started my coding for data analysis. During this first stage of data analysis, I immersed myself in the raw data, by actively reading, looking for themes, meanings, and patterns, and by making notes in the margins of transcripts of concepts that were reoccurring. The first raw data review functioned as open coding, which made me learn about the data presented and made me aware of reoccurring themes.

Axial coding was done using a coding legend with several categories which resulted in a number of larger codes. As I picked up on themes in the data collection, I began coding them in my research transcriptions using the highlight color feature on Google Docs. Fourteen broader themes emerged, as identified in my coding legend. Then I created a separate Google Docs folder to organize questions that were asked in each interview with each of the eight participants'

responses below the question. Using these larger codes, I navigated between the data collected from each interview to create overarching themes within the data set. Axial coding allowed me to make connections to themes and topics related to the purpose of my research and research question. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a method in which patterns are identified within the data and provide the researcher with a rich and detailed description of the data being collected. I employed thematic analysis to identify recognizable topics, ideas, patterns, and themes within the data which provided insight into the concept being researched. As a result, overarching themes were extracted and the analysis provided me with a way to present my findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Chapter 4 – Findings

Open and axial coding, alongside thematic analysis, generated four main themes that help answer the research question of this study. The research question guiding this study is: what are early childhood educators' experiences with and perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador? This chapter presents salient findings from the data collection and reveals educators' understandings and perspectives of the ELCC Supplement.

Not surprising, the majority of participants perceive the ELCC Supplement as an incentive or bonus program to top off the low wages of an early childhood educator. Second, participants articulate a shared appreciation of some features of the ELCC Supplement. At the same time, they assert several dislikes. As we dug deeper, participants report a significant number of abuses in the distribution of the ELCC Supplement. Finally, the participants share their thoughts on recommendations and changes to be made with the ELCC Supplement. To expand on these, my findings will be presented under four key headings, on the participants' views on the purpose of the ELCC Supplement; on their likes and concerns surrounding the ELCC Supplement; on perceived abuses of the ELCC Supplement System; and finally, on their recommendation for changes.

Participants

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants in this study, all identifiable characteristics were removed, and pseudonyms were assigned. It is important to highlight that although demographic information was not obtained, all were self-identifying female early childhood educators (ECEs). All participants in this study are certified ECEs and represent different levels of education and qualifications with the Association of Early Childhood

Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador. Table 1 identifies the pseudonyms given to participants, their level of ECE certification, the setting they currently work or used to work in (private/not-for-profit), and whether they work/worked in centred-based or family home childcare. To summarize, five of the eight participants found themselves in Level II of the certification, one was Level III, and two were Level IV early childhood educators.

Table 1 - *Participants Pseudonym*

Pseudonym	AECENL Level of Certification	Private/Non-for-Profit	Centred-Based/Family Home Childcare
Abigail	Level II	Non-for-profit	Centred-Based Childcare
Lynn	Level IV	Private	Centred-Based Childcare
Catherine	Level IV	Private	Centred-Based Childcare
Arianna	Level II	Private	Centred-Based Childcare
Peyton	Level II	Private	Centred-Based Childcare
Veronica	Level II	Private/non-for-profit	Centre-Based/Family Home Childcare
Delaney	Level III	Private	Centre-Based Childcare
Selena	Level II	Private	Centred-Based Childcare

Perspectives on the Purpose of the ELCC Supplement

The majority of the participants in this study perceive the ELCC Supplement as an incentive or bonus program that tops-up the low wages of an early childhood educator. All participants describe the ELCC Supplement using common phrases, such as: "bonus," "incentive," "additional compensation," "top-up," "financial compensation," and "offset wages." Although all participants deserve better wages for the work that they do, all experience the ELCC Supplement as something that can be taken away at any point. Unfairly, rather than being a “bonus” --something granted above and beyond good wages--participants note that without the

ELCC Supplement, they could not live on their low hourly wages alone. For example, Abigail a Level II ECE who works in a non-for-profit childcare centre and works predominantly with infants comments, “It [the ELCC Supplement] means whether or not I can stick with the occupation at this point. Like I said that instructor I had back in the 80’s was right. You can’t make it on just what your salary will be.” Veronica, a Level II ECE, also perceives the ELCC Supplement as compensation ECEs cannot live without, she states, “You’re not really making enough money to survive. You would not be able to do it on a single income...You definitely cannot survive without it. For twelve or fifteen dollars an hour it’s not really enough money to survive.”

The majority of participants explain that the ELCC Supplement is an incentive to upgrade from Trainee-Level to Level I to Level II. However, it is not motivating them to pursue university education towards a Level III or Level IV ECE certification. Peyton a Level II ECE notes that:

It is a help [the ELCC Supplement] but it is not a motivation to enter the early childhood education program nor is the wages... I really do not want to go through the next five to ten years paying off a student loan or not being able to make enough to be able to pay it... And only making an extra one-thousand dollars on the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement is not going to help with that at all... No matter what education I have, it’s not motivating.

Most participants believe that the ELCC Supplement does not act as a recruitment strategy by welcoming new ECEs into the field; instead, it keeps people who are already working in childcare to continue working in the profession. Lynn, who recently graduated from the ECE program at Keyin College and earned a Level IV ECE certification explains how she did not know about the ELCC Supplement program until entering the profession:

For me, it was funny because when I started my ECE program, I had no idea about any of this [ELCC Supplement]. Whereas I know some people go back to school because they know they want to get that [ELCC Supplement] ... When I went back to school, everyone

was like, "You're going to be a Level-Four, you're going to be a Level-Four." But I didn't know what that meant... I didn't really understand how the levels worked, and it wasn't my reasoning. So, when I started working and I was a Level IV, then I understood how that worked.

Catherine, a Level IV ECE who works in a private childcare centre, describes how she invests the ELCC Supplement on essentials like healthcare benefits and towards a retirement savings plan:

It's [ELCC Supplement] a bit of a bonus to my wage... I understand that the government doesn't always have money. So, I don't rely on it. But I super appreciate it because that's primarily the money I put into my RESP for my retirement. It's also money I set aside where I don't have a healthcare plan. It is money I put aside in my tax-free savings in case I do get sick... It is money I invest.

Additionally, Catherine explains how employers perceive the ELCC Supplement as an excuse not to increase hourly wages; she states, "I've had employers in the past who would not give me a raise because well, you're getting the [ELCC] Supplement. That's a common thing."

Delaney, a Level III ECE who works in private childcare, makes a similar comment, the ELCC Supplement is a bonus and helps with essentials such as bills/payments an ECE may fall behind on due to low wages:

It's [the ELCC Supplement] something that offsets our wages because our wages are so low. I don't want to say insignificant, but they are low. So, the government I know put that in place to offset our wages. To me personally, it's that little extra income that helps in areas where you know, most ECEs live paycheque to paycheque. So, every three months it offsets that bill that gets left behind in that three-month spam.

Arianna, a Level II ECE, provides her unique perspective as a family home childcare operator, that the ELCC Supplement is an incentive to become regulated by the government:

Usually, when we get the educational [ELCC] Supplement, it's like catching up for us. I don't know if I would be regulated if I never had it. That's what makes it worth it. There are a lot of expenses besides the supplies being regulated in your home than in your centre... It increases my income. In family childcare for what the government sees, I make about the same amount as I did in centre-based care. I don't have to pay childcare because my children go to school then come to me. It's too expensive.

Furthermore, Arianna comments on the challenges of being a full-time ECE earning low wages and having children of your own who need care:

I don't have to pay childcare because my children go to school then come to me. It's too expensive... We did go to a family childcare when I went back on maternity leave. Then when my provider got pregnant, I quit. I started staying at home. It wasn't worth it for me. I work in the field, and I wouldn't be caring for my own child... I would be caring for someone else's child. I would be paying one full paycheque, maybe a little more back into the centre where I worked. It just wasn't worth it.

Selena, a Level II ECE explains how the ELCC Supplement recognizes different education and training for an ECE, and it's an incentive to continue education:

To me, the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement recognizes the different levels of education and training that an ECE has. And because our wages in most cases are low, I think that it's important... So, I do think that government [ELCC] Supplement is certainly an incentive... And I think it is an incentive to upgrade and add to your training and education.

When I asked the participants what would happen if the government took away the ELCC Supplement, all participants agree that ECEs would leave the profession to find jobs elsewhere, such as food services or grocery stores, for better wages and benefits. For example, Lynn states:

I mean you could work fast food. I'm pretty sure if you work at Tim Hortons long enough you can get your wage bumped up... There are probably people at Tim Horton's making more than early childhood educators working with children. I wouldn't because I'm already a Level-Four. I already know there are other opportunities for me.

Lynn highlights that ECEs are willing to work at other centres for an extra one or two dollars even with the ELCC Supplement. She comments, "There was a centre that opened up that's paying one or two dollars more. The ECEs at this other centre left to go to this new centre.

People left to get that extra two dollars. People are willing to do that. The money matters."

Surprisingly, Arianna explains how she would go unregulated if the ELCC Supplement program ended. She states:

I would honestly not be regulated, and I think you hear that from many of us. I mean, there's not enough money. You can only charge parents so much. I feel guilty. I

have to eat. I have to feed those kids... You know what I mean. There is only so much money. It would not be worth it anymore. It wouldn't be worth it for a lot of people to be in the field.

Overall, educators' voices in the interviews for this study reveal the complicated relationship between working as an ECE in licensed childcare settings with very little compensation and the critical choices they have to make to get by on essential living expenses. The idea that educators perceive the ELCC Supplement as a "bonus" to top off their low hourly wages shows that women's work is valued less than men. As participants note in this study, you don't see government wage enhancements like the ELCC Supplement in other professions (particularly male-dominated professions) because they are more likely to earn a living wage. If the government of Newfoundland and Labrador wants to close the gender wage gap, they must consider occupation, education, gender, and age disparities. Rightfully, these women need to pay their bills through fair wages, not through a government supplement that can be taken away at anytime. A "bonus" is a temporary fix, but it does not address systemic issues regarding women in the workforce. Women are not deliberately setting out to find lower-paying jobs; the jobs that women do are valued less than men. Notably, as Lynn comments, ECEs can leave the sector to find better pay and benefits in food services like Tim Hortons; therefore, as women enter the ECE workforce that requires higher education, their wages drop. Ultimately, the ELCC Supplement is not a sufficient strategy for encouraging educators to pursue more post-secondary education for a job that we continue to devalue.

Likes, Dislikes, and Mixed Opinions about the ELCC Supplement

When the participants were asked to describe what they like and what they dislike most about the ELCC Supplement, many similarities, some differences, and mixed options emerged from their responses. I will begin this section of the findings, with what the participants identify

as the most positive parts of the ELCC Supplement. This will be followed by a section on their strongest dislikes and concerns. Lastly, I will present some of the mixed feelings that they shared with me.

Likes. Not surprising, I found that the majority of participants like that the ELCC Supplement recognizes the different educational backgrounds and training of an early childhood educator by the payments granted to individuals based on their ECE level of certification. For example, Veronica suggests that:

I should get the extra amount on the [ELCC] Supplement if I decided to do that additional year of schooling. It's the same thing where I work. If you are a Level-One, you get fourteen dollars an hour, and if you are a Level-Two you get fifteen, and if your Entry-Level get thirteen. So that's just the way it is... You get more education- you should get more money.

Similarly, Selena comments on how she likes that the ELCC Supplement recognizes an ECEs training and education, "I think it [the ELCC Supplement] recognizes the required training and the education to gain a certain level of knowledge and expertise in the field... So, I would say that's what I like about it the most."

Half of the participants note that they like the process of applying for the ELCC Supplement and like that it gets paid out in four lump sum payments, once every three months. For example, Catherine notes that:

I like the [ELCC] Supplement. I appreciate the fact that I get it. I thank the government that I get it. I feel safe because I'm applying on my own every month or every quarter to the government. I like the fact that I'm filling out the form, and the owner is signing it. And that I'm passing it to the government myself. Because it means I'm responsible for this pocket of change. I like how it does land in my bank account and not my owner's bank account.

It appears that having control over this payment process gave them a sense of autonomy, stability, and control (it is in their hands). All participants comment on how they like having a date when they will receive their ELCC Supplement in their bank account. Peyton comments:

I'm really happy that the [ELCC] Supplement lottery has been changed. Now we know when we're going to receive it. We receive it on the first government payday. So the government payday, we know if we don't get it, so the next government payday is on June sixth. And now all the ECEs get their [ELCC] Supplement on that day.

The majority of participants explain that they like the quarterly payments from the ELCC

Supplement because the money comes in big chunks. Lynn notes:

I think in having these chunks of money coming. I'm able to take care of business. So since I have been getting the [ELCC] Supplement, I'm can put it towards my student loan every month... But that is like seven-hundred-twenty dollars for three months for me... But it depends on my goals... If I'm looking for a down payment on something, it's going to come from my [ELCC] Supplement. It's not going to come from my biweekly cheque.

Delaney also likes how the ELCC Supplement payments are disbursed to ECEs every three months, she states, "I like that it's extra funds. We get it every three months. So, I feel that it's a bit of a positive... I don't find that the application process is too bad... In saying that, it's the part that we fill out." Arianna explains how she likes that the ELCC Supplement payments have been increasing with time. As a family home childcare provider, she explains that she can use these extra ELCC Supplement funds towards business expenses such as purchasing a new fridge. She states, "I like that it's increasing [referring to the ELCC Supplement]. It's increasing slowly. It obviously helps with being able to afford things... I used it once to buy a new fridge because the fridge wasn't big enough to hold all of the milk."

Peyton highlights that she likes how she can plan around the quarterly ELCC Supplement payments for holidays/birthdays:

I usually plan around it [referring to the ELCC Supplement]. It's June, September, December, and March. So, in June, it's usually my auto-insurance that has to be renewed. So, I don't have to worry about monthly payments... September, well, that's when my children are going back to school, so I plan their school supplies around that... December, that's Christmas gifts for them. And then in March, it's their birthdays... April, it's Easter.

Abigail takes note that the ELCC Supplement program improved overtime:

It's a really good thing. It came about when I was in the field, maybe 12-15 years. It has improved even since the time it started. I have seen improvements... To me it [the ELCC Supplement] makes us feel like we are important. If the government really feels that we are important they need to put their money where their mouth is and make sure it's there all the time.

In summary, it is important to underscore the key point raised by participants that despite the implementation of the ELCC Supplement, ECEs' level of qualification and educational background is still not adequately reflected in the compensation, particularly compared to other women-dominated fields. The fact that childcare centres cannot afford to pay their educators adequately, to reflect their education and experiences is worrisome. The fact that the government needs to step in to provide a supplement, and even then, compensation is low, is doubly worrisome and clearly not effective in recruiting and retaining ECEs in licensed childcare settings. That said, given that this is the only top-up available, despite its shortcomings, I agree with Catherine that the ELCC Supplement should continue to be paid directly into an ECEs bank account, in regular and predictable installments, and not paid directly to the childcare centre. This study's participants clearly note that this money is essential for them to continue working in a field that continues to pay low wages. These ECEs were managing considerable stress in their day to day work, educating and caring for young children of our society; living paycheck to paycheck only made things worse.

Dislikes and Challenges. Despite the positive comments, all participants express their frustrations about feeling that they are being treated like babysitters because they earn babysitters' wages and have little or no benefits or vacation time compared to others in female-dominated professions. For example, Veronica states:

In any other profession, you don't lose your benefits. Like, when you're a nurse, you don't lose your benefits or your vacation time... You don't lose any other things like insurance. Like as a nurse, your vacation still accumulates, and you don't lose your benefits. You don't lose anything. If you leave work at a childcare centre, you could lose

everything. I lost my RESP. I lost all of my vacation time... I don't accumulate anything when I'm on maternity leave. And this is a predominantly female-dominated profession that cares for children. Why are we being taken advantage of in those ways? Especially if you're going to have a child. But if you're a nurse, you will never run into any of those things. I'm really frustrated. Don't get me wrong... I have a lot of respect for nurses. But we are treated with a lot of disrespect. We do equally as important work. It just feels like we're ignored or looked at like a babysitter.

The majority of participants are concerned about there not being significant differences between payment levels depending on their ECE level of certification. For example, Delaney notes:

When you finish your diploma, you're a Level-Two early childhood educator, when you look at the chart here, Level-Two to a Level-Three, it's only five-hundred dollars in the difference. I mean me, personally, I did seven-plus years in university related to the field. And that's only an extra five-hundred dollars a year [referring to the ELCC Supplement payment].

Similarly, Abigail comments:

People without an education should not get paid [the ELCC Supplement]. So, don't give it to them if they don't have the education. And I know there was an argument that I've been in the field for this long without any educational background so I should get it because I've been here for so long. As I said, I disagree with this because it takes any from the respect of getting an education.

Another common concern raised by all participants is that they do not like that the government does not give them the option on the ELCC Supplement application form to have taxes deducted from the payment before it gets paid out. For example, Selena states:

They don't take enough taxes out of it [ELCC Supplement]. So, income tax time we get hit hard with that... My accountant has said to me, you know, put some aside, but when you don't have enough to keep up (as it is for most of us from my experience), don't take that extra amount out for tax time. And from my understanding and I asked my employer there's no real option to say, can you take out more taxes before you get it.

Although the ELCC Supplement lottery has changed, the majority of participants explain that they do not like the uncertainty of not knowing when the ELCC Supplement would show up in their bank accounts. Not knowing when the ELCC Supplement will be deposited prevents them from planning their finances accordingly. Catherine notes:

I'm not too fond of the fact that I never know when it's going to end up in my bank account. You never know when the [ELCC] Supplement is going to arrive in your bank account... I personally never count on the [ELCC] Supplement when I'm doing my monthly budget as adding this to my income. Or you don't know at the end of the quarter if they'll even give it to you. Even though you applied for it... I don't want to bite the hand that feeds me if you know what I mean.

Veronica similarly notes that she didn't like the application process and uncertainties of when you will receive the ELCC Supplement:

I think that there are many issues with the [ELCC Supplement] application and getting the money on time and getting the right amount. It doesn't seem to be a system that works very well. I find it's very ambiguous like it's not clear how you can get it and when you can get it... There's no clear thing to look at and be like no this is what that's all about. And I don't think the public realizes that we're getting this [ELCC] Supplement, which then goes back to getting new people to join the field.

In addition, Lynn explains that she does not like the application process because there is no option to submit the form online and because applicants only get a notification if you did something wrong on the application. Lynn stresses:

I wouldn't say I like how it's [the ELCC Supplement] paid out. I'm not too fond of the process. The process doesn't make sense because nothing changes. You can't submit online. They want a signature. You don't get notified if they receive it. You only receive a notification if you did something incorrectly. I would hate to see it be given to owners to be paid out to staff. I think that would be tragic for ECEs. But I think if the government paid it out on a bi-weekly basis, it would be much more beneficial.

Peyton also stresses that she does not like the uncertainty of when (and if) she'll receive the ELCC Supplement and suggests that there should be an online application process:

Waiting for the [ELCC] Supplement and not knowing. When we send off our applications, we have to drop them off in person or mail them. They can't be faxed. The only reason we were able to mail them off this time was due to COVID. That's what they should be doing it in the first place. It would save so much time and money. Why can't we just take advantage of modern technology. I am frightened to drop my application off in the mail because we never get a notification to tell us if it was received or not. So, you spend three months waiting for it. And I believe it was last year- there were many ECEs on Facebook who said, "I was counting on this, and I needed this for Christmas, and I didn't get it." And then the government would send them an email, "Oh, I'm sorry we didn't receive your application." Then, you would have to go another period waiting for it. So, I wish there was a system in place where you email it off, and they tell you that it

was received.

Delaney agrees that the application process can and should be better managed. On this she notes the following:

I would say when it gets to the government's side of things with them processing it [referring to the ELCC Supplement], there is a lot of times when they come back and say, "Oh, you need this done, or this needs to be done, or this needs to be filled out." And it's not as simple as sending out an email and saying, "Oh, yup, that's fine." No, you have to redo the whole thing and go through the entire process again.

Additionally, Delaney raises concerns that there are people receiving the ELCC Supplement who do not qualify or deserve it. She explains, "I always feel that it could be regulated a little more. There are people out there getting the [ELCC] Supplement who probably don't qualify. It could be audited more/monitored more. Some of us have taken the time to get higher levels. It can be quite frustrating."

Mixed Opinions. Overall, there were mixed opinions on the ELCC Supplement application process and how the payments are distributed quarterly. The majority of participants said they both appreciate but also have concerns about how the ELCC Supplement is distributed, in quarterly payments. Some want the payments to be more regular and distributed across their pay cheques. There were mixed ideas about how best to make the ELCC Supplement part of the ECEs' biweekly salary--half of the participants like the idea, but the other half were unsure. Additionally, there were mixed perspectives about childcare administrators/monitors receiving more (an additional amount) on their ELCC Supplement. The majority of the participants explain that they believe that those receiving the ELCC Supplement (ECE, administrator, monitor) should have a certain number of hours working directly with children, in the centre, before being eligible for the ELCC Supplement. They think there should be more checks in place, and a better way to prove one's actual contact hours with children before being eligible for the ELCC

Supplement, because some participants note that there are administrators in the sector who only do paperwork (not actually work with children) and then leave, who are claiming the ELCC Supplement. However, others recognize the high demands placed on administrators and monitors; and thought that these administrators should receive more of the ELCC Supplement than others because of the nature of the work they do. For example, Peyton states:

I was an administrator, and I only made sixteen dollars an hour. But I'm sure where I'm at now, the administrators get a lot more than that. But yes, I guess you're going to work more, you have to talk to parents, you have to speak with social workers, you have to make sure the staff are doing well. They have a higher workload. So yes, they should definitely make more. As well, the work you do should be reflected in your pay rate.

Abuses of the ELCC Supplement System

Participants share their experiences working with people who manipulate the ELCC Supplement system in various ways for personal gain or extra revenue for their childcare business. Throughout each of the interviews, numerous concerns were raised regarding some owners/operators taking advantage of the ELCC Supplement program. In this section, I will present descriptions of critical issues and concerns that participants feel are problematic with the ELCC Supplement system and need to be better addressed. Abigail, Peyton, Catherine, Delaney, and Arianna express their concerns that some owners/operators use the ELCC Supplement program as an excuse to keep wages low. For example, Peyton states:

I still find a lot of private centres owners/operators that are using it [referring to the ELCC Supplement] to their advantage. They pay their staff as low as they can because centres know they will get the [ELCC] Supplement anyway. I can remember that was an issue when the [ELCC] Supplement started when they were trying to disburse it because of that. A lot of complaints, people, said, " Oh, you should give the [ELCC] Supplement to the daycares and let the daycares give it to their staff. No, then you would still just be getting minimum wage if they did that. There are a lot of owners/operators who would only use the [ELCC] Supplement top it up to minimum wage still... There are a lot of owners/operators that are not paying their staff full salaries even though they are getting the money from the government to pay them.

Related to this, Delaney and Selena notice that some administrators unfairly include the ELCC Supplement in the hourly wages on job advertisements, rather than as a separate government program. For example, Delaney states the following:

I know administrators out there that when they advertise jobs, they advertise the [ELCC] Supplement included in the wages... I don't think it is right if you're promoting that you're paying fifteen dollars an hour that should be fifteen dollars an hour coming from your company's pocket with the [ELCC] Supplement on top of that.

There were other concerns and complaints when it came to operators. Arianna, for example, raises the concern that some owners/operators refuse to sign your ELCC Supplement form if you choose to find a position elsewhere:

You fill out your form, and then you have to get it [the ELCC Supplement] signed off by the owner. But say you left our centre on bad terms, which people do, or you got to let go, then people [childcare owners/operators] will argue on signing your forms. Some of these centres are not happy places.

Arianna also shares her critical reflection on childcare operations:

Maybe they [childcare centres] need to be owned by ECEs and not just anyone can open up a childcare centre to understand how a childcare centre works. It's not a business and definitely not looked at this way from most people working in a centre who are coming into a centre as an ECE. But someone coming in with a business degree, look at it as a money maker.

On a more individual level, Catherine, Arianna, and Delaney raise their concerns that people are working in childcare who are receiving the ELCC Supplement that may not be eligible for it.

There have been reports that some people are completing forms (voluntarily or not, see example below) stating that they have higher credentials than what is on their AECENL level of certification or job title. For example, Catherine shares her experience:

In my last job I was kind of cornered to be manager on paper. The guy cornered me and I said sure. He said, "You wouldn't have any responsibilities, you would just be manager on paper." And it would mean an extra couple of thousand dollars a year. And I thought, yes you can do this because you know I'll be claiming manager on my [ELCC] Supplement. So, it's not money coming out of your business. It's money coming from the government to pay me. And because I'm a manager on paper it was one of the reasons, I

left that job. There was stuff the manager wasn't being completely transparent about. And I thought because I'm a manager on paper I could have gotten in huge trouble.

Additionally, Arianna expresses concerns about some people claiming hours that they did not work:

So, someone who works as a Level-Three ECE but works in a preschool room, they might sign-off on their [ELCC] Supplement saying they're working with the after school aged kids. Or when kindergarten was full-day they used to sign-off people for the full day. They used to sign-off people just so they could get their [ELCC] Supplement or their full [ELCC] Supplement even though they didn't work with that age group. But I know of someone who didn't get their full [ELCC] Supplement because they used to all sign off that they're working with the same age group. They were taking advantage of the system.

All participants in this study raise the important point that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador needs to consult more with ECEs' professional association, AECENL, before making any crucial decisions for the profession. For example, Veronica states:

The government wouldn't put out news or decisions about the teacher's association or social workers or nurses. Why are they doing it to ECEs? Because ECEs are viewed in a certain way. ECEs are viewed as babysitters by a lot of people. So, they don't need to contact our association to make decisions for us. It's very upsetting, and it makes you feel that you're not worth much even though what you do is very important. The issue is AECENL doesn't have enough members for the government to notice us. Like with the COVID-19 pandemic, AECENL wrote a letter and said whatever... Right now, there's not enough of us for the government to care. They are [referring to the government of NL] going to make that decision, and it is what it is, deal with it.

Recommendations/Changes to be made with the ELCC Supplement Program

In each of the interviews, the participants provide recommendations on changes to be made with the ELCC Supplement program. Recommendations range from how the ELCC Supplement should be administered to what types of degrees should be rewarded (or not) through the ELCC Supplement to recommendations for addressing recruitment and retention in the ECEC sector.

Administration of the ELCC Supplement. All participants state that to qualify for a full quarterly ELCC Supplement amount, it shouldn't matter how many hours you worked each month as long as you worked the total 360 hours over three months. Many participants explain that ECEs are prone to get sick working with children, which may be a barrier to earning the full ELCC Supplement amount by not meeting the 120 hour monthly requirement; but over three months, that might not be an issue, and might be easier to achieve. Participants also note that supply/substitute ECEs may not be able to get a consistent 120 hours per month yet should still be entitled to it. For example, Abigail comments:

My things would be to go back to the way of averaging out your 360 hours over the three months. Because there have been times, I lost out on half... I got part-time instead of full-time for the sake of one hour. Because you must have 120 full time and anything below that is part-time. I've had times in a month where I had 119 hours, so I got half the [ELCC] Supplement and maybe the month before that, I had 180 hours. There was a time when they used to average the 360 hours out over the three months you got the full [ELCC] Supplement. I think they should go back to that.

As noted above, participants explain that they would like to see an online application form, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Peyton stresses, "They [government of NL] need to make another positive change as to how those [ELCC Supplement] applications are submitted... Everyone should be able to fill it out online." Furthermore, all participants suggest that there should be an option when you fill out the ELCC Supplement form to take out additional taxes. For example, Selena states:

I would advise them if it's going to be on a quarterly basis there needs to be an option that we can tick off on that form if we want to take off additional taxes on that [ELCC Supplement] form. That should be our right on that form. Income tax time really hurts ECEs. Then they [ECEs] are waiting for their next [ELCC] Supplement to pay what they owe from income tax. So, I think it is a worry and a lot of stress for a lot of people.

Catherine notes that there should be better communication, so educators know the exact date when they will receive the ELCC Supplement in their bank account:

It would just be great to know if you applied from the [ELCC] Supplement, you would receive it in your bank account... That the government planned to have your [ELCC] Supplement in your bank account by the 15th of May. Because then, you can plan for bills and say you had a child who needs to go to the Dentist or I could have applied for my dental appointment when I received the [ELCC] Supplement.

Another common finding was that all participants believe that the ELCC Supplement should be counted as income, rather than as a supplement or top-up. The participants suggest that the ELCC Supplement should not affect an educator's chances of being approved for a loan or mortgage. For example, Abigail states:

When I put it [the ELCC Supplement] in my taxes, it just looks like income. I'm not eligible for EI [employment insurance]. Like if you do have to leave to go on unemployment, maternity, EI or whatever you will still see the benefits of having higher unemployment income even if somebody is going to look for a mortgage or a car loan, not making it insurable. The [ELCC] Supplement does not count as your income. When you go to the bank and say I make 40,000, they respond and say, "oh no, you don't because you only make 30,000 because 10,000 of this is the [ELCC] Supplement, and it is not insurable," so it doesn't come into play. I've heard a lot of people say they've been turned down for loans because of that... At the bank, they tell you that it's not countable income because it can be taken away. It's not the money that you're working for.

Education/Qualifications. All participants except one agreed that ECEs should be paid based on their ECE certification level and that there should be a bigger pay gap (a larger pay increment) between ECE levels. The majority of the participants suggest that to obtain a Level III and Level IV ECE certification, there should be clear restrictions on and specification about the applicant's university education, noting that the degree should be related to early childhood education. For example, Delaney stresses the following:

People who go higher to get their Level-Three or Level-Four... I mean, they're getting a higher education. But again, the degrees should relate more to the field. Like if you're going to do an early childhood education degree, all the power to you. You deserve to get paid more because you did a higher education.

Delaney believes that there should be a way to prove how your university education relates to early childhood education and care to obtain a Level III or Level IV ECE certification. Delaney explains:

I think you should hold a degree in something that is relevant to what you do. Like no offence, if you hold a degree in criminology, what does that have to do with children? So, I think holding a Level-Four should hold something behind you that relates to children somehow. Like a lot of education programs, they are child-based. And if I do remember correctly, to earn a Level-Four with an education degree, there are still some courses you must do at MUN [Memorial University of Newfoundland] in the education level to obtain that Level-Four. I know at CNA [College of the North Atlantic], you have to submit course outlines and stuff to get exempted from stuff. At MUN and stuff, they keep it for so long. To be able to show them, here is all my course outlines to AECENL, they will review and say yes this meets requirements... I can see how this relates to the childcare field or no, it does not.

On the other hand, Catherine and Lynn offer a different perspective. They thought that having a university degree unrelated to child studies (making them eligible for a Level IV ELCC Supplement) can be a positive thing and add a new perspective to the profession. For example, Lynn suggests that:

If you're learning something for four-years, like most degrees are, whether that be math or art, or psychology... I'm sure there's something within that study that you can bring into the field. It's interesting because one of our teachers is a musician. I guess I would be artsier. And the other one is more forestry and science. So, we kind of combine in those pieces a little bit. Like if I'm in the art area, sparks are happening.

Surprisingly, one participant notes that they don't have a problem if ECEs are paid the same regardless of their ECE level of certification. Catherine notes:

It's happened before where we all made the same amount [referring to the ELCC Supplement]. But then people had a flip-out. There was an increase again for ECEs who met the certification levels differently. I don't mind if that's what they have to do to keep people in the field because there's such a shortage of staff. I have had people who didn't even qualify for the [ELCC] Supplement and freak out at me because I'm Level-Four and getting the [ELCC] Supplement. So, I have gotten abused the other way. They didn't think it was fair that I had the education and received the [ELCC] Supplement. I've never been resentful the other way. I treat everybody equally. I've had one than one person over the years who got mad at me. Because I went to university and I went to college and got my qualifications. Like, they can't take my degree away from me, and they can't take my

diploma away from me... There has been frustration from people who don't want to put the time into it.

All participants recommend that when Newfoundland and Labrador introduce full-day kindergarten that the ELCC Supplement should be available to ECEs if their wages and benefits do not match primary teachers or teacher assistants based on education and years of experience. For example, Abigail states:

If they're expected to work for the same pay as they're getting now in the daycares, yes, they should probably get the [ELCC] Supplement. But if they're getting almost the same pay as the teachers. Then, no. They'll be at an advantage. And you won't get anybody working in the daycares if you do it that way.

Interestingly, most participants suggest that the ELCC Supplement should only be available for ECEs who have their AECENL Levels (I, II, III, IV). For example, Veronica indicates that:

Why do you not have the same thing as I do and get that [ELCC] Supplement? It's the same thing with a substitute that I used to work with who had to upgrade. Like, if I was going into a school and doing your job and receiving the same pay. It's not the same thing. We [early childhood educators] are trying hard to show everybody what we do is important, and we need an education and deserve to get paid more. How will we do that if whoever wants to work comes in, and we give them the [ELCC] Supplement?

Participants identify many obstacles and hurdles to getting higher education in early childhood education so they can be eligible to receive a higher ELCC Supplement. Peyton provides a critical comment on changes to be made so ECEs can get better access to higher education:

Not everyone can do this [ECE] program. It takes a lot, and it's not just about your grades that you're getting in high school. I think that guidance counselors need to be aware of that. And that's how some people come into this program. They decide this is the program where we're going to place low achieving students. And I feel that needs to be changed. And again, I believe the ECE program should be a steppingstone to other things. But still, something is missing. There is no steppingstone for other things like between the ECE program and going into other things like teaching. Maybe, MUN [Memorial University of Newfoundland], we need to look at can we transfer those ECE credits over to MUN for education. Like we take from the centre of nursing studies for an LPN [Licensed Practical Nurse]. An LPN can transfer over to nursing and get their BA [Bachelor of Arts]. We need to look at all these other things to make our program that much better.

Addressing Recruitment and Retention. Delaney provides a critical suggestion on how to better use the ELCC Supplement to recruit and retain ECE professionals more effectively.

Delaney explains the following:

I almost feel that is a good way to audit the field because if you have a centre- let's say every three months the owners are sending in this is my staff, here are the Levels [I, II, III, IV], here it is. But then, they notice, oh Jez, every three months you get some staff turnover like their new staff coming in, new staff coming in. So then, they could audit the centre, and be like what is going on, what is the cause of this so we can fix this and that's a good way to get some research going. But then, also with that, the government would have to come up with a pay wage plan. So everybody is getting paid the same across the board, and then the [ELCC] Supplement adds up to it, so whatever it is Level-One earns this, Level-Two earns this, Level-Three earns this, etc. There should also be a rule- you have to increase your staff wages as an employer gradually, and some of this is just offsetting. So at least then, there is no competition across places, so like I'm going to go here now because they're paying more or I'm going to go here now because that's the problem in our field. You could jump and get a job in an instant if you wanted to. So at least, then you know people are leaving because you are being treated unfairly, and the staff are being treated unfairly. They are not leaving because of wages or money because everything is levelled.

To conclude, the interviews provided rich and meaningful data that revealed participants' views on the ELCC Supplement. The four key findings were: participants' views on the purpose of the ELCC Supplement; on their likes and concerns surrounding the ELCC Supplement; on perceived abuses of the ELCC Supplement System; and finally, on their recommendation for changes. The participants of this study perceived the ELCC Supplement as an "incentive/bonus" program rather than a program designed to attract a greater number of qualified ECEs into regulated childcare settings. There were both likes and concerns regarding the payment granted to individuals based on education and qualifications and the application process for the ELCC Supplement. Each of the participants note things that they felt were wrong with abuses of the ELCC Supplement system, such as owners/operators using the ELCC Supplement program as an excuse to keep wages low. Finally, the participants voiced their opinions on changes to be made for addressing recruitment and retention in ECEC. The next chapter aims to further analyze these

findings in relation to the study's theoretical framework (political economy of care and feminist ethics of care) and relevant literature about the topic.

Chapter Five – Discussion

This study is grounded in the assumption that there is a devaluation of care and carework in ECEC programs, particularly in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Using a political economy of care and feminist ethics of care analysis, it is assumed that this devaluation of care and carework stems from: gendered and classed discourses of the ECEC workforce; historical understandings of care as a private responsibility; and the divide in value between care and education. Due to the devaluation of care and carework in society many care workers (particularly women) have low wages and poor working conditions in licensed childcare settings. Based on this grounding, the purpose of my study was to better understand the impact of the ELCC Supplement on the lives of ECEs in Newfoundland and Labrador. To do so, early childhood educators working in the licensed childcare sector views of the ELCC Supplement were explored in qualitative interviews using a social constructivist worldview for data analysis.

The interviews highlight that ECEs' voices are often marginalized and absent when critical decisions are made for the essential carework that ECEs do. To answer the research question: what are early childhood educators' experiences with and perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador?, this chapter analyzed the views of eight ECEs in relation to the study's theoretical framework (the political economy of care and feminist ethics and care theory) and relevant literature. As previously indicated in chapter three, I used a social constructivist worldview to determine the participants' experiences, understandings, and perspectives of the ELCC Supplement.

The Political Economy of Care and the Feminist Ethics of Care in the ELCC Supplement

To recap, the political economy of care is an approach that reasserts the value of care and carework in society by centering the importance of care in an economy. A PEC analysis assesses

to what degree carework is valued in relation to social and economic infrastructure, organization, and reproduction (Mahon & Robinson, 2011). A PEC analysis helps to understand the historical divide between the public education system and the private ECEC (care) market system. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) argues that feminist ethics of care has been instrumental in making visible that, “these three dimensions of care—labor/work, affect/affections, ethics/politics—are not necessarily equally distributed in all relational situations, nor do they sit together without tensions and contradictions” (p. 5). Therefore, thinking with feminist ethics of care in ECEC provides insights into how a government policy is caring or uncaring and thereby affects the professional lives of ECEs and their essential carework.

The ELCC Supplement in a Neoliberal Market Economy

Childcare Market. Early childhood education and care currently functions within a care market, in which families and ECEs are expected to carry out their responsibilities privately. This means that ECEC programs exist in an expanding rather than shrinking market economy where families purchase ECEC services of increasing poor quality, perpetuating the childcare crisis that already exists as a result of lack of affordability and access (Mahon, 2009). Tronto (2013) argues that in a market, the distribution of care and care responsibilities does not work well because:

first, some incompatibilities between a “free market” and care, and second, that using market thinking obscures structural inequalities, which makes it impossible to allocate caring responsibilities adequately. (p. 116)

In ECEC, structural inequalities appear in various forms (ECEs low wages, lack of affordability and access for quality childcare services, etc.) because neoliberalism assumes that the market decides the best way to organize services and commodities. However, the market fails care

because care costs money, care takes time, and therefore care does not make a high profit (unless there are cuts to care). Historically, women have been relegated to care for children in the private sphere. This care was expected to be provided by mothers, grandmothers, or other female relatives. Today, women still do most of the caring for children, whether it is unpaid or paid. With the privatization of childcare comes significant disparities for women who need childcare to enter the labour market and educators who provide these essential early care and education services. The deprived state of the ECEC sector can be described as follows:

Like Cinderella, early childhood education has had three sisters – primary, secondary and tertiary, not necessarily ugly, but who have in various ways, bullied, ignored and exploited her ... yet early childhood was the sister with potential (Lange 1988). (Lange as cited by Kesting & Fargher, 2008, p. 25)

Dalli (1993) also argues that early childhood education is the "Cinderella" of education because the professional status of an ECE, her work, and education/training is perceived by the government to be lower compared to school teachers. Furthermore, Dalli (1993) states that early childhood education is "the Cinderella who could not afford a ball gown and who definitely had not been invited to the ball" (p. 244). In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, rather than phasing in a universal ECEC system with adequate funding, one of the government's initiatives to address ECEs' low wages and recruitment and retention issues was the implementation of the ELCC Supplement program. However, we see from my findings that ECEs have identified many problems with the initiative because it does not adequately address the central issue of ECEs being underpaid and undervalued. In fact, because the funding is used as a supplement rather than as base funding to improve pay and quality within centres, many problems persist. These problems have to do with ECEC services operating as a commodity and a private responsibility

in a market economy; and the provincial supplement is handled as a private, individual-level issue; not addressing broad, sector-wide, structural undervaluing and underpayment. Hence, the lack of fair wages for ECEs remains a private problem because all risk and responsibility for earning better wages with the ELCC Supplement are in the hands of the individual ECE. Publicly managed, publicly-funded, and publicly-operated childcare programs can avoid market dysfunction and ensure affordability and accessible childcare for families and children and good wages and working conditions for early childhood educators.

My study participants identify many features of the ELCC Supplement that simply do not work to improve working conditions for ECEs (and there is no sense that the ELCC Supplement is improving conditions within centres, for the benefit of the children that they care for). The ELCC Supplement simply reinforced and underscored that ECEC is operating in a market economy. The participants stressed that they cannot survive as an ECE with their low wages alone, and the ELCC Supplement does little to improve this. The ELCC Supplement proved to be a source of additional work for ECEs, with the added paperwork and monitoring of hours so they were eligible for the Supplement.

As Veronica states, "You're not really making enough money to survive. You wouldn't be able to do it on a single income... You definitely cannot survive without it [ELCC Supplement]. For twelve or fifteen dollars an hour, it's not really enough money to survive." The ELCC Supplement only barely helps to keep ECEs working in the profession. The top-up is relatively low, the increments between educational steps are small and inadequate, and the way the funding is administered (not taxed at the source, need to apply and submit forms, need to qualify by working a set number of hours per month, not contributing to base income, etc.) is problematic according to the participants.

They perceive the ELCC Supplement as an “incentive/bonus” program to top up the low-wages of an early childhood educator, leaving employers “off the hook” -- and not responsible for providing decent, living wages. The bottom line is that childcare programs cannot be sustained without keeping ECEs wages low (Bennett, 2007). As the participants indicate, the ELCC Supplement is a temporary fix initiated by a disinterested government that can be taken away at any time. The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (2016) argued that government bonus programs in ECEC are a short-term “Band-Aid” solution because they are quick, superficial, and temporary - it can be stripped away at any time. The ELCC Supplement only works to keep ECEs in their current jobs; however, it is not an effective strategy for attracting new ECEs into the sector or encouraging some to pursue more post-secondary for a job that we continue to undervalue. The Supplement individualizes the problem, puts all risk and responsibilities in the hands of individual ECEs and fails to address broad, system and sector-wide problems. All-the-while, deep-rooted challenges (the undervaluing of their work, being underpaid, etc.) within the childcare sector remain untouched in Newfoundland and Labrador, as they continue to sit in a poorly structured market economy. What remains is an individual-level attempt to address a larger, structural issue.

Hyper Capitalism. Mcgrane (2014) argues that early childhood education and care programs in Newfoundland and Labrador represent a neoliberal system with a hyper-focus on capitalism, evident in the preponderance of for-profit programs. Based on the participants’ views, the ELCC Supplement program exhibits many features of neoliberalism with a high tolerance for the abuses of a capitalist system. For example, participants state that some operators use the ELCC Supplement system to their advantage by keeping wages low or including the ELCC Supplement amount in hourly wages in job advertisements. Tronto (2013) states that “this

pattern of creating structural inequalities through past interactions and then declaring them formally irrelevant for the next transaction is one of the most important tools for neoliberal thinking” (p. 126). In the context of ECEC, the childcare market model is built on a foundation of structural, gender inequalities. The lack of accessible and affordable childcare creates tensions for individuals (particularly women and single parents) entering the labour force. There is not enough support to end systematic oppression and inequalities produced by a market system that fails women, the families who need accessible childcare, and children's health and safety. The childcare market in Newfoundland and Labrador exhibits key features of a market economy. It forces competition (between ECEs hourly wages at childcare centres), pushes down wages, and tolerates abuses such as cheating and promoting individualism. Tronto (2013) suggests that the nature of care makes it incomparable to other commodities. She suggests that care and its complexities require time and cannot be made more efficient (Tronto, 2013). Therefore, childcare should not need to work in a market system because the nature of care and carework is completely incompatible with the market economy.

Precarious Work and Neoliberalism. As identified in the literature review of this study, the recruitment and retention issue in Newfoundland and Labrador ECEC system has persisted for decades (Ministry of Education, 2017). The supplement is actually an acknowledgment of this—where the state knows fully well that ECEs are being underpaid. In fact, this study’s findings show that this issue remains unchanged because of the continuous cycle of precarious working conditions (low wages, poor working conditions, and few, if any benefits). Joanne Morris from the College of North Atlantic Children’s Centre in St. John's Newfoundland states that there are systematic reasons why ECE wages are so low in Newfoundland and Labrador:

Childcare services are not profitable because about 80 percent of an operating budget

goes towards salaries, another 10 percent towards food and 10 percent towards consumable program supplies, rent, utilities. (as cited by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2014, para. 30-31)

Urban (2010) found that in neoliberal countries, a workforce sector may be increasingly regulated by the state (with or without the agreement of the sector) through greater training requirements, regulatory bodies and the standardization of practices without gaining autonomy, status, and power for the occupation. This supplement does not achieve power and autonomy for ECEs. Instead, earning better pay and having decent working conditions continue to be treated as individual (personal, rather than social or structural) problems. In this manner, the ECE is required to complete the additional paperwork and work a specific number of hours to receive the full supplement amount. If they have the slightest error on their application form, it's on them, and they must wait for an additional three months to earn what they rightfully deserve. Regarding owners/operators, many childcare centers do not have room in their budget to pay their employees decent wages unless they increase their family/parent fees. Then, the financial burden is on the family. This ELCC Supplement system indicates that the problem continues to be on an individualized level- the ECE, the owner/operation, or the family. No single individual can or should be blamed or penalized for what are clearly systematic inequalities in and for the sector. This system-wide and systemic problem stems from provincial and federal governments allowing childcare to continue to operate in a market system. The problems that my research revealed about the ELCC Supplement provide additional evidence that working in a market system does not work well.

Similarly, in this study, the participants stated that the professional association, AECENL, and the ECEs themselves felt devalued and disrespected because of the government's

lack of consultation with them. In this regard, the participants noted that the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association was consulted before decisions were made about the school system closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this was not the case for the Association for Early Childhood Educators for Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL). ECEs felt blindsided by the announcements that the government made regarding the COVID-related safety precautions put in place for the children and families in their care. Tronto (2013) recognized that care in a market system may not be the best way to provide care due to systematic reasons embedded in the market that cause inequalities for care workers. We are not going to move forward until we collectively recognize that childcare is a collective good that should be publicly funded. The current market-based system fails children's right to quality care and education, and women's right to access childcare and receive decent wages. If we want to change the way society views women as workers, we must work in solidarity with all women-dominated professions to address systemic inequalities, rather than against one another to ensure all voices and experiences are heard, valued and viewed as necessary for change.

The ELCC Supplement and Privilege Irresponsibility

Privilege irresponsibility. Privilege irresponsibility happens when those who hold both power and privilege maintain a hierarchical system through various passes (Tronto, 2013) that continues to be oppressive for marginalized groups. Zembylas, Bozalek, and Shefer (2014) examine Tronto's notion of privileged irresponsibility; they state that it arises from:

‘the unbalanced nature of caring roles and duties in our society’ and means that ‘[t]hose who are relatively privileged are granted by that privilege simply to ignore certain forms of hardships that they do not face’ Tronto (1993, 120). (p. 206)

Tronto (2013) points out that people who are the beneficiaries of privilege do not recognize the privilege they possess (to excuse themselves from doing or thinking about all the care that is done in the world) or the emotional consequences it has on marginalized bodies undertaking carework. Privilege irresponsibility is typically evident when there is a divide between a valued public sphere of the economy and a devalued private sphere of care (Tronto, 2013). The notion of privileged irresponsibility happens in ECEC when those who hold positions of power (government) are oblivious to how the system hurts those who have to navigate it (ECEs), in order to live well. The ELCC Supplement is an individualized solution to systemic wage disparities. This irresponsibility starts when the government passes down the responsibility to the employer, who passes it down to the educator, which thereby treats the system-wide problem as an individualized concern.

Government's Privileged Irresponsibility. This study's findings show how privileged irresponsibility is being played out in the Newfoundland and Labrador ECEC system by creating individualized pay system for educators through a government supplement. The ELCC Supplement in Newfoundland and Labrador represents a system that reiterates Tronto (2013) notion of privileged irresponsibility with the ignorance and misconceptions of what goes on in licensed childcare settings. The government exhibits privileged irresponsibility because privileged white policymakers decide what is/is not important for getting the ELCC Supplement without having practical experience in the profession or consulting with educators themselves to determine important factors for earning the ELCC Supplement. The government of NL recognized a problem with the recruitment and retention of qualified ECEs; however, because it is not a problem they face, minimal consultation is done with the women who experience the oppression. On the other hand, the participants feel that the government is really taking low

wages and recruitment and retention issues seriously. All participants in this study stated that they appreciated how the government is helping with their low wages. However, it is still not enough to end the injustice they feel as a result of living paycheck to paycheck and not affording essentials (ex., bills, groceries, housing, car payments, etc.). Since ECEC in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador operates within a neoliberal market system, more intervention at the public level is needed to address ECE disparities between wages and benefits. If our province continues to treat ECEC as a private responsibility, and as part of the private sector, we will continue to see high staff turnover rates and inequalities for women in the workplace.

Employer's Privileged Responsibility. In many cases, employers exhibit privileged irresponsibility by determining how much an ECE is or isn't worth, which is reflected in an educator's compensation and benefits. In this current ECEC system, employers continue to be allowed to underpay and undervalue carework and the onus is on ECEs to do the extra schooling and extra paperwork and reporting to receive a meagre supplement that will be taxed at the end of the fiscal year. In some cases, participants report that some operators sign off higher ECE certification levels or more hours worked on the floor in ELCC Supplement form to meet higher ELCC Supplement payment criteria for their employees. The true winners are the employers, who are allowed to continue to pay ECEs less than they are “worth” (as they are the real recipients of the subsidy). As the participants point out in this study, there are some owners/operators who use the ELCC Supplement to their advantage by keeping their educators' wages low. Additionally, as Abigail notes, employers continue to pay similar wages as when she first started working in childcare. Little has been done by ECE employers to address the issue of low wages and poor working conditions because the market for-profit system does not allow for

decent wages in ECEC. Even when there are abuses in the system, the pressure comes from economic necessity for higher earnings or employers themselves; and all risk of being fraudulent falls on individual ECEs and not on the employer. ECEs face a systemic problem of underpayment, across the sector and country. They must deal with low wages at the individual level, rather than treating this as a social or public responsibility.

Unfortunately, some educators do not receive adequate sick leave and vacation time. Many educators are required to do curriculum planning/pedagogical documentation/child development observations on their own time while they are expected to work long hours each day on the floor with children. These additional work hours are often not compensated on an ECEs paycheck. The reality is that ECEs do not get sufficient time in their workday to get done what is needed for the childcare program. This irresponsibility falls on the shoulders of the employer, because ECEs are required to work overtime without being compensated for it. Again, the childcare market (for-profit) system does not work well. It does not allow quality childcare programming while maintaining adult-child ratios because many programs cannot afford to pay for an additional staff member to relieve educators to get their paperwork/planning done. The senselessness of how care is invisible and undervalued in society will not change unless the nature of social caring is considered central to our political, policy and professional lives.

ECEs Responsibility. The ECE participants in this study indicate that much of the ELCC Supplement application responsibility falls on them (they have to work extra, monitoring their hours, filling forms, at times bending the rules, etc. in order to get paid what they are due). Delaney notes the ambiguous application process for the ELCC Supplement, “you have to redo the whole thing and go through the whole process again.” Additional work (to get a small top-up that is later taxed) is left in the hands of ECEs. ECEs must jump hurdles to receive the better pay

that they rightly deserve, while other professions, including some other female-dominated professions, receive better wages, without the additional work, reporting, scrutiny, or hassle. The participants felt like their education in ECEC continues to not matter (even with the ELCC Supplement that is supposed to reward higher educational credentials), considering they could find jobs that offer better pay and benefits elsewhere that require little education, such as food services. This was made clear in Lynn's declaration that "there's probably people at Tim Horton's making more than early childhood educators working with children." Participants remarked on the intensity of their ability to pay for their bills by living paycheck to paycheck to afford essentials. As Veronica states, "You're not really making enough money to survive. You wouldn't be able to do it on a single income."

The ECE workforce in Newfoundland and Labrador earn the lowest wages among all workers, and 96.2 percent of all staff are women (Neil, 2015). This statistic illustrates that there is a problem with public policy that impacts a woman's chances of earning a sustainable livelihood. Women need to be paid fairly, through actual wages, not through government incentives or supplements that do not count as income (banks have the right to deny educators for loans/mortgages, etc.), that educators need to apply, and with the risk of the Supplement being taken away. These women are also expected to be "grateful" and do extra work to self-report regularly and honestly, for the meagre top-up. Hara (2007) highlights that a carework labour force is treated as a constructed, "means of production, like equipment" (p. 25) to be used and replaced as needed. Hence, the work educators engage in is viewed as replaceable and unskilled, resulting in the devaluation of the ECEC workforce.

Like participants in the study by Shdaimah, Palley and Miller (2018), the participants in this study felt that the different payments based on an ECEs level of certification in the ELCC

Supplement is not enough. As indicated in the findings section, the participants highlighted many obstacles for an ECE to pursue higher education to earn a Level III or Level IV certification for higher pay in the ELCC Supplement (and the payoff for higher education was small). An ECE will only earn up to five-hundred or one-thousand dollars a year more than their less educated peers to increase their level of certification and education with the ELCC Supplement, and the hourly rate at a childcare centre does not necessarily improve. Whitebook and Sakai (2003) found that highly educated staff are more likely to leave a job if they earn lower wages. This study found the same relationship between qualifications and job retention. As Peyton states, “I believe the ECE program should be a steppingstone to other things. But again, something is missing. There is no steppingstone for other things like between the ECE program and going into other things like teaching.” However, ECEC should be treated as valued and valuable work, and not as something that educators should run away from. Until we recognize the importance of early care and education at a public level, with improved wages and working conditions, ECEC will continue to be viewed as a job we devalue. Researchers studying the professional lives of ECEs suggest that the movement towards professionalization in ECEC is based solely on increasing ECEs’ education and training without improving wages and working conditions (Johnson, 2019; Moss, 2010). In Newfoundland and Labrador, it is clearly the case the ECEs must take responsibility for greater professionalism yet manage and tolerate their low wages.

Key Recommendation: Calling for a Publicly Funded System in ELCC in Newfoundland and Labrador

Democratic Political Practice. Early childhood educators are the main resources for childcare; as a result, there needs to be “an increasing recognition that the work is complex” (Moss, 2006, p. 30). Moss (2011) argued that based on their local knowledge, ECEs should be

invited to engage in, “decision-making about the purposes, the practices and the environment of the” (p. 3) centre, as well as, “the evaluation of early childhood work through participatory methods” (p.3). Democracy calls for ECEs, working in both for-profit and non-for-profit centres, to be included and involved in decisions that directly affect them (i.e. ECE working conditions). Democratic political practice involves a collective decision-making process that should involve policy makers, owners, managers and ECEs.

Publicly Funded ELCC System. Fair wages should not be distributed through government supplements; rather, through base salaries of ECEs. According to the International Labour Organization (2018), carework in ECEC will be one of the most rapidly expanding sectors in the future and a public system would ensure that the ECEC sector would be understood, valued, recognized, and well-compensated for the work that they do. Abigail suggests, “If the government really feels that we’re important, they need to put their money where their mouth is and make sure it’s there [ELCC Supplement] all of the time.” I was not surprised by this finding given the uncertainty of how ECEs feel about when and if they will receive the ELCC Supplement quarterly payment amounts. One comprehensive step towards building a national or provincial childcare system to fund the ECE sector properly is through the implementation of a salary grid. By having a salary grid, ECEs will earn fair wages that reflect their experience and educational backgrounds, similar to other female and male-dominated professions. All grants and subsidies need to be pooled together into base funding for the childcare sector (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Childcare advocate Martha Friendly argues that after the COVID-19 pandemic, building a national childcare system in Canada will be “critical to rebuilding Canada’s economy” (para. 9) with 74% percent of families dependent on these services (Childcare Resource and Research

Unit, 2020). I stand in solidarity with this claim. By implementing a national childcare system, we are not only addressing the right of children and families to access quality and affordable childcare and early education, but we are also working towards addressing the oppression and exploitation of childcare workers.

Early childhood educators' working conditions, such as employee wages and benefits, are factors which contribute to the quality of service provided in childcare centres (Mullis, Cornille, Mullis and Taliano, 2003). Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips (1990) found that wages are the most important predictor of the quality of childcare services provided to children and their families. "A childcare center can become a stronger learning environment for children if... teachers are properly compensated, trained, satisfied with their job, and in a positive work environment" (Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, Taliano, 2003, p. 555). The lack of government policies that address the work of social reproduction, for instance, a national childcare system, result in perpetuating the care economy where the responsibility for social reproduction lies within the private sphere or the market. Furthermore, I believe that there needs to be enough spaces and funding for all children and families (including those who are disadvantaged) to have access to childcare like Canada's provincial and territorial school system. When we address this gap in ECEC, we are building an economy that views care and care workers as essential for addressing inequities produced in a system of unbalanced power.

ECE Provincial Salary Grid. This study's findings point to some recommendations that could significantly address the wages of ECEs and address the recruitment and retention issues in Newfoundland and Labrador ECEC programs. Knowing that the negative working conditions of ECEs have been proven to produce adverse effects on the quality of service childcare centres provided to its children, families, and employees, improving working conditions must be central

in childcare centre practices and policies (Adams, 1965; Clark and Oswald, 1996; Doherty et al., 2000; Kagan et al., 1987; & Whitebook and Sakai, 2003). A key recommendation emerging out of this study is the establishment of a provincial salary grid by the Newfoundland and Labrador government. A salary grid would illuminate wage disparities among ECEs with similar qualifications and experience levels.

In addition, improving and regulating the types of benefits in a salary grid provided to ECEs would also help retain ECEs within the profession of licensed childcare. However, for-profit childcare centres may resist this idea because it means losing out on profit due to increasing ECE wages and better benefits to meet the salary grid criteria. Careful attention and consideration should be given to implementing a salary grid whereby everyone is collectively responsible for maintaining the system. Existing provincial wage grids in the health, education, and community social service sectors provide useful benchmarks in developing ECE wages. A competitive, publicly funded provincial salary grid increases wages and provides consistency and recognition of the essential and valuable work of ECEs.

Limitations

This study was limited in a number of ways that may have affected the data collection and overall analysis. This study's leading limitation included the relatively small sample size, limited geographic location of the participants, and its lack of racial diversity. Although I indicated that the small sample size yielded rich and pertinent data, I believe that because it is largely homogenous, it should be enhanced. There is a need for the sample to be geographically diverse, with a larger sample with different ECE levels, various childcare programs, and a wider spread of locations (rural and urban areas). It would have also strengthened my research if my sample had included more ECEs that represented different ECE levels of AECENL certifications

(Level I, Level II, Level III, Level IV). Along with, a larger sample of ECEs who work in private vs. publicly funded childcare centres and their experiences with the ELCC Supplement would have enhanced the study. Additionally, it would be beneficial if I had the opportunity to interview Level IV ECEs with university degrees related to early childhood education.

Further Research

Given my findings, further research could examine early childhood educators' perspectives on a national/provincially-funded childcare system by asking in-depth questions regarding a salary grid and benefits needed in regards to benefits, such as sick days, vacation time, paid breaks, paid planning periods etc. Researchers may also choose to focus on the issue of possible unionization of workers. I would recommend a study in Newfoundland and Labrador that compares the working experiences of ECEs who are unionized and those who are not.

In summary, to end exploitation and oppression among early childhood educators in Newfoundland and Labrador, I believe we need to readdress where childcare stands in economic and political regimes by making community childcare services and carework a public rather than a private responsibility. The wages and benefits of ECEs must also reflect equal and compensable working conditions compared to school teachers based on education and experience. The critical decisions made for women-dominated professions must reflect their voices, experiences, and perspectives. The early childhood workforce is growing, and for-profit childcare centres are expanding so ECE working conditions are becoming a pressing issue. Thus, this issue “needs to encompass restructuring and rethinking” (Moss, 2006, p. 31) in an effort to ensure improved working conditions for early childhood educators who care for and educate young children.

Newfoundland and Labrador has an ageing population and is experiencing economic hardship; therefore, we must collectively work together to ensure that early childhood educators of our province have equitable financial, personal, and economic growth. With that said, I believe you can't have early education without the essential and ethical duty of carework. When children are provided with a safe and nurturing space where their care needs are met, they will succeed in their caring relations with others and the world around them. When we can provide a society where families can afford childcare, early childhood educators earn a living wage; then, we will raise a generation where care is a central concern of a democracy and public policy (Tronto, 2013).

APPENDIX

Appendix A – Research Ethics Board Approval

To: Melissa Russell

Early Childhood Studies

Re: REB 2020-060: Early Childhood Educators Understandings and Perspectives on the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement in the Province of Newfoundland & Labrador.

Date: March 24, 2020

Dear Melissa Russell,

The review of your protocol REB File REB 2020-060 is now complete. The project has been approved for a one year period. Please note that before proceeding with your project, compliance with other required University approvals/certifications, institutional requirements, or governmental authorizations may be required.

This approval may be extended after one year upon request. Please be advised that if the project is not renewed, approval will expire and no more research involving humans may take place. If this is a funded project, access to research funds may also be affected.

Please note that REB approval policies require that you adhere strictly to the protocol as last reviewed by the REB and that any modifications must be approved by the Board before they can be implemented. Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication from the Principal Investigator as to how, in the view of the Principal Investigator, these events affect the continuation of the protocol.

Finally, if research subjects are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research.

Please quote your REB file number (REB 2020-060) on future correspondence.

Congratulations and best of luck in conducting your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Alkoby".

Dr. Asher Alkoby, LL.B., LL.M., S.J.D.
Chair, Ryerson University Research Ethics Board
(416)979-5000 ext. 2491
aalkoby@ryerson.ca
rebchair@ryerson.ca
<http://www.ryerson.ca/research>

The Following protocol attachments have been reviewed and approved.

- Consent Form (1).pdf (submitted on: 03 Feb 2020)
- Recruitment Flyer _ Participant Letter Recruitment (1).pdf (submitted on: 03 Feb 2020)
- Scholarly Review - References (1).pdf (submitted on: 03 Feb 2020)
- Data Collection Tool - Interview Questions (1).pdf (submitted on: 03 Feb 2020)
- Letter of approval -AECENL.pdf (submitted on: 03 Feb 2020)
- Revised - Consent Form (1).pdf (submitted on: 18 Mar 2020)
- TCPS 2 CORE certificate..png (submitted on: 18 Mar 2020)
- Revised Data Collection Tool - Interview Questions (1).pdf (submitted on: 18 Mar 2020)
- Early Learning Child Care Supplement.pdf (submitted on: 18 Mar 2020)
- Revised Recruitment Flyer and Participant Letter Recruitment (2).pdf (submitted on: 18 Mar 2020)
- Consent Form (third revision)..pdf (submitted on: 24 Mar 2020)

If any changes are made to the attached document throughout the course of the research, an amendment **MUST** be submitted to, and subsequently approved by the REB.

Appendix B – Participant Recruitment Letter

Recruitment Letter for the Association of Early Childhood Educators to share with Early Childhood Educators in St. John's, Newfoundland

Do you know any Early Childhood Educators working in licenced childcare that would like to voice their opinions on the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement? If so, please contact Melissa Russell for more information about how you can get involved in my research study. This study will be carried out in partial fulfilment of the researcher's master's degree requirements.

The aims of this study are:

- To better understand Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) experiences with and perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Supplement
- To hear the voices of ECEs with a variety of qualifications (Level I, Level II, Level III, and Level IV) on their own experiences with the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement

You may be eligible to participate if:

- You are a qualified early childhood educator (Level I, Level II, Level III, Level IV) with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL)
- You must be working in licensed childcare (non-for-profit, private, or government-funded childcare) in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in the city of St. John's.
- You must currently be eligible/receive the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement and are willing to report your experiences with this government supplement.

Participants will be asked to:

- Share their experiences with the researcher on a recorded Zoom phone call. This interview will take a maximum of one hour.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information — please email me at melissa.russell@ryerson.ca

Thank you for your time.

I look forward to hearing from some of you!

Melissa Russell

--

Melissa Russell, BA ECS (Hons), RECE

Student, MA Early Childhood Studies, Ryerson University

melissa.russell@ryerson.ca

This Research has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board REB #2020-060

Appendix C – Participant Recruitment Flyer

Early Childhood Educators' Experiences with and Perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement in the Province of Newfoundland & Labrador

- Are you an Early Childhood Educator working in St. John's?
- My research, for my Major Research Paper towards my Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies at Ryerson University, looks to better understand the impact of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement on the lives of ECEs
- I'm looking to recruit 12-20 ECEs who are willing to share their perspectives and experiences with the Supplement.

WHO: Early Childhood Educators (Level I, Level II, Level III, Level IV) working in the city of St. Johns, Newfoundland? You must currently work in licensed childcare (private or non-for-profit) and be receiving the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Supplement.

WHAT: One time, one hour, audio recorded, one-on-one Zoom interview about your experiences with and perspectives of the ELCC Supplement.

Participation in study is voluntary and confidential.

Interview topics include the following:

- What do you like/ dislike about the ELCC Supplement?
- Do you think it is an effective recruitment strategy for the ECE profession?
- If you could, what would you change about the ELCC Supplement?

WHERE: Ryerson University, Zoom communication

If you are interested or would like more details, please email Melissa Russell,

melissa.russell@ryerson.ca

This Research has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board (REB)
REB #2020-060

Appendix D – Letter of Approval

**ASSOCIATION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS
OF NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR**

January 29th, 2020

RE: Letter of Approval

The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland & Labrador (AECENL) is a non-profit organization that has been incorporated since 1989. AECENL is dedicated to professionalism in Early Childhood Education and to quality child care and education for young children.

AECENL is operated by an elected volunteer board of directors representing all regions of the province and all parts of the early learning and child care sector. AECENL also employs an Executive Director, Registrar of Child Care Services Certification and an Administrative Assistant.

In 2000, AECENL received a contract from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to implement the Child Care Services Certification system and to develop and deliver opportunities for professional learning (PL) to the early learning and child care (ELCC) sector. To work in an ELCC setting ECEs are required to hold valid certification and complete PL hours in order to renew their certification.

AECENL has thirty years of experience in the delivery of PL that includes six semester-based courses, face-to-face workshops, webinars, online workshops, PL lending library, PL grant fund, regional conferences and an annual provincial conference.

Melissa Russell has contacted AECENL to provide assistance with recruiting participants for her study on *Early Childhood Educators Perspectives and Understandings of the Early Learning Child Care Supplement*. Where ECEs are spread across the province, many residing in rural areas AECENL uses several methods of distributing information to those who hold certification and membership. AECENL will assist Melissa by recruiting ECEs from across the province of Newfoundland and Labrador through e-mail and their private Facebook group page. AECENL respects the confidentiality and anonymity associated with the project and understands that they will only be distributing information and will not be receiving any information from participants, nor will they know who has participated in the study.

Regards,

Skye Crawford Taylor – Executive Director of AECENL

P.O. Box 8657 St. John's, NL A1B 3T1
Phone: 709 579-3028 (Toll Free: 877 579-3028) Fax: 709 579-0217 (Toll Free: 877 579-0217)
executivedirector@aecenl.ca www.aecenl.ca

Appendix E – Consent Form

School of Early Childhood Studies
Faculty of Community Services
Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies

Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

Title of the study: Early Childhood Educators' Experiences with and Perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement

Investigator: This research study is being conducted by Melissa Russell under the supervision of Dr. Rachel Langford, from Early Childhood Studies, Faculty of Community Services at Ryerson University. Melissa Russell is completing this research study as part of their graduate studies program for the partial completion of their Master of Arts degree.

Researcher: **Melissa Russell**
melissa.russell@ryerson.ca

Supervisors: **Dr. Rachel Langford**
School of Early Childhood Studies
Ryerson University
rlangfor@ryerson.ca
416-979-5000, x 2516

Dr. Patrizia Albanese
School of Sociology
Ryerson University
palbanese@ryerson.ca

Purpose of the study: This research study is part of the principal researcher's Master's Research Paper (MRP) in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies degree program at Ryerson University.

The researcher will investigate a maximum of twenty participants' experiences with the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement. In order to be eligible, you must be an Early Childhood Educator working in licensed childcare in St. John's, NL. The researcher is recruiting (a) Level I,

(b) Level II, (c) Level III, (d) and Level IV Early Childhood Educators registered with the Association of Early Childhood Education of Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL). Licensed childcare settings must include not-for-profit and private licensed childcare centres. The data collected for this assignment will be used for the purpose of completing a master's research paper (MRP) by the researcher. The data may be used in future publications by the researcher.

Description of the study: The purpose of this research study is to gather Early Childhood Educators perspectives and understandings on the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement.

You will be asked to participate in a one-hour, one on one, semi-structured, open-ended individual interview about your perspectives and understanding of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement. The interview will take approximately 1 hour and will be done over the phone/via Zoom communication.

You will be asked open-ended questions and will be given the opportunity to elaborate on your perspectives and experiences. All responses, upon consent, will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Participants will have the opportunity to read the transcripts of their interviews and will have one week (7 days) to make any changes using the "Track Changes" tool in Microsoft Word.

- **Sample questions:** Please tell me what the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement means to you. Do you feel that the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement is an effective recruitment strategy for the ECE field? Why or why not?

Benefits: The aim of the study is to voice early childhood educators' experiences with and perspectives of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement. This study will contribute to a growing body of literature seeking to address the recruitment and retention issues in the early childhood education and care profession. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

Risks: Minimal psychological risk may occur when an educator is asked to speak about their experiences, perspectives, and understanding of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement. I will work to reduce this risk by ensuring you that the information you share is entirely confidential and voluntary; that you can skip any question; and that you can stop participating at any time. I will be sure not to disclose your name, place of employment or other identifying information to reduce any (minimal) financial, professional and legal risk to you. With Newfoundland & Labrador having a small early childhood education community, there is a potential risk that your participant may be identified in the study. Please see financial risks.

Minimal financial, professional and legal risk may occur if and when a participant discloses information to the researcher about child abuse, neglect or other information that falls under duty to report for Registered Early Childhood Educators.

Supports for participants to talk about care and care practices can be accessed through the Association of Early Childhood Educators website and if the participant feels there is a need to

report any suspicion of child abuse or neglect, the information is available from the College of Early Childhood Educators

https://www.collegeece.ca/en/Documents/Professional_Advisory_Duty_to_Report.pdf

Financial Risks: If a participant speaks negatively about employers and/or the supplement, and are subsequently identified in the research findings this may cause financial risks.

Confidentiality: Your responses and confidentiality will be protected throughout the process of this study. A fictitious name (pseudonym) will be used for you and any specific identifiable characteristics will be altered. The research will not be collecting any identifying information about your place of work. Your perspectives and opinions will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. Direct quotes from you may be used in the final report, but they will not be attributed to you or reveal your identity.

Participants will have the right to review/edit copies of the transcript of their interview if they choose to do so, as stated above.

Duty to Report & Loss of Confidentiality: If at any point during the interview, the researcher is notified of an instance or suspects any child abuse or neglect concerning the welfare of a child, the researcher will be forced to terminate the interview. As the researcher is also a RECE, they are bound by a 'Duty to Report' clause in the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 in accordance with the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice by the College of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, in this case, participants will forfeit their right to confidentiality.

Data Storage: The audio recordings of the interview will be destroyed upon transcription and verification. Participants will be given a copy of their transcriptions to the email that they provided to the researcher for review. If participants do not provide their input within the seven-day period, it will be assumed that participants are satisfied with the transcripts as it is. Transcripts will be kept on the researchers Ryerson University Google Drive which is locked and password protected with two-factor authentication. This information is accessible only to the researcher and MRA supervisor for five (5) years.

All digital consent forms will be stored on the researcher's Ryerson University Google Drive which is locked password protected with the two-factor authentication. This information is accessible only to the researcher and MRP supervisor for five (5) years. No hard copy of consent forms will be stored upon digitalization. After five (5) years the researcher will delete all data related to this research study.

The researcher's supervisors Dr. Rachel Langford and Dr. Patrizia Albanese, may also have access to all research data. Five-years after the completion of the study, all research data will be destroyed by the researcher (Melissa Russell). Therefore, Dr. Rachel Langford and Dr. Patrizia Albanese can only access this data for five years in their pass-word protected Ryerson Google Doc/Ryerson email.

Voluntary nature of Participation: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in the study or not. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you can

skip that question or choose not to answer. You may stop participating at any time. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to not have your data included in this study. The final date to withdraw participant data will be up to one week after your interview.

Your choice whether you would like to participate or not will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University, the School of Early Childhood Studies, Melissa Russell, or Dr. Rachel Langford or Dr. Patrizia Albanese.

Findings: All Ryerson University Major Research Papers (MRPs) are available at the Ryerson University digital repository. Upon completion of the study, the final paper will be available at <https://digital.library.ryerson.ca/> and open for all to access. This data may be used for future PhD research studies.

Questions about the Study: The data in this study will be used for the MRP and maybe used for future publications. If you have any questions about the research now, please ask them now. If you have any questions later, you may contact:

Researcher: **Melissa Russell**
melissa.russell@ryerson.ca

Supervisors: **Dr. Rachel Langford**
School of Early Childhood Studies
Ryerson University
rlangfor@ryerson.ca
416-979-5000, x **2516**

Dr. Patrizia Albanese
School of Sociology
Ryerson University
palbanese@ryerson.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

This Research has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board (REB)
REB #2020-060

Appendix F – Data Collection Tool

Open-ended, Semi-structured Interview Question

1. To begin, how many years have you been working in licensed childcare? (Probes: It sounds like you have a lot of experience... What does your typical day look like? What do you like about your job?)
2. What kind of education or training did you have to get where you are in your job?
3. Can you tell me what the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement means to you? (Probes: What do you like best about it? What do you like least about it?).
4. Do you feel that the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement is an effective recruitment strategy for the ECE field? Why or why not?
5. How do you feel about the payment granted to individuals based on their educational qualifications in Early Learning and Child Care Supplement? (Probe: I've heard that some ECEs have argued that regardless of education qualifications we are doing the same work; therefore, should be paid the same. What do you think?). Reference:

Position	Level	Full Annual Supplement Amounts Effective April 1 st , 2018
Early Childhood Educator (Child Care Centre) and Early Childhood Educator (Family Child Care)	One	\$ 11,600.00
	Two	\$ 13,100.00
	Three	\$ 13,600.00
	Four	\$ 14,100.00
Administrator (Child Care Centre) and Monitor (Family Child Care Agency)	Two	\$ 14,600.00
	Three	\$ 15,100.00
	Four	\$ 15,600.00

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017, p. 4).

6. What do you think contributes to better work performance in the early childhood education and care profession? (Probes: What do you think might motivate more people to enter the profession? Do you think more education for ECEs results in better childcare? If yes, how might we motivate more people to pursue more education?)
7. If you were advising the minister on changes to be made in the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement, what would you say?
8. Let's just say the government changed the policy and took this supplement away. How would you feel about this?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share about the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement?

This Research has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board (REB)
REB #2020-060

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