Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood: What do Early Childhood Educators Need to Know?

by

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ABSTRACT

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SEXUALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: WHAT DO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS NEED TO KNOW?

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University of Guelph, 2023

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Sexuality development is a fundamental domain of development that unfolds from birth (WHO, 2006; WHO et al., 2017). As practitioners supporting well-being throughout early childhood (i.e., birth up to age 12), Early Childhood Educators are uniquely positioned to support children’s sexuality development. The purpose of Study 1 was to review pre-service ECE programs in Ontario to determine the preparation ECEs receive to support sexuality development. A content analysis indicated that although sexual development is not explicitly included in many ECE training programs, there are overlapping competencies within educator-training where the development of sexuality could be addressed. The purpose of Study 2 was to define the scope of developmentally appropriate practice for ECEs supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood. Key informant interviews outlined various competencies (e.g., understanding sexuality and gender development), considerations (e.g., culturally sensitive care), and skills (e.g., communication) ECEs need during pre-service training.

Key words: developmentally appropriate practice, early childhood education, sexuality development, Ontario, qualitative content analysis, key informant interviews
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<td>CCEYA</td>
<td><em>Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014</em></td>
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<td>CECE</td>
<td>College of Early Childhood Educators</td>
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<td>CSA</td>
<td>Child Sexual Abuse</td>
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<td>CSE</td>
<td>Comprehensive Sexuality Education</td>
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<td>DAP</td>
<td>Developmentally Appropriate Practice</td>
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<td>DECE</td>
<td>Designated Early Childhood Educator</td>
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<td>RC</td>
<td>Resource Consultant</td>
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<td>RECE/ECE</td>
<td>Registered Early Childhood Educators/ Early Childhood Educators</td>
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<td>SIECCAN</td>
<td>Sex Information and Education Council of Canada</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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<td>2SLGBTQINA+</td>
<td>Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Nonbinary, and Asexual</td>
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Introduction

The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the importance of holistic approaches to health that include physical, emotional, mental, social, and sexual well-being (WHO et al., 2010). The Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) supports this vision of holistic well-being through their emphasis of sexuality education\(^1\) as an initiative that supports overall health (SIECCAN, 2019). Here,

“comprehensive sexual health education [is] broadly aimed at equipping people throughout the lifespan to enhance sexual health and well-being (e.g., having respectful and satisfying interpersonal relationships, increased self-acceptance, increased capacity to access sexual and reproductive health services)” (SIECCAN, 2019, p.12).

However, sexuality is considered an adult phenomenon (Taylor, 2010) and therefore early childhood is widely absent from Canadian initiatives for sexuality education (see Balter et al., 2021a for review). Currently in Canada, there are no provincial mandates to ensure that Early Childhood Educators (ECE/RECE) are trained to understand and address the development of sexuality in the early years (Balter et al., 2016; 2018; 2021a). Moreover, preliminary environmental scans indicate that none of Ontario’s Early Childhood Education training programs provide pre-service educators with the knowledge base to successfully support this development (Balter et al., 2018). As such, the current project explores what developmentally appropriate early years’ sexuality education can look like in practice, replicating, in part, work done by Marques and colleagues (2017), which explores the meaning of developmentally appropriate when addressing sexuality education in adolescence. Furthermore, the current project expands upon evolving research on the development of sexuality in the early years (e.g., Balter et al., 2016; 2018; 2021a; 2021b; Cacciatore et al., 2019; 2020a; 2020b), guided by the framework of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), a perspective that aims to contextualize what constitutes as developmentally appropriate (NAEYC, 2020). The following review of the literature outlines the importance of supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood.

\(^1\) Other terms for sexuality education have been used to help combat the misinformation and preconceptions of the word ‘sexuality’ when discussing it in the context of childhood (e.g., Body-Emotion Education; Cacciatore et al., 2020a). However, the current study draws upon the literature to show that pre-service educators need to be knowledgeable about sexuality and gender development in childhood. As such, the current study acknowledges and supports alternative terms but continues to use “sexuality education” to refer to the knowledge educators need to support their professional practice.
and describes the considerations and barriers to the inclusion of sexuality health and education in the early years sector.

**Literature Review**

Research has established that sexuality develops and unfolds across the lifetime, starting at birth with infants’ awareness and exploration of their senses and body (e.g., Cacciatore et al., 2019; Wurtele & Kenny, 2011). From there, infants gain an awareness of their interactions with others, their own gender identities, the way that others differ from themselves, and begin to explore boundaries and social norms throughout childhood (WHO et al., 2010). The WHO explains that sexuality education is as a necessary support for children as they gain an understanding of themselves and learn to make critical, informed decisions about their sexuality (WHO et al., 2010), specifically amending terminology in their definitions of sexuality education to be inclusive of a variety of education settings (e.g., kindergarten, early childhood education; WHO et al., 2017). SIECCAN underscores the importance of sexuality education for children, stating that “all people should have access to age-appropriate sexual health information and resources beginning in early childhood and continuing across the life span” (SIECCAN, 2019, p. 23). Additionally, children have a right to comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) that supports their sexual health from an informed position, free from adult norms and expectations (Balter et al., 2021a; UN General Assembly, 1989). CSE uses a biopsychosocial approach to sexuality which recognizes the complexities of health and well-being, using a positive, empowering approach to sharing information about human relationships and sexuality (Marques et al., 2017; SIECANN, 2019). Sexual health refers to sexuality as a facet of holistic well-being (e.g., physical, emotional) through an inclusive, rights-based lens (WHO, 2006). Truly comprehensive sexuality education incorporates mental, social, physical, and emotional well-being in the support of overall health (Bialystok, 2019; Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018).

**Education in the Early Years**

In the Canadian context, education is mandated and overseen by the various provincial governments. In Ontario, the early years (i.e., 0-8 years; NAEYC, 2020) training and curriculum are determined by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Furthermore, in the Ontario early learning sector, the guiding frameworks are divided between pre-service training documents (e.g., *Early Childhood Education Program Standard*; Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and
Universities, 2012) and pedagogical support documents (e.g., Early Learning for Every Child Today, ELECT, and How Does Learning Happen?: Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years, HDLH; Best Start Expert Panel, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). The landscape of early learning in Ontario and the guiding sector documents will be expanded upon in this section.

**Early Childhood Education in Ontario**

To guide and regulate the field, the Ontario Ministry of Education and College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) released the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 (CCEYA, 2014), Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007 (ECE Act, 2007), Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (CECE, 2017), and the Early Childhood Education Program Standard (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012). Together, the CCEYA and the ECE Act regulate the practice (e.g., cleaning requirements, ratios; CCEYA, 2014) and the profession (e.g., regulations for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs), the formation of the CECE; ECE Act, 2007), respectively. As the governing organization, the CECE oversees the regulation of the sector to protect the best interests of the public (CECE, 2020a). The CECE released the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice which defines the “scope and nature of the profession” (CECE, 2017), providing the ethical guidelines (e.g., responsibilities to children; CECE, 2017), and practice standards (e.g., caring and responsive relationships; CECE, 2017). The Early Childhood Education Program Standard (hereafter referred to as the Program Standard) outlines the learning outcomes, job-specific skills, and breadth of knowledge that successful pre-service early childhood education programs must include to be accredited by the CECE (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012). To be eligible for accreditation, institutions must demonstrate the ways in which their pre-service ECE training programs meet the Program Standard. Through emphasis of supporting holistic development, the Program Standard indeed calls for supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood, though there is a need to expand this to explicitly include sexuality education (Balter et al., 2021a). Beyond the Program Standard document, there is no further provincial guidance for the content and curriculum of pre-service training programs.

**Pedagogical Support**

To guide the practice of early childhood education in Ontario, the Ministry of Education
released an early learning framework (i.e., ELECT; Best Start Expert Panel, 2007) and guiding pedagogical resource (i.e., HDLH; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (ELECT) outlines how development unfolds across intersecting domains of development (i.e., social, emotional, language, cognitive, and physical) and provides an overview of age-specific milestones based on normative development (e.g., within cognitive development, tracking moving objects is an indicator of developing spatial awareness; Best Start Expert Panel, 2007). To complement this resource, ELECT is accompanied by *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years* (HDLH; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), a pedagogical guide for implementing evidence-based strategies to support learning. Together, these documents outline goals based on developmental milestones (i.e., ELECT) and a pedagogical framework of how to support children in achieving these objectives (i.e., HDLH; Best Start Expert Panel, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; Timmons & Airton, 2020).

Despite these pedagogical documents emphasizing the importance of supporting holistic well-being, sexuality is excluded from the developmental milestones considered (Balter et al., 2021a; Best Start Expert Panel, 2007). However, Timmons and Airton (2020) explain that through a gender expansive lens, ELECT and HDLH provide the framework for supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood. As the pedagogical documents emphasize belonging, expression, engagement, and well-being as foundations for learning to occur, there are implied connections between supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood and fulfilling the professional responsibilities required of all educators in Ontario (Best Start Expert Panel, 2007; CECE, 2020a; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; Timmons & Airton, 2020). While ELECT guides curriculum, HDLH emphasizes emergent curriculum, involving responsive scaffolding in which educators create opportunities for learning that build from children’s evolving interests (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; Stacey, 2009).

**Emergent Curriculum**

Emergent curriculum involves incorporating both child-led and teacher-led education, with reflexive practice and professional knowledge, to design play-based, inclusive learning experiences for children (Stacey, 2009; Wien, 2015). Some interpretations of emergent curriculum can be problematic, focusing on norm-based metrics of development and gender
expression (see Surtees, 2008 for commentary), or failing to balance child and teacher directed learning. A strict child-led pedagogical philosophy, on the one hand, only allows for narratives that children are consistently exposed to (Langford, 2010; Surtees & Gunn, 2010). This may leave out many groups and lived experiences beyond the heteronormative, able-bodied scripts that dominate the societal model of acceptable behaviours (Davies & Kenneally, 2020; Farley, 2018). Relying solely on teacher-led learning, on the other hand, is in direct contrast to the principles of emergent curriculum, which emphasize the co-creation of learning experiences between children and educators (Stacey, 2009). Exclusive teacher-led learning is unidirectional, in line with positivist approaches (Canella, 1997), and will not be used for the current project to understand program planning in the early years. In its true intention, emergent curriculum is the integration of children’s knowledge and educator-facilitated scaffolding to build on children’s needs and interests through co-creation of learning opportunities that enhance well-being and development ( Nxumalo et al., 2020; Stacey, 2009).

There is evidence in the literature that children in the early years display curiosity about their own and others’ bodies and the physical differences between sexes (e.g., curiosity around toileting, role playing doctor; Balter et al., 2016; Cacciatore et al., 2019; Cacciatore et al., 2020b; Kurtuncu et al., 2015; Volbert, 2000), reproduction, pregnancy and birth (Cacciatore et al., 2020b; Kurtuncu et al., 2015; Volbert, 2000), relationships and acceptable displays of affection (e.g., hugging, kissing, playing house; Cacciatore et al., 2019; Kurtuncu et al., 2015), unacceptable and unsafe forms of touching (Cacciatore et al., 2020b), gender-based norms and scripts (Volbert, 2000), and social norms, taboos, and privacy to explore boundaries of socially acceptable behaviours (Cacciatore et al., 2020b). Thus, including training on the development of sexuality in early childhood in pre-service education prepares educators with the resources, knowledge, and language to support sexual health in ways aligned with children’s developmental level. Furthermore, research has shown that 10% of children’s curiosity about sexuality is expressed verbally (e.g., in the form of questions), while 90% is expressed behaviourally (Cacciatore et al., 2020b). Thus, educators need to expand beyond answering questions to support all expressions of sexual development as it emerges throughout early childhood (Cacciatore et al., 2019). This approach adds further rationale for the need to embed CSE into the early childhood context through educators’ informed knowledge of sexual health and well-being,
combined with their professional ability to co-create meaningful learning experiences (Balter et al., 2021b; Stacey, 2009). Finnish ECE curriculum is an example of education policy supporting children’s knowledge of personal safety skills (see Cacciatore et al., 2023).

Ultimately, supporting children’s curiosities falls under the principles of ELECT, suggesting that this domain has philosophical support from Ontario’s guiding documents for early childhood education (Best Start Expert Panel, 2007; Timmons & Airton, 2020). Despite this, there is no explicit mention of the development of sexuality in early childhood within ELECT, nor is their guidance on a federal or provincial level for supporting children’s sexual health and well-being in this domain (Balter et al., 2018). In summary, the research highlights the necessity from a developmental perspective (e.g., Cacciatore et al., 2019) and the alignment with Ontario’s pedagogical framework (e.g., Timmons & Airton, 2020), that CSE to be included in early years education. Moreover, there is a need to investigate how to best support pre-service training, ensuring educators are equipped with the knowledge to adequately support the development of sexuality in early childhood (Balter et al., 2021a).

A Journey Through Sexuality Education Curriculum in Ontario

Despite the World Health Organization positioning that sexual well-being is essential to overall health (WHO et al., 2010), in 2010, attempts to update Ontario’s 1998 sexuality education curriculum were met with heavy debate (see Osbourne, 2019 for a review of the history of sexuality education in Ontario). In the Canadian context, education falls under the authority of the provincial governments; therefore, decisions regarding education are intertwined with each of the provinces’ political landscapes. This section outlines a brief overview of decisions made by Ontario’s provincial government over the last three decades with regards to sexuality education curriculum for children in Kindergarten through Grade 12.

In 2010, the Ontario government updated the content of sexuality education in elementary (i.e., grades 1-8) and secondary (i.e., grades 9-12) curriculum, replacing the then outdated 1998 curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998). The updated 2010 curriculum was redacted after public protests and political pressure to remove specific content (i.e., sexuality education) from the public education curriculum (Bialystok, 2018; Bialystok & Wright, 2019; Bialystok et al., 2020; CBC News, 2010). After winning the 2015 election, Ontario’s Liberal government proposed a revisiting of the 2010 curriculum amendments (CBC News, 2015a) and
pushed for a comprehensive approach to sexual health education. By 2015, the proliferation of screen media and internet communication technologies (e.g., social media sites) provided additional reason for public education to address the role of technology and social media in spreading misinformation, facilitating online relationships, and increased access to information, including information available to children engaging with internet-based communication and media (Anderson & Raine, 2017; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015a; 2015b). However, despite consultation with parents and qualified experts, there was continued backlash; the protests resulted in wide-spread misinformation on the aim of the curriculum updates (Saarreharju et al., 2019). As a result of the tension, parents pulled their children from school and mainstream media reported job losses in the education sector due to the protests (Bialystok & Wright, 2019).

Upon winning the 2018 election, the Conservative government repealed the 2015 curriculum, replacing it with a temporary curriculum that blended content from the 1998 curriculum with content from the redacted 2010 curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998; 2015a; 2015b; 2018; 2019). Subsequently, the Conservative government put forth the 2019 curriculum, starkly similar to the 2015 curriculum which they denounced as part of the 2018 election campaign (Bialystok & Wright, 2019). The minor changes from the 2015 curriculum included reducing discussion of 2SLGBTQINA+ issues and postponing conversations of gender identity from grade six to grade eight (Ontario Ministry of Education 2019; CTV News, 2019). The final 2019 curriculum update came with a caveat that parents of young children (up to grade eight) could choose to remove their children from classes during sexual health education (CBC News, 2019; Saarreharju et al., 2019).

The division in parent perspectives on the sexuality education curriculum became a political platform when the widespread unease over sexuality education was used in the 2018 election campaigns to leverage the current post-truth era, whereby personal perspectives are viewed as more important than established knowledge (see Bialystok et al., 2020). Leveraging post-truth ideologies is executed by promoting and protecting the idea that parents have wide-

2 2SLGBTQINA+: Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Nonbinary, and Asexual people (SIECCAN, 2019, p.25), firstly recognizing that Indigenous people on Turtle Island, or Canada, recognized sexual orientations and gender identities beyond, and before, the colonization of these concepts.
reaching expertise knowledge, often meaning experts are ignored (Bialystok et al., 2020). In the Ontario curriculum debates, dissenting discourses positioned those who supported sexuality education reform as against children, not acknowledging the empirical evidence outlining the beneficial outcomes of inclusive sexual health education curriculum (SIECCAN, 2019), or against religious freedoms, leaning on homophobic and xenophobic representations of religious considerations (e.g., Bialystok, 2018; Khan et al., 2020).

**Unpacking the Discourses of Sexuality Education Curriculum in Ontario**

The aforementioned public backlash to revised versions of the Ontario sexuality education curriculum altered the way sexual health education was implemented in school-based settings. The public conversations surrounding the appropriateness of sexual health education for children reflect societal views of childhood and are unpacked throughout this section. Further, this section will discuss the public discourses during the curriculum debates, which integrated concerns from parents and religious groups, representing complex intersection of sociopolitical barriers, and the media coverage of the situation. Outlining the nuances of these public discourses is particularly important in light of the significant changes to public education which resulted.

**Societal Views of Childhood.** The widespread contention over educating children on sexuality highlights fears that such conversations open the doors for the sexualization of children (Hornor, 2004). These fears stem from intersections of philosophical ideas of childhood (Burman, 2017; Jarkovská & Lamb, 2019; Taylor, 2010) and the rise of Christianity which made explicit connections between innocence and sexlessness (see Piper, 2018). Historically, a white, able-bodied, middle-class child is constructed as the most innocent and ideal (Davies & Kenneally, 2020; Jarkovská & Lamb, 2019); the further the departure from the ideal, the less innocent a child is perceived to be, and thus, the less society works to protect them. This rhetoric allows for normativity to be harmfully redistributed as protecting childhood innocence (Balter et al., 2021a; Davies & Kenneally, 2020; Piper, 2018). As colonization positioned white Christians as the dominant population, this further powered the overarching discourse that sexuality (as understood from an adult lens) and its expressions are shameful (i.e., sinful) and need to be separate from the purity of childhood. Furthermore, this moral burden falls upon adults, specifically parents, to preserve this notion of innocence and keep children separate from adult
society (Jarkovská & Lamb, 2019; Taylor, 2010). This early positioning of parents as the protectors of childhood has transformed into the idea that parents have wide-reaching expert knowledge (Bialystok, 2018). However, comprehensive sexuality education is not about forcing sexuality and sexual development upon children, and rather, focuses on empowering people with foundational knowledge and skills for self-protection and sexual well-being (WHO, 2006).

**Public Perspectives of Sexuality Education Curriculum.** The proposed Ontario curriculum was opposed by a small proportion of the public, namely parents and dominant religious groups. Largely, these parties oppose the inclusion of sexuality education in schools, explaining this choice as an attack on religious beliefs, and more broadly, on childhood itself (Bialystok, 2018; Bialystok et al., 2020); others believe that these conversations should be conducted in the home (Shipley, 2015). This is in contrast to research outlining that parents are unprepared to address sexuality development when it emerges in early childhood (Stone et al., 2017). Moreover, research has demonstrated that the majority of Canadian parents indeed support comprehensive school-based sexuality education (Wood et al., 2021), with 87% of parents indicating support for, not only the inclusion of sexuality education in schools, but also for the topics being proposed (e.g., communication skills, building healthy relationships; McKay et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2021).

**Media Coverage of Ontario’s Sexuality Education Curriculum.** The primary focus of media coverage surrounding the Ontario sexuality curriculum updates positioned contrasting views of rejection (e.g., religious groups and parents) and acceptance (e.g., parents and general public) in response to the curriculum changes (Shipley, 2015). While rejection of the curriculum updates came mainly from parents and Catholic religious groups, the degree to which minority religious groups were assigned responsibility for the opposition to these updates was disproportionate and reflected widely held societal prejudices (Khan et al., 2020; Rayside, 2010). Specifically, Muslim groups were misidentified as being the primary protesters of the curriculum updates (Bialystok & Wright, 2019).

Although there are misconceptions over how religious groups view sexuality stemming from...
from racism and xenophobia (see Dhoot, 2017), there are clear efforts by many religious groups that advocate for CSE, choosing interpretations of their religions that embrace diversity and expression (CBC News, 2015b; Shah, 2016). In response to the xenophobic and Islamophobic beliefs that these cultures are against sexuality education, Muslim groups in Ontario voiced their approval of the proposed curriculum updates stating, “this curriculum is an opportunity for Muslim families to have mutual, two-way dialogue about values, relationships, marriage and sexuality” (Murtaza in CBC News, 2015b, para. 4). Emerging literature further explores these interpretations, “Islam, in its true meaning of peace and justice, accommodates the individual’s sexual orientation as an intrinsic part of their biological and psychological makeup” (Hendricks, 2010, p. 32). Religious and cultural expressions are unique and cannot be considered a unified perspective (Hoel & Henderson-Espinoza, 2017). Individual religious denominations and leaders emphasize different interpretations of religious experiences and the need for intersectionality and acceptance, echoing the core goals of both CSE (SIECCAN, 2019) and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (NAEYC, 2020). Indeed, there needs to be separate considerations for circumstances of intersecting identities (e.g., religious identities; Shipley, 2015), ensuring to separate legitimate considerations of religious expression from homophobic and xenophobic ideology; in the Ontario context, these were wrongfully intertwined (Bialystok, 2018).

Overall, the political landscape and media coverage overshadowed the public support (Bialystok, 2018), of which a majority were supportive of the Ontario sexuality education curriculum updates (Wood et al., 2021), and created fear of discussing sexuality, gender, or related topics for educators who faced potential retaliation from parents or workplace leadership and administration (Balter et al., 2016; 2018; 2021a; Davies, 2021). Eventually, protests were met with reassurances that parents could effectively provide sexuality education to children, positioning the curriculum updates as a political agenda rather than ensuring comprehensive health education (see Bialystok et al., 2020). However, past research has noted that parents are ineffective at imparting CSE to their children (Shrage & Stewart, 2015; Shipley, 2015). Even parents in healthcare, with extensive training, self-describe as not being sufficiently prepared to provide the depth of sexuality education they see as necessary for their children (Kurtuncu et al., 2015).

**Impact of Public Sexuality Education Debates on Early Childhood Education**
In Ontario, the public reactions to the inclusion of sexuality education for older children help contextualize the difficulty of supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood specifically. Based on these public debates, and the aforementioned ideologies surrounding young children and childhood (e.g., paternalism, innocence), it can further be speculated that the inclusion of sexuality education in early childhood would be met with similar, if not increased, pushback (Balter et al., 2016; 2018; 2021a; 2021b). Thus, these conversations are delayed until puberty despite research demonstrating both necessity and support for earlier sexuality education (Cacciatore et al., 2019; Cacciatore et al., 2020b) and further research that calls for including CSE in the pre-service training for ECEs, who can use their skills and knowledge to support the development of sexuality in early childhood (Balter et al., 2021b).

**Importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education**

Comprehensive sexuality education involves the integration of all domains of well-being (e.g., social, emotional, cognitive; Bonjour & van der Vlugt, 2018). Indeed, integrated approaches to sexual health recognize the influence of internal factors (e.g., identity, emotions) and yield more positive outcomes regarding both health behaviours and overall development than siloed approaches (i.e., only discussing sex as bodily functions; Kenny & Wurtele, 2012). While most research has focused on outlining the benefits that CSE has in older age groups (e.g., Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021), there is evidence that formal sexuality education programs for children in the early years yield higher levels of foundational knowledge about sexual health (Ozgun & Capri, 2021a; 2021b). In the current project, the wide-reaching benefits of supporting sexuality development are represented by the ability to engage in social justice initiatives and function as a protective factor against abuse (Balter et al., 2021a). These benefits are key considerations for children in early childhood specifically and are each discussed in the two sections that follow.

**Supporting 2SLGBTQINA+ Communities**

Curriculum that is 2SLGBTQINA+ inclusive and provides opportunities for learning about diversity in sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression work to reduce homophobia and expand students’ ideas of gender roles, stereotypes, and norms while promoting equity and rights for the 2SLGBTQINA+ community (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Goldfarb &
Lieberman, 2021). Through educating the school community, CSE works as a protective factor against discrimination and negative experiences, often faced by transgender students, parents and/or educators, as well as lifting the burden of these individuals (and often, for children, their parents), to identify and advocate for systemic changes to prevent such harms (Gunn, 2015; Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017). Indeed, educators who are well-versed in inclusive pedagogies can support parents in their knowledge and affirmation of developing gender expression and identities (Timmons & Airton, 2020). However, excluding sexuality education from formal curriculum allows for the hidden curriculum to thrive. The hidden curriculum refers to the implicit lessons being taught through behaviours, rules, regulations, and social norms (Giroux & Penna, 1979). Through rewarding desirable behaviours (e.g., obedience), implicit messages about what good students look like are indeed learned by students (Giroux & Penna, 1979). Through such implicit education, the hidden curriculum perpetuates heteronormative practices that ultimately shape children’s developing concept of sexuality and thus impacts sexual health and well-being (Balter et al., 2018; Blaise, 2009; Martin & Bobier, 2017). Excluding curriculum aimed at supporting sexuality development, as well as failing to explicitly mandate it, not only removes beneficial outcomes but replaces them with increased notions of heteronormativity through the hidden curriculum (Janmohamed, 2010; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2005).

**Personal Safety Skills**

When discussions of sexuality education arise, so do conversations of childhood sexual abuse (CSA), and whether sexual health education works to prevent it (see Bialystok, 2018). As with CSE, CSA prevention, takes an ecological approach, recognizing that CSA is complex and multi-faceted and prevention requires interdisciplinary approaches (Kenny & Wurtele, 2012). In a review of the literature on school-based personal safety skills programs, researchers found that successful programs (i.e., programs that increased children’s knowledge of personal safety skills\(^4\) used interdisciplinary methods to deliver content (Fryda & Hulme, 2015). Specifically in the context of the early years, the inclusion of discussions around proper terminology for body parts gives children language and comfortability discussing these topics, making body parts

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\(^4\) Personal safety skills, self-protection skills, or body safety skills all describe various skills that reduce vulnerability to CSA and skills that assist victims of CSA with disclosing their abuse to a trusted adult (see Kenny et al., 2008; Kenny & Wurtele, 2013; Kenny et al., 2013).
normal, not a secret. Such skills work as a protective factor, allowing children identify inappropriate behaviours from others and to disclose occurrences of abuse (Kenny et al., 2013). As these protective skills are a powerful factor in reducing children’s vulnerability to CSA, there is clear rationale for imparting this information to children; a goal that is included in the aims of CSE (Balter et al., 2021a; Balter & van Rhijn, in press; SIECCAN, 2019).

Those opposed to school-based sexuality education position that this education should occur in the home (Bialystok, 2018). While discussions in the home around personal safety skills are indeed important, CSA is complex, and often occurs within close relationships where children are groomed to view boundary transgressions as normal occurrences (e.g., Clayton et al., 2018; Finkelhor, 1984; Rudolph et al., 2018; Ullman, 2007). Even in the absence of CSA, research has demonstrated that solely under parent supervision, children’s knowledge of bodily terminology is severely limited (Kenny et al., 2008). Therefore, educators for all age groups are uniquely positioned, beyond mandatory reporting obligations, to respond from an informed position to children’s natural curiosity and help guide children’s learning about their own development (Balter et al., 2021b), while being aware of signs of CSA. However, previous environmental scans indicate that educators are not trained on the development of sexuality in early childhood (Balter et al., 2021a), making the identification of abuse more difficult than if educators were knowledgeable about common behaviours and behaviours that are of concern (Kenny et al., 2013; Wurtele & Kenny, 2011).

With the proliferation of internet and communication technologies (ICTs), there is increased risk of misinformation, violations of privacy, and online exploitation (SIECCAN, 2019). Furthermore, ICTs continue to alter the way people communicate and receive information, including evolving the scope of what comprehensive sexuality education looks like (SIECCAN, 2019). Specifically, by building the awareness of personal boundaries, consent, and personal safety skills, all of which are aims of CSE, children learn a breadth of personal safety skills that are transferable to an online context and can provide a strong baseline for digital safety skills (SIECCAN, 2019). If early childhood educators are trained and equipped to do so, they can support children to build foundational skills related to both sexual health and internet safety and will be better equipped to make educated decisions for themselves as they interact with ICTs.

Pre-Service ECE Training on Supporting Sexual Health and Well-Being
There is considerable research, not only to support discussing the development of sexuality in early childhood during pre-service training (e.g., Balter et al., 2016; 2018; 2021a; Cacciatore et al., 2019; 2020a; 2020b; SIECANN, 2019). Moreover, there are existing frameworks for developmentally appropriate sexuality education have been presented in the literature (e.g., Wurtele & Kenny 2011). Therefore, it is vital to ensure that ECEs are equipped to combine this knowledge with their skills in pedagogy to implement responsive programming and impart developmentally relevant CSE to children. While media pressure and sociopolitical factors present barriers to ensuring early learning environments support all domains of development in the early years, there is a need to clearly identify the content of CSE in pre-service ECE training. Formal support for ECEs (i.e., enshrining in policy, including in pre-service training) can provide educators with the training, knowledge, confidence, and language to support the development of sexuality in early childhood (Balter et al., 2016; 2018; 2021b).

The current lack of training for early childhood educators, paired with the lack resources for developmentally appropriate sexuality education, are the focus of this section. A widespread lack of training is seen among educators and healthcare professionals alike. Although a sample of doctors and nurses indicated that children should be provided with sexuality education, less than 7% had received any training on sexuality and gender development in children themselves, as healthcare professionals (Kurtuncu et al., 2015). The trans-disciplinary nature of the gap in pre-service training is evidence of the social desire to keep sexuality and the discussion of sexuality separate from conversations about children and childhood, despite the equally widespread professional opinions that these conversations are needed (Farmer et al., 2019). While some educators personally oppose the inclusion of sexuality education in this age group (Balter et al., 2018), there is a clear case for the inclusion of this material from regulatory health organizations (e.g., SIECCAN, 2019; WHO et al., 2010), and research (e.g., Balter et al., 2018; 2021a) that illustrates the necessity of ensuring educators are trained to support the development of sexuality in early childhood. An in-depth analysis of educators’ experiences supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood noted that ECEs encounter expressions of sexuality-related behaviours ranging from self-touching to questions about gender norms on a daily basis (see Balter et al., 2016 for example). Despite these behaviours occurring daily (Cacciatore et al., 2020b), most educators do not feel adequately prepared to turn these
behavioural expressions into learning opportunities (Balter et al., 2018). Not addressing behavioural expressions from a holistic lens unintentionally leaves implicit responses, such as educators’ non-verbal reactions to behaviours, as the dominant factor guiding children’s education rather than intentional practice (Cacciatore et al., 2020b). Specifically, if children’s sexuality and gender development is hushed or skipped over, children will learn from the lack of conversation, which further perpetuates the idea that sexuality is off limits thus inadequately supporting children’s development (Balter et al., 2018; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2005).

The public conflict in Ontario, where parents were ubiquitously positioned as vocal critics of the proposed updates to the public-school sexuality education curriculum (Boesveld, 2015), contributed to the lack of confidence educators have in being able to, without backlash, address sexuality-related topics as they naturally occur (Osborne, 2019). Educators in Ontario, while being mindful of parents’ beliefs and values, recognize the benefits of including conversations on the development of sexuality in the early years in the classroom (Balter et al., 2016). Ultimately, the collaboration of both parents and educators will yield the most positive outcomes and create the most inclusive, supportive learning environments for children (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Educators are aware of this dynamic in all aspects of their practice, and work with parents to provide these supportive spaces.

While conversations of CSA prevention are regularly included in training and professional development, few other aspects of the development of sexuality in early childhood are reliably covered, including evidence-based components of CSA prevention (Balter et al., 2018). Formal training for pre-service educators on sexual health, and communication about sensitive topics, paired with key learning techniques, such as reflective practice and practical experience discussing sexuality, will give the strongest foundation for high-quality support of the development of sexuality in early childhood (Balter et al., 2021a; Timmons & Airton, 2020). In addition to training on how to support the development of sexuality in early childhood, educators need training to learn to identify and address their own biases which can implicitly influence their efficacy in providing an inclusive, welcoming space (Balter et al., 2018; NAEYC, 2020; WHO et al., 2017). Educators have noted an absence of this information in their training, limiting their knowledge of how to properly support and scaffold the development of sexuality in early childhood without contributing to the heteronormative discourses that ignore the varying
experiences of children in favour of adult expectations (Balter et al., 2016; 2018). Furthermore, formal workplace support for educators softens the challenges that educators may face when working to support the development of sexuality in early childhood (Balter et al., 2016).

Another gap in the immediate implementation of CSE for young children is the lack of consensus on what is developmentally appropriate in the early years. This gap is not limited to the early years as research has also explored what constitutes as developmentally appropriate CSE for adolescents (Marques et al., 2017). Current curriculum for school-based sexuality education (e.g., WHO, SIECCAN) entirely leave out the early years despite recognizing the necessity for its inclusion (see Balter et al., 2021a). Furthermore, past research has noted a lack of resources around how to support the development of sexuality in early childhood (e.g., Balter et al., 2021a; Cacciatore et al., 2020b). Ideally, an established framework for supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood (i.e., such as ELECT) would translate into formal workplace policies that protect ECEs and guide their practice. Currently, the lack of administrative and policy support is a barrier in educators’ willingness to address these topics (Balter et al., 2016). Indeed, ECEs have identified the need for clarity around which topics are developmentally appropriate, evidence-based, and education on how to deliver this material in ways that align with current pedagogical practices (Balter et al., 2016; 2018; 2021a).

**Theoretical Framework**

As the current project is situated in a Canadian (i.e., Western) education system, the current project considers developmentalism, as this framework, in part, informs the practice of early childhood education (Johnston et al., 2020), while acknowledging the limitations of developmentalism and derived perspectives (e.g., DAP, Lather, 2007). Early childhood education is an interdisciplinary field, integrating approaches from overlapping theoretical perspectives such as developmentalism, ecological theories, and child-centered approaches (Johnston et al., 2020). The current project aimed to centre the inclusivity of sexuality education, and overall well-being, and therefore, critique the normativity of developmentalism and its integration into educational theory.

**Developmentalism**

Developmentalism classifies development within the bounds of norms to be reached at
particular ages and stages and aims to explain how individuals grow and develop throughout the lifespan, paying particular attention to childhood (Johnston et al., 2020). Early research in developmentalism used white, middle-class, able-bodied children to inform normative developmental milestones. However, these normative milestones are not inclusive, nor are they representative of all children (Burman, 2017). This marginalizes those who do not belong to the desired group in discourses of heteronormativity, racism, and ableism (Janmohamed, 2010; Sexton et al., 2002).

Developmental perspectives originated from eighteenth-century philosophy (e.g., Rousseau and the Enlightenment; Burman, 2017; Taylor, 2010), and were driven by the desire to create a truth about the nature of childhood and firmly center normative child development as the standard. Traditional developmental approaches are notable for the discussion of childhood in distinct stages rather than as an intersectional, integrative continuum that is highly unique and contextual. The ages and stages approach is strongly facilitated by Piaget’s distinct steps of cognitive development (Piaget & Inhelder, 1972) and embedded within Western approaches to child rearing. However, it fails to recognize the continuum of development and pathologizes individuals, families, and cultures that do not progress according to these norms or hold different values than those who informed the original conceptualization of developmentalism (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008). Not only do such perspectives mistakenly position Western norms of development as universally relevant, but they also fail to celebrate and appreciate differences in child-rearing practices, labelling these approaches as pathological (Farley, 2018). These views of childhood further perpetuated social hierarchies (i.e., by age and by gender) as well as emphasized the notion of an ideal family, following the normative expectations of the time (i.e., middle class, white, cisgender, and heterosexual; Burman, 2017; Jarkovská & Lamb, 2019).

Furthermore, the developmental notion of childhood positions children as innocent and free from corruption, turning religious notions (i.e., the absence of sins) into a key feature of childhood (Piper, 2018). This dynamic creates a moral obligation for adults to preserve the ‘innocent child’ (Burman, 2017; Jarkovská & Lamb, 2019; Taylor, 2010). As sexual development is regarded as an adult experience, children are purposively excluded from conversations around sexuality (Taylor, 2010), contributing to the widespread dissent in response attempts to address sexuality in public education.
Developmentalism is a dominant framework that guides societal views of childhood, parents, and education (Burman, 2017; Johnston et al., 2020). The idea of formal all-day schooling, whereby children who had previously worked were now regarded as ignorant and needing education from adults, was informed by developmentalist perspectives (Burman, 2017). Formal schooling also worked as a safety assurance, working with the newly emerging ideas that children are fragile and need constant protection from adults (Jarkovská & Lamb, 2019). Here, school emphasized surveillance, compliance, assessment, and standardization, features of developmentalism that are widely critiqued for centering normative perspectives through racist, classist, ableist, and heteronormative discourses that exclude a large portion of human experiences (Farley, 2018; Grieshaber, 2016). Views of childhood and education that stem from developmentalism are influenced by these epistemological positions, and therefore must be supplemented with frameworks that emphasize inclusivity and the agency of children in co-creating learning experiences (Johnston et al., 2020; Stacey, 2009). Despite these critiques, and the persisting epistemological orientations of developmental theories (Grieshaber, 2016), there are several foundational developmental psychology scholars who both work within the framework of developmentalism and recognize the active role of children, educators, and the environment on learning and development (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Vygotsky, 1978; Lather, 2007), informing new educational practices such as Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP).

**Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

The concept of DAP came from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as a response to the growing use of the term *developmentally appropriate* in the practice of early childhood education (Bredekamp & Cobble, 1987; 1997; NAEYC, 2009; NAEYC, 2020). The NAEYC aimed to raise standards for successfully supporting and facilitating the development of children in care. The initial intent was for the framework of DAP to be used as a quality assurance tool (Sexton et al., 2002), further perpetuating the standardized assessment tools seen in developmental approaches that favour normative development (Grieshaber, 2016). From there, DAP evolved to integrate cultural and social experiences into the practice of early childhood education. The evolution of developmentalism included less rigid, ages-and-stages frameworks such as the *Theory of Cognitive Development* (Vygotsky, 1978),
and *Ecological Systems Theory* (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Under Vygotskian models of learning, children’s ability to learn is facilitated through interactions with educators, which are nested within and influenced by cultural and social contexts. Here, culturally and socially constructed concepts can be scaffolded, bridging the gap between what children know and the next stages of learning, by educators who are able to clearly identify and react to the child’s evolving development (Vygotsky, 1978). Hence, the essence of DAP is to create an environment centered around responsively facilitating learning opportunities that support children’s interests and needs (NAEYC, 2009). Under the framework of DAP, educators respond to children’s emerging interests and development, employing the idea of scaffolding in learning and development (Goldstein, 2008) as DAP emphasizes the co-creation of knowledge that follows children’s interests and needs (Parks, 2020). Considering Bronfenbrenner’s *Ecological Systems Theory*, there is significant emphasis on the influence of external factors on the experiences and knowledges of children. The ecological model includes considerations of how different levels of proximity to the child moderate the influence of different agents such that those with closer connections to a child have the most influence on their development (e.g., parents, siblings; Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Ultimately, through considerations of differing personal experiences, the inclusion of Vygotsky’s and Bronfenbrenner’s theories has pushed the initial concept of DAP to be more inclusive of socio-cultural influences on development.

It is important to note that DAP has been critiqued for relying too heavily on the normative aspects of developmentalism (Bredekamp & Cobble, 1987; 1997; Sexton et al., 2002). Although many educators actively work against normative practices, these traditional developmental principles are interwoven in the guiding frameworks of early childhood education (Grieshaber & Blaise, 2019; Johnston et al., 2020). It is important to be mindful of these critiques and intentionally incorporate responsive, intersectional, and inclusive frameworks to counter such normative perspectives. Accordingly, the most recent versions of the NAEYC position statement outline the importance of considering the shared and unique experiences, as well as the sociocultural and political context in which children and educators operate (NAEYC, 2009; NAEYC, 2020). While this is likely thorough the same developmental lens as we view childhood as a whole (Farley, 2018), the core considerations of DAP ensure that no domain of development can be ignored when working to facilitate learning and growth. Under this updated framework,
“educators strive to make sure that each child hears and sees their home language, culture, and family experience reflected in the daily interactions, activities, and materials in the early learning setting” (NAEYC, 2020, p. 17).

Marques and colleagues (2017) outline that for sexuality education, DAP is an appropriate framework, but is seldom used in curriculum creation. Ultimately, the current project aims to work within and against the framework of DAP, acknowledging and supplementing its shortcomings (Lather, 2007) to identify gaps in current pre-service training and clearly establish a guide for supporting sexual health and well-being beginning in the early years. Educators both implicitly and explicitly integrate various theoretical perspectives, such as the principles of DAP, in their everyday practice (Potter, 2007). An approach working within developmentalism, while acknowledging the limitations, will situate the research within DAP while pushing forward against the critiqued aspects of developmental theories (e.g., normativity; Burman, 2017). The following section outlines the intersection of the theoretical framework and the literature review and presents the aims of the current project.

Researcher Positionality & Pre-Understandings

When conducting inductive qualitative analysis, it is essential to outline the researcher’s influence on the interpretation of the data (Graneheim et al., 2017). As such, this section of the document outlines my positionality, assumptions, and pre-understandings of the research area, and outline how these pre-understandings impact the analysis.

I am a white, cisgender, female with no visible disabilities. I grew up in a middle-class family, with four co-parenting adults across two households. My personal characteristics undeniably privilege and impact the way I approached the data and the lens through which I understand the world more broadly. Ultimately, one’s positionality cannot be separated from their research, regardless of methodology. Throughout the project, the data and conclusions that I present are only a piece of the puzzle. Specifically, I cannot speak for 2SLGBTQINA+ individuals and the erasure they face at the hands of researchers and institutions. Nor can the current project outline what constitutes as trauma-informed care, culturally relevant care, or culturally safe practice in early childhood education. In addition to my personal positionality, there are pre-understandings of the research topic that influenced the way in which I considered the data. To prepare for data collection, I conducted a literature review of relevant research
discussing the importance of sexuality education, the importance of education in supporting the 2SLGBTQINA+ community, the role of ECEs, and the importance of adequate training and policy support. Alongside this research, I examined several areas of literature that aim to deconstruct the taken-for-granted assumptions about gender, sexuality, families, and childhood; this is discussed in the literature review and theoretical framework sections above. Additionally, over the course of this project, I had experiences in early learning settings, seeing the work that educators do every day to support holistic development. Furthermore, I began a role as a research analyst which gave me further insight into the government systems that can influence early childhood education in Ontario. Together, my positionality, pre-understandings, and experiences informed the analysis and helped guide the current project.

**Current Project**

In conversations around the inclusion of sexuality education for children, the best interests of children can often become intertwined and conflated with the comfort of adults (Bialystok, 2018; Cacciatore et al., 2020b). While I acknowledge that this project adds to the volume of conversations about children, the present study aims to contribute to a growing body of literature that is re-centering child well-being. While international organizations provide guiding frameworks for educators to implement sexuality education (WHO et al., 2017), there is a need for this to be extended into the early years’ context. There is an identified need for comprehensive training for ECEs on how to support the development of sexuality in early childhood (e.g., Balter et al., 2018; Davies, 2021). In addition to this, there is a need to determine what exactly DAP looks like in sexuality education curriculum (i.e., following in the frameworks of ELECT; Best Start Expert Panel, 2007) and how to implement it (i.e., following in the pedagogical approaches described in HDLH; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). As such, the current project contributes to the evidence-based knowledge of educators, training programs, parents, and policy makers, providing rationale and considerations for facilitating the healthy development of sexuality in early childhood as a facet of overall well-being (SIECCAN, 2019).

The research questions guiding this project are,

1. How are pre-service educators currently trained to support the development of sexuality in early childhood and well-being in the early years in Ontario?
2. What do sexuality education experts identify as required training for ECEs to help
them support the development of sexuality in early childhood?

i. What does Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) mean in addressing sexuality education in the early years?

ii. What do educators need to support sexuality development, teach personal safety skills, and empower children in ways that align with the pedagogical approaches of the early years sector?

First, an analysis of Ontario’s ECE training programs was conducted for Study 1. Here, the content of training offered to pre-service educators was assessed through the framework of DAP. Mainly of interest to explore was the occurrence and depth of training to equip educators to support the development of sexuality in the early years. While similar program reviews have been done for the Ontario context (Balter et al., 2018), Study 1 conducted an in-depth review of programs’ current practices, recognizing that recent and ongoing social justice initiatives may have prompted further training or knowledge in some pre-service programs (e.g., anti-oppression; Issa, 2020).

To address the second research question, Study 2 included interviews with key informants exploring what training ECEs need to support the development of sexuality, considering what constitutes as developmentally appropriate, and the barriers to achieving comprehensive support for early childhood educators. By exploring what key informants recommend, knowledge from this half of the project will support educators’ self-described need for pre-service training in this area (e.g., Balter et al., 2018). This replicates previous research conducted by Marques and colleagues (2017) which explored what developmentally appropriate sexuality education looks like in adolescence. In their study, researchers aimed to “understand how sexuality education professionals conceptualize adolescent development, their application of these understandings to their practice, and the challenges and barriers they experience in conducting developmentally appropriate sexuality education” through interviews with educators (Marques et al., 2017, p. 37).

In Study 1, I collected course materials from accredited post-secondary (i.e., college and university) Early Childhood Education programs across Ontario (CECE, 2021). In Study 2, I interviewed key informants who were participants working in sexuality education and/or early childhood education. Here, key informants offered their professional perspectives on what
content is developmentally appropriate for the early years and how to facilitate this education in ways that align with the aims and pedagogical approaches of the early years (e.g., reflexive, intentional, play-based, emergent; Stacey, 2009), replicating previous research which defined DAP for adolescent sexuality education and wise practices for delivering this education (Marques et al., 2017). Data for both Study 1 and 2 were analyzed using conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), guided by the theoretical framework of Developmentally Appropriate Practice, while recognizing the limitations of working within normative frameworks (Lather, 2007). The analyses that follow aimed to intentionally include data that may be overlooked without an understanding of the way social norms shape our collective understanding of what is developmentally appropriate. The following sections outline the data sources and collection processes, analytic process, and results for the review of Ontario’s pre-service training programs and the key informant interviews, respectively.
Study 1: Ontario’s Pre-Service ECE Programs

Previous research has outlined the self-declared need expressed by early childhood educators in Ontario for their pre- and post-service training to include discussions of the development of sexuality in early childhood (Balter et al., 2018). Recent tension in Ontario surrounding sexuality education for children in middle childhood and adolescence has also created stigma and fear for professionals looking to offer anti-bias educational spaces for children. Therefore, Study 1 aimed to gather information about current practices in Ontario’s pre-service early childhood education (ECE) programs. Study 1 asked how pre-service educators are prepared to support the development of sexuality in early childhood and well-being in the early years in Ontario. The research question was answered using public course materials to analyze the content being delivered in Ontario’s early childhood education programs at a single point in time. Using conventional qualitative content analysis, I examined course materials from all post-secondary programs that offer accredited early childhood education programs (CECE, 2021). The analysis involved coding and categorizing textual data into categories, guided by the literature, my pre-understandings of Ontario’s early learning policy landscape, and the theoretical framework. The following sections will expand further on the methods, analysis, and results of the program review.

Methods

To gather data, I searched the College of Early Childhood Educators’ (CECE) website for post-secondary programs that met the requirements for registration with the CECE as a Registered ECE (RECE; see Appendix A). The search resulted in 28 institutions with programs approved by the CECE as meeting the education requirements for registration. One institution was excluded from the study (i.e., Collège des Grands-Lacs) as it closed in 2001 and its services were assumed by another institution represented in the study. Several institutions have affiliate institutions that offer programs in early childhood education including independent course

5 Affiliate institutions refer to post-secondary programs/institutions that offer accreditation through another public post-secondary institution. In the current study, only three institutions had affiliate programs: St. Clair College of Applied Arts and Technology (n = 1), Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technology (n = 1), and Canadore College of Applied Arts and Technology (n = 4).
offerings, overlapping courses their accreditation partner, or offering the same program entirely. Duplicate courses were not analyzed for the study; only distinct courses were considered. Further, several institutions offer multiple programs (e.g., degree, diploma, and intensive programs); however, these were analyzed as separate programs as their course offerings were not identical. In summation, data were collected from public post-secondary institutions \((n = 27)\) and affiliate institutions \((n = 6)\) across Ontario that offer pre-service training in Early Childhood Education and Care. In total, 39 programs were analyzed across degree \((n = 8)\), diploma \((n = 25)\), and affiliate \((n = 6)\) programs (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Pre-Service Early Childhood Education Programs Included in Analysis*

Course offerings included in the analysis, a total of 849 courses were screened (see Appendix A). From this total, 290 courses were excluded (34.2%), resulting in 559 courses included (65.8%) in the sample for analysis. An explanation of courses excluded from the study sample, as well as rationale for their exclusion, follows after Figure 2.
Courses Excluded from Analysis

For the purposes of this study, practical and experiential learning courses such as seminar, practicum, and other placement courses were excluded \((n = 162)\). While experiential learning courses offer opportunities for pre-service educators to interact with children, and therefore be exposed to verbal and behavioural expressions of sexuality development, the focus of the study is the knowledge base that would support educators’ interactions. Next, the study excluded courses that were subject-specific \((n = 19)\), this includes courses on art, music, drama, mathematics, and science, often appearing as combined courses (e.g., Georgian College, ECED 1021 Math, Science and Creative Art). These courses focus on specific strategies and pedagogies for scaffolding specific subjects and competencies (i.e., numeracy) and supporting children as they explore those domains. While conversations of sexuality development, sexual health, or sexuality education may naturally emerge through these courses (e.g., discussing drawings of children’s families), they are not the logical place to incorporate the wide knowledge base that is needed to support the development of sexuality in early childhood. Additionally, general
communications courses (e.g., College Communications, English, French) were excluded from the analysis as they focus on general writing, language, and/or communication skills \((n = 41)\). Courses on interactions with communities and families were retained as these would be the courses that discuss how to communicate with these parties about a range of topics. Furthermore, research courses (e.g., Research Methods, Statistics) were excluded from the analysis as these focus on different skills such as literature reviews or analytical skills \((n = 15)\). Project, paper writing, and special topics courses \((n = 8)\) were also excluded as the subject matter within these courses would vary significantly based on pre-service educators’ individual or group interests, instructor interests, or broader program goals. Further, institution courses (i.e., courses designed to orient new students to the services and policies of the institution, \(n = 1\)), history (\(n = 1\)), philosophy (\(n = 1\)), technology (\(n = 1\)) and personal finance (\(n = 1\)) courses were excluded. Lastly, general workplace health and safety courses were excluded from this analysis \((n = 2)\) as they cover general, widely applicable health and safety practices, rather than practices specific to early childhood education and care. Courses that covered health and safety in an early childhood environment (e.g., Canadore College, ECE 118, Health, Safety & Nutrition) were retained for study as they are more applicable to the aims of the Study 1 than general education courses about workplace health and safety.

Some courses that specifically fit within the scope of the study were not included in the analysis due to availability \((n = 18)\). Some course outlines were only available to former students of the institution, or available for a fee. The current study aimed to review courses that were publicly available; therefore, unavailable courses were not included. Additionally, many of the courses from Indigenous affiliate programs were unavailable for analysis \((n = 20)\). However, these knowledges are sacred and deeply connected to Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing, and are, therefore, protected (Janke & Sentina, 2018). Furthermore, as a settler, it is not appropriate to review Indigenous knowledges without a deep understanding of the way that sexuality, gender, and their development is considered within local Indigenous communities. As such, consultation and collaboration with Indigenous early childhood educators and knowledge keepers is imperative for the decolonization of post-secondary education, of early childhood education and care, and of Western perspectives on sexuality and gender development which are heavily guided by colonial narratives.
In summary, excluded courses \((n = 290)\) comprise of 34.2\% of the courses screened and most of these courses were intentionally excluded \((n = 252)\). The other excluded courses were either unavailable publicly \((n = 18)\) or protected by the Indigenous institution they belong to \((n = 20)\) and were therefore unable to be included in the final sample. The remaining 65.8\% \((n = 559)\) of courses were included in the final sample and will be discussed in the next section.

**Courses Included in Analysis**

All courses, outside of those mentioned above as being excluded, were of interest. Course outlines were preferred, as they offer more information about the course content, including readings and more detail about course content, in addition to containing course description. However, not all institutions make course outlines publicly available. A total of 16 programs had full course outlines publicly available. All institutions make course descriptions publicly available; where course outlines were not available \((n = 23)\), course descriptions were collected. Overall, materials for 559 courses were collected and analyzed (see Appendix A).

**Conventional Content Analysis**

The data were examined using content analysis, a method which aims to create categories to represent the shared meaning of the whole dataset (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Content analysis is useful for considering text data and involves “subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systemic classification process of coding and identifying” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). Although content analysis stems from a positivist lens (e.g., Devi Prasad, 2019), which is contradictory to the primary orientations of this project, qualitative content analysis (QCA) moves away from the quantitative aspects of coding data, such as using proportions and frequencies to numerically represent the content of data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Moreover, QCA methods emphasize both the content and the context of data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Morgan, 1993), an approach that offers connections to the policy, pedagogical, and political context in which the current project is situated. Specifically, I used conventional QCA which takes an inductive-dominant approach and includes exploration of both manifest and latent content in the data (Armat et al., 2018; Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Inductive-dominant approaches to coding are guided by the data, wherein researchers identify key ideas in the data that can help address the research questions (Graneheim et al., 2017). Inductive-dominant
approaches are in contrast to deductive-dominant approaches which apply existing theories to data to answer research questions (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Graneheim et al., 2017). While the program review was guided by an expanded view of sexuality development (see Timmons & Airton, 2020), the study uses the theoretical framework of DAP as a guide rather than a coding framework (Graneheim et al., 2017), making this analysis inductive-dominant.

Analysis followed the steps of Ritchie and Spencer (1994), which outlines five steps (i.e., familiarization, theoretical framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation) for qualitative content analysis. Additionally, Hsieh and Shannon (2005) provide useful clarification on the types of content analysis and the steps of each method. Guidance from Hsieh and Shannon (2005) helped me follow the specific approaches to conventional QCA. The following sections outline the first steps of conventional content analysis (i.e., immersion in the data, initial framework, and initial coding/indexing). Next, the categories created during the analysis are presented, framing the findings in context of the Ontario’s early childhood education sector. Finally, the last step of conventional content analysis (i.e., mapping/interpretation) involves situating the results of the analysis in the context of the research question (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), and follows the results. This stage does not include full discussion of the implications of the research results as “relevant theories or other research findings are addressed in the discussion section of the study” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1279). The following sections expand upon each of these steps and are followed by the results of the program review.

**Immersion in the Data**

First, I read the dataset multiple times to familiarize myself with the data and gain an understanding of the material (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). From there, I re-read the dataset, noting data that fit the scope of sexuality development as discussed in literature review (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). An example of this is considering research that explains the link between conversations of sexuality education and child sexual abuse (CSA; Bialystok, 2018), and research that identified educational spaces as key institutions that can support sexual health and well-being through education (i.e., Fryda & Hulme, 2015). Having identified this connection while reading through the data, I considered abuse prevention as a key component of supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood.

Through this stage of the analysis, I got an initial sense of how the data related to the
research questions. Guided by the framework of Developmentally Appropriate Practice, I considered explicit mentions of sex, sexuality, gender, same-sex, LGBTQ, and noted topics, as guided by the literature, that connect to sexuality development (e.g., relationships, family structure, stereotypes, and personal safety skills). Through the process of immersing in the data, I was able to narrow down a unit of analysis that fit the data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Graneheim et al., 2017). Since Study 1 examined course outlines, which are often broken into sub-sections, and course descriptions, which are typically a few sentences, the unit of analysis is sentences. This unit of analysis, while small, allows for the data to be summarized, while allowing for the flexibility to include surrounding sentences for context.

**Initial Framework**

After determining a unit of analysis, “drawing on a priori issues,” I developed an initial framework for coding the data based on initial categories that were noticed during step one (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 180). The initial framework involves considering the data, the context, and the research questions (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to develop a descriptive first draft of a coding index that is refined as the analysis progresses while ensuring the “original research questions are being fully addressed” (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 180). An example of the initial framework providing structure for coding occurred when I recognized concepts such as “mental and emotional health of young children” and “well-being, belonging, expression and engagement” as core components of Ontario’s early learning pedagogical framework. Specifically, well-being, belonging, engagement, and expression are the principles identified in *How Does Learning Happen?* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) and have been identified as key concepts connecting to sexuality and gender development in previous literature (e.g., Timmons & Airton, 2020). Therefore, moving through the analysis, I was prepared to consider the alignment between early learning and support for sexuality development. Subsequently, as described in the results below, *Goals of Early Childhood Education and Approaches to Programming Using Emergent Curriculum* were considered sub-categories of the category *Landscape of Early Learning in Ontario*. These categories are further expanded upon in the results section.

Throughout the initial framework stage of the analysis, I noticed both implicit and explicit connections to the sexuality and sexual health. However, categorizing the data as either
implicit or explicit would not have provided the depth of analysis needed to answer the research questions. Rather, to answer the research questions, I determined it would be useful to draw a distinction between implicit and explicit data. This decision was informed by literature that highlights the importance of ensuring sexuality education is explicit as not to perpetuate heteronormative discourses (e.g., Davies et al., 2021). Therefore, I reviewed the data, using targeting searches of key words (sexuality, gender, etc.), and through re-reading the transcripts for other course materials that discuss the development of sexuality in early childhood. The results of this more targeted analysis can be found in the sub-categories Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood presented in the results section.

**Initial Coding**

After reviewing the dataset, and considering the research question, I proceeded to initial coding. Using open coding (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007), the flexibility of QCA allows the coding to be shaped from identified connections among data (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The initial coding phase included considerations of both manifest and latent content, as I considered contextual factors that added value to my interpretation of the data. An example of this in the current study is when I noted the idea of following children’s interests as a key idea in the course material data (e.g., “Students will practice facilitating Child led learning experiences based on children's natural curiosity and inquiry,” Fleming College, EDUC 132), and recognized that, in Ontario, early learning pedagogy emphasizes a child-led approach to program planning (i.e., emergent curriculum; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014); this was also discussed in the literature review above. As such, the idea of programming using emergent curriculum approaches was integral to considering the landscape of early learning in Ontario, the context in which the data were collected. Without consideration of the underlying philosophy of emergent curriculum, only the manifest meaning of following children’s interests would have been available. While child-led programming is important, the connection to emergent curriculum and, specifically, the role of the educator in emergent curriculum to extend children’s thinking (Stacey, 2009) is what would call for educators to support children’s ideas beyond the dominating normative discourses (Langford, 2010; Surtees & Gunn, 2010). The pre-understanding to consider this as a key approach to early learning, and to understand what emergent curriculum offers (i.e., co-creation of learning between educators and children) can be categorized as the latent content of this data.
Defining and Refining Categories

The next phase of the conventional content analysis involved charting categories to compare and groups codes, and defining and refining categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). During category creation, the literature suggests charting each category to ensure the data fit within the category (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007), as the content of each category should be distinct, with little overlap and clear differences between categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). Furthermore, charting categories allows the researcher to clearly see categories in relation to one another to ensure such belongingness (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). As such, using NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2022) to code and categorize data, I manually charted and reviewed categories, collapsing several categories where applicable. When charting, researchers provide excerpts of data to exemplify the category’s content and provide clarity to the definition of the category (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Creating categories from the data helped highlight the relation between the data and the research question (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007).

An example of the charting to category creation process is apparent when considering the codes capturing diversity and family structure. Throughout the data, there were mentions of supporting diversity throughout one’s practice as an early childhood educator. However, while there were some specific mentions of applying a critical lens to programing (e.g., “Students learn how to program for preschoolers with specific consideration given to the implementation of the anti-bias curriculum, healthy brain development outcomes, and inclusive experiences,” Mothercraft College of ECE, Course 8), the majority of the data contained broad references to supporting overall diversity (e.g., “Students will consider significance of the uniqueness and diversity in children, family, and communities in early development,” Loyalist College, CADW 2001). Furthermore, the majority of the data regarding diversity included broad domains of diversity that would be covered in the course. As such, Understanding and Supporting Diversity and Differences was identified as a broad category. Additionally, throughout the data, family structure was mostly referred to in the context of supporting families, and specifically non-nuclear families (wide range of family structure, families from varying cultures, etc.). As such,

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6 Diversity refers to “differences and uniqueness that each person brings to the early learning and care setting including values and beliefs, culture and ethnicity, language, ability, education, life experiences, socio-economic status, spirituality, gender, age and sexual orientation” (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2017, p. 23).
Supporting the Families in Your Program can be conceptualized as a sub-component of supporting diversity and differences overall. As the field of early learning and care works closely with families to create supportive environments for children, the emphasis in the data on supporting families fits the context in which the data were collected (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

The process of creating a “description of [the] research topic through generating categories” is referred to as abstraction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007, p. 111). To ensure trustworthiness, the degree of abstraction should be consistent across categories (Graneheim et al., 2017). However, during abstraction, it is important to ensure that while the research question is being addressed, that commentary on the content of data is left for the discussion as “we do not want to find strategies, opinions, or attitudes in the findings of a study aiming to illuminate experiences” (Graneheim et al., 2017, p. 32). Throughout the study, I aimed to connect the findings back to the research questions, ensuring to consider the results as they related to potential policy recommendations for pre-service educator training. Throughout the results, I make connections to existing literature and Ontario’s early learning policy and pedagogical frameworks. Separately, in the discussion section I will expand upon the findings and the implications in the Ontario context. In doing this, I attempt to keep the level of abstraction, that is collapsing categories with increased focus on interpreting meaning, consistent throughout (Graneheim et al., 2017). Additionally, this decision is what separates the current study from a thematic analysis, which would further emphasize abstraction and interpretation, rather than a summary of content as presented in the current analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Ultimately, the literature review, knowledge of Ontario’s policies, and contextual conversations with colleagues in early learning acted together to inform my pre-understandings and decision-making during analysis. Following the literature on content analysis, I applied the above steps to the data to explore the pre-service training educators receive on supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood. The following sections outline the results of the analysis as well as how the analytic decisions for each category were made.

**Results**

Although environmental scans of Ontario’s pre-service training programs have previously been conducted (e.g., Balter et al., 2018), there is a continual need to reassess the
content of post-secondary programs as course materials can change from term to term, and may be updated to reflect current, and everchanging societal (e.g., Issa, 2020) and political (e.g., Bialystok et al., 2020) initiatives. As such, Study 1 examined pre-service training programs across Ontario to explore the scope of education future Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) receive about topics under the umbrella of sexuality development. The research question guiding this portion of the project is,

(1) How are pre-service educators currently trained to support the development of sexuality in early childhood and well-being in the early years in Ontario?

This chapter demonstrates the analytical process followed to answer the research question. Using conventional content analysis to review the course materials from Ontario’s pre-service ECE programs, I examined areas of training where pre-service educators may have exposure to topics relating to sexual health and development in the early years to assess the scope of knowledge educators have to support their emerging practice. The following sections define and explain the categories determined in the analysis and provide excerpts from the data to highlight the content of the category. A summary of these results can be found in the table below (see Table 1). The categories are presented in order of most specific to most general under guidance from literature on reporting content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007).
Table 1: Summary of Topics Covered in Pre-Service Training

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category and Sub-Category Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding Sexuality and Gender</strong></td>
<td>Course materials that discuss sexuality and/or gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Knowledge on Sexuality and Gender</td>
<td>Data highlighting where educators learn general knowledge on sexuality and gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood</td>
<td>Data in which supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood is explicitly stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention</strong></td>
<td>Course materials that focus on detecting abuse, violence, or neglect, abuse prevention, and duty to report abuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Domains of Development</strong></td>
<td>Data that discuss domains of development in early childhood, interconnectedness of developmental domains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Landscape of Early Learning in Ontario</strong></td>
<td>Data that contextualizes the policies and pedagogies that frame the early learning and child care sector in Ontario.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals of Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Data mentioning the values and frameworks of early learning approaches in Ontario (e.g., foundations of learning: belonging, expression, engagement and well-being; DAP).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaches to Programming Using Emergent Curriculum</td>
<td>Data highlighting emergent curriculum as a pedagogical approach in which children’s interests are noticed and inform the learning experiences that children and educators co-create.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Understanding Sexuality and Gender**

To address the research questions of this study, I was interested in determining the scope of training pre-service educators are provided on sexuality and gender identity, as well as if any of this training specifically discussed supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood. Within this category, two sub-sections were identified. First, I identified course materials that referred to *General Knowledge of Sexuality and Gender*, where course materials explicitly referred to sexuality and gender (i.e., identity, expression) and equity for 2SLGBTQINA+ communities. In the second sub-section, I identified where course materials explicitly discuss *Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood*. Here, to answer the research question, it was important to consider the ways in which ECEs are being prepared to support the development of sexuality in early childhood specifically. This includes ensuring ECEs understand what sexual health and well-being is, what sexuality development looks like in early
childhood, and skills for supporting this domain of development in their future practice as ECEs. The decision to separate these two sub-categories from the rest of the data was guided by literature describing how lack of explicit anti-bias education leaves room for heteronormativity and does not support the goals of creating inclusive early learning environments (Blaise, 2009; Janmohamed, 2010; Martin & Bobier, 2017; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2005). Further, the decision to separate these two sub-categories from each other was to acknowledge the distinction in content about sexuality development from the content that equips ECEs to support sexual health and well-being in their role as professionals. The following sub-sections present these two results in more detail, providing excerpts from the data to outline the scope of and content within each sub-category.

**General Knowledge on Sexuality and Gender**

To support educators’ understanding of sexuality development as it unfolds in the early years, it is important for educators to, first, understand what sexuality is, how it develops, and how it impacts health and well-being. As such, data containing mentions of sexuality and gender were of interest to answer the research question. Overall, $n = 2$ programs in the dataset discuss the concepts of sexuality and gender explicitly. Among these data, course materials included mentions of sexuality (e.g., “You will examine human sexuality from historical, cultural, developmental, behavioural, physiological, psychological, sociological, and relational perspectives. Perhaps most importantly, this course will allow you to reflect upon your own experiences, development, background, and value stances with regard to sexuality,” University of Guelph, FRHD 2100) as well as the development of sexuality (e.g., “This course covers a social scientific analysis of human sexuality. Emphasis will be placed on the development of sexuality within an interpersonal context,” University of Guelph, FRHD 2100). Other data within this category discussed the biases and barriers within society that specifically pertain to sexuality and gender identity (e.g., “Acknowledge the differences between sex and gender, and the existence of prejudice based on sexual orientation,” Canadore College, ECE 245). This category is distinct from data that contain mentions of diversity more broadly, whereas the data discussed here are centred on sexuality and gender identity specifically and do not include other areas of diversity. Knowledge of diversity and building an understanding of how to support the diversity within society is a separate category discussed later in the analysis.
Overall, there were only a small proportion of programs that covered general knowledge of sexuality and gender within their pre-service courses. Moreover, courses include conversations about sexuality, the societal construct of sexuality, oppression based on sexuality or gender identity, and a variety of other topics included within comprehensive sexuality education (pregnancy, STI/STDs, autonomy, media representations of sexuality, etc.).

**Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood**

To answer the research question, I was interested in searching for data which showed that programs indeed discussed the development of sexuality in the early years and highlighted the role of educators in supporting sexual health and well-being. This sub-category is distinct from the data discussed previously, which included more general knowledge on the concept of sexuality and gender. Here, data where learning and developing an understanding of sexuality and how it appears in early childhood are included.

While analyzing the data, it was clear that few programs \( (n = 3) \) discuss the development of sexuality in early childhood or make connections to the educator’s role in supporting this domain of development. Within the programs that do discuss supporting children’s developing understanding of sexuality and gender, data where courses \( (n = 1) \) made specific and explicit connections to educators’ role in supporting this aspect of development were scarce. One course description outlined the specific connection to the role of the educator in supporting sexuality development, “*Outline the role of the educator in supporting children’s developing sense of relationships, self-regulation, stress levels and coping mechanisms, and sexuality*” (Canadore College, ECE 118). While the current study aimed to present a more qualitative approach to examining the data, it is essential to highlight that this one course represents 0.12% of all pre-service ECE courses offered in Ontario.

Other course materials covered “*sexuality across the lifespan*” (University of Guelph, FRHD 2100), or gender socialization (e.g., “*topics relating to sex-role stereotyping,*” Mothercraft College of ECE, Course 4, and “*Topics may include: gender socialization, sexuality...*,” University of Guelph, FRHD 1020). While this data is less specific about educators’ knowledge on supporting the development of sexuality, it indicates that the courses acknowledge the existence of sexuality development in the early years, which is an essential component of educators’ ability to support children’s sexual health and well-being.
Overall, there is little preparation for pre-service educators to support the development of sexuality in early childhood. The results show that less than 1% of all early childhood education programs across Ontario prepare ECEs to support children’s sexual health and well-being. As such, it is clear that ECEs require more preparation in pre-service than the data suggests they are receiving; this has been noted as an ongoing gap in early childhood educators’ pre-service training (Balter et al., 2018). It is positive to find that courses that do cover sexuality, generally, focus on understanding societal discourses around sexuality, as well as comprehensive sexuality education for adults. Having this knowledge is important and can indeed support educator’s own well-being and health (SIECCAN, 2019).

Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention

All pre-service programs, as required by the Ontario Ministry of Education, address the legal responsibilities of educators to report suspected abuse (i.e., physical, emotional, sexual; Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012). While not all courses discussed CSA within their course outlines and descriptions, sexuality education is a powerful protective factor against CSA (Fryda & Hulme, 2015; Kenny et al., 2013) and personal safety skills are an essential part of CSE (SIECCAN, 2019) and what it means to support sexuality development in early childhood (Balter et al., 2021a; Balter & van Rhijn, in press).

Within this category, data show that many courses (n = 23) focused on detecting abuse, violence, or neglect, as well as discussing the educators’ role in reporting abuse, “Students develop a basic knowledge of child abuse, early identification and professional requirements for the reporting of child abuse. The roles that an early childhood educator can play in supporting families is examined,” (Mothercraft College of ECE, Course 2). Further, while no data contained explicit mention of supporting children to build protection skills or personal safety skills as part of the training educators receive on CSA, some courses included prevention in their considerations for educators when learning about CSA (e.g., “recognizing signs and symptoms of abuse; reporting abuse; and supporting children and families who are the victims of abuse, as well as implementing prevention strategies into ECE programs to assist in the protection of children,” Niagara College, SOCL 1328, and “He or she develops a learning activity to promote the prevention of abuse with the aim of providing help and support to children and families,” Collège Boréal, ESE 1027). As such, these courses were also included in the considerations for
this category. Other mentions of CSA detection and reporting were brief (e.g., “The process of child abuse reporting will be examined at an introductory level,” Seneca College, ECE 112) or non-specific, centering more on the legislated requirement to report (e.g., “prepare to fulfill professional responsibilities in the area of child abuse,” Mohawk College, EDUC 10113). Although not all courses explicitly mentioned CSA, CSA prevention and protection are a distinct professional competency (CECE, 2017) and all programs are required to address abuse, and educators’ roles in detecting and reporting suspected abuse (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012). As the study only examined publicly available course materials, I am unable to determine whether CSA is embedded within other courses and does not explicitly appear in course outlines or descriptions collected for analysis.

While reviewing the data, I noted that material related to abuse was often included within courses that discussed general health and safety in an early childhood environment (e.g., Health, Safety & Nutrition). As such, it is expected that even in programs where CSA was not explicitly found in course materials, pre-service educators would receive some knowledge of CSA and reporting requirements⁷. Of concern, however, is the lack of emphasis on personal safety skills within the data; the importance of including this information will be considered in the discussion section.

**Understanding and Supporting Diversity and Differences**

Throughout the data, programs discussed supporting diversity and difference within society on the basis of race, sexuality, and culture. It is important to recognize that considering humans as diverse or different because of these facets of identity can be othering, however, it is equally important to recognize that in Canada, the lived experiences of those outside Western norms (i.e., people who do not fit the white, cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied, and neurotypical) are indeed viewed different and are uniquely impacted by societal and cultural norms and policy decisions. As such, I thought it was important to consider whether and to what extent pre-service training discussed anti-bias approaches to early childhood education. Further, as the early learning pedagogy in Ontario emphasizes the importance of families, and educators’

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⁷ At time of data collection, one institution included in the current study was renewed for accreditation with the specification that changes need to be implemented that adequately address the requirement to recognize and disclose abuse (CECE, 2021).
relationships with children and families, understanding the various family structure and the circumstances faced by families in Ontario was important for this section. As discussed previously, this category includes two sub-categories. First, data from course materials show that pre-service educators are gaining a General Understanding of Diversity and Differences found within society. Further, pre-service training contains courses about Supporting the Families in Your Program, with specific knowledge on how educators can support a variety of family types and family circumstances through their practice.

**General Understanding of Diversity and Differences**

Most of the programs that touch on diversity \( n = 34 \) included broad descriptions of a variety of types of diversity that the courses would cover (e.g., “Racism ableism ageism colonialism homophobia antisemitism sexism and other forms of institutionalized oppression are considered in relation to the experiences needs and responses of populations who have been historically excluded disadvantaged and oppressed,” St. Clair College, ECE 205G). Also, within this category, course materials contained mentions of supporting of diverse experiences and the impact of policies on intersecting identities and experiences,

*The course will examine emerging and future social policy directions in Canada and will consider our position in relation to the world. Issues of race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, age and citizenship will be addressed throughout the course. In order to work effectively with children, families and communities, and to be advocates for social justice, early childhood educators need to understand the conditions which create and maintain social problems as well as the policies and programs designed as solutions to these problems. (George Brown College, GHUM1041)*

Further, course materials specifically described the application of critical approaches to early learning practice (e.g., “relate the principles of anti-bias education to their role as early childhood educators,” Niagara College, EDUC 1216). Together, these data were similar in their emphasis on understanding each component of, and the intersection between, social issues and early learning. Ensuring educators are equipped with an understanding of diversity and the intersections between forms of systemic oppression is an important component of understanding anti-bias pedagogies (Crenshaw, 1991), and the role of pre-service training in providing this teaching has been noted in the literature (e.g., Nganga, 2015).
Supporting the Families in Your Program

When looking at data about supporting diversity, I identified that Supporting the Families in Your Program, and particularly, supporting the diversity of families and families’ experiences was a particularly salient concept. Further, this topic is a unique consideration for early childhood educators, as supporting families is a large part of educators’ practice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Given the emphasis of the importance of family-educator relationships in Ontario’s early learning frameworks, it is unsurprising that all programs in the study had course material aimed at preparing educators to collaborate with families. However, only some programs were explicit in discussing a range of family types and how to support the unique needs often seen by these families (n = 17). The majority of data centred on supporting a variety of family types, emphasizing that educators meet families where they are at:

*Using a strength-based approach, students examine multiple family “types” and a wide range of issues which affect families in Canada today. Students gain knowledge of the benefits of inclusive partnerships with families and learn effective strategies for supporting and engaging families in early learning and care settings.* (St. Lawrence College, EARL 5)

Further, data within the category outlined specific family types of focus in the course (e.g., “students will examine diversity found in families through the following topics of divorce, lone-parenting, blended and step families, poverty, teen pregnancy, death, violence, same sex families, homelessness, skip-generation families and immigration on family dynamics,” Sheridan College, SOCI 12029G). Of note, some programs (n = 2) named the frameworks used to guide students’ thinking about how to support diversity in families (e.g., “Using an anti-oppressive and structural lens: students will examine challenges that Canadian families are facing and develop an awareness of the principles and values that guide human service practice with families,” Northern College, SW3113). Lastly, some course materials focused on the communication between educators and families (e.g., “Students will develop and demonstrate presentation skills in order to provide parent education which supports families with specific issues. The principles and strategies for ensuring a family-centered practice in an early childhood setting will also be considered,” Cambrian College, ECE 2395). Overall, data in this category range from supporting family structures, including structures outside of the nuclear family norm, as well as practical
strategies for educators to understand, respect, and plan programs that support all families in their care community.

Domains of Development

Throughout the data, course material often referred to domains of development (e.g., physical, emotional, social; “Students will study typical and varying characteristics of physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional development and the interrelatedness of these domains,” Loyalist College, CADW 1006, CADW 2001, CADW 2003). Further, course materials highlighted the interconnectivity between each developmental domain and the importance of supporting all domains (e.g., “Emphasis is on the interdependency of all domains of development - physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional and the complex interaction of biological and environmental factors,” Toronto Metropolitan University, CLD 101). As an in-depth knowledge of children’s development is a key professional competency for early childhood educators, all programs (n = 39) discussed domains of development, with most programs devoting a large proportion of their instructional time to this topic. From the data, much of pre-service training programs examined children’s development from a developmentalism lens (e.g., “in this course students will investigate foundational child development theorists and their linkage to practice and pedagogy in early care and education systems,” Fanshawe College, ECED 1074) or integrated developmentalism with other approaches (e.g., health-based approaches):

The fundamental concepts of developmental health provide the foundation for this course. Major theories of child development from both biological and social sciences will be examined. Emphasis will be placed on the influence of the complex interplay between biology and experience on developmental health, behavior [sic] and learning. (George Brown College, PSY 1075)

Further, some courses discussed child development in the context of DAP, (e.g., “Students will examine the role of the Early Childhood Educator in maintaining an inclusive, child centered and developmentally appropriate practice,” Fanshawe College, ECED 1084, and “Recognize the implications that supportive interactions have on brain development and its correlates - emotion regulation, and social competence throughout the lifespan,” Seneca College, BCD 404). Overall, course materials emphasized holistic development and the interconnectedness of development
and well-being (e.g., “Students gain an understanding of what contributes to a child’s sense of belonging, resilience and self-regulation,” Georgian College, ECED 2011).

Based on the literature, supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood would align with the category of supporting children across the Domains of Development. While this category outlines the way that pre-service training programs support the domains of development, and the emphasis on overall well-being across domains (i.e., holistic development), sexuality development was not explicitly included in the lists of domains impact child development found within the data. Leaving sexuality out of the developmental domains means that unless sexuality development is discussed in conversations of physical, social, and emotional development, sexuality development is not considered to be a developmental domain. This assumption is in opposition with the recommendations from leading health organizations (i.e., WHO), and experts on sexuality education (i.e., WHO, SIECCAN) who position sexuality education as a component of holistic health and well-being.

**Landscape of Early Learning in Ontario**

The final category of data in this analysis is guided by literature from Timmons and Airton (2020), which highlights how the goals of Ontario’s early learning (i.e., HDLH; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) aligns with supporting sexuality development. Further, they extend this connection to the professional responsibility of creating safe educational environments (Timmons & Airton, 2020). In Ontario, the Ministry of Education has outlined goals and approaches to early learning which frame the current study (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) and are important to consider when aiming to understand the context in which the data are situated. Therefore, this category considers data from pre-service programs that highlights the alignment between Ontario’s early learning landscape and supporting the development of in early childhood. The sub-category, Goals of Early Childhood Education highlights that the fundamental principles of early learning in Ontario (i.e., belonging, expression, engagement, and well-being as foundations for learning), require children’s holistic development to be supported. The second sub-category, Approaches to Programming Using Emergent Curriculum, revisits the ideas of emergent curriculum presented in the literature review, alongside reported experiences of ECEs with children’s exploration of sexuality and gender (i.e., Balter et al., 2016; Cacciatore et al., 2020b). Further, this sub-category presents data where course materials discuss the role of
the educator in emergent curriculum (i.e., observing, assessing, and planning learning experiences according to children’s interests).

**Goals of Early Childhood Education**

Across data from all pre-service training programs ($n = 39$), courses included extensive training on how educators can ensure a safe and healthy learning environment for children in their care:

*This course provides students with the foundational knowledge for establishing a healthy and safe early years environment. [...] Child development knowledge, observation, current legislation, and agency/school board policies are introduced to guide students in decision-making with regards to supporting physical, mental and emotional health of young children.* (Loyalist College, ECEP 1013)

Furthermore, Ontario’s pedagogical framework outlines the foundations for learning in early childhood education (i.e., belonging, well-being, expression, engagement; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). While programs are not required to incorporate these four pillars into their pre-service programming, this policy and pedagogical context has influenced the content of pre-service training programs. Few programs explicitly used the pedagogical framework to guide pre-service training (e.g., *“developmental milestones that occur from conception through the formative years; the social/ecological context that impact development; a review of the ELECT document, how does learning happen, and current research that is relevant to the learning outcomes,”* Lambton College, ECE 1184). As previous research has outlined the connection between well-being and holistic development, supporting sexuality development fits within the goals and pillars identified by the Ontario Ministry of Education (Timmons & Airton, 2020), and was therefore important to include this content within the analysis of the current study.

Additionally, course materials used concepts of DAP to guide pre-service training, as early childhood programs *“positively influence children's development and learning through developmentally appropriate practices”* (Durham College, CHLD 1201). As the current study considers and critiques DAP and the use of DAP to uphold normative practices, it is important to consider where DAP was found within the data. Data containing DAP were often paired with mentions of holistic well-being, supporting children, or other specific approaches to creating responsive learning environments, (e.g., *“this course explores introductory skills in planning a*
developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive curriculum for young children,” Anishinabek Educational Institute, Course 6). Here, pre-service training equips students with an understanding of, “the educator’s role in supporting the child’s sense of belonging, health and well-being, positive identity, and sense of self in their daily experiences in an early learning environment” (George Brown College, ECE 1075). Further, programs aim to help students “conceptualize the role of the practitioner/educator as a culturally competent, empathetic professional promoting the holistic emotional wellbeing of children” (Seneca College, BCD 502). Ultimately the data from course materials suggest that the intent of DAP in the context of early learning is aligned with the orientations of the current study. Moreover, it is important to translate the inclusive, critical notions of developmentally appropriate into practice.

**Approaches to Programing Using Emergent Curriculum**

Data within this sub-category are related to the design of learning opportunities stemming from children’s interests, skills, abilities, and context and emphasize practices that follows and extends on children’s emerging curiosity and interests. All programs (n = 39) emphasized the importance of program planning and discuss child-led or emergent curriculum approaches,

*This course will explore the value of pedagogical documentation, assessment & reflective techniques designed to incorporate learning goals that support child-led, high quality, developmentally appropriate experiences. Skills gained in observing young children will help students identify and communicate how learning evolves while assessing and exploring future developmental and relationship building opportunities.* (Canadore College, ECE 125)

As a key pedagogical approach to early learning in Ontario, all programs discussed designing learning opportunities that extend on children’s emerging ideas and curiosities. Further, courses related the planning of learning experiences to the practice of programming for children (e.g., “The philosophical tenets of responsive and inclusive practice in designing, planning and evaluating programs for children will be explored. Personal bias and its influence on professional standards of practice will be considered.” Humber College, EDUC 111). Further, it was important to highlight the role of the educator, who “integrates family and children’s diversity when developing curriculum and designing environments in early childhood education” (Algonquin College, FAM 1232), speaking to educators’ role to considering the unique needs of
children and families when planning programming.

Overall, this category demonstrated that pre-service training involves equipping educators with the skills to follow children’s interests and ask questions about children’s development to create rich learning experiences. It was also important to consider data where course material focused on “the value in allowing children to co-constructive [sic] learning” (Canadore College, ECE 115) as literature reviewed for the current study highlighted that children ask questions and engage in behaviours related to their sexuality and gender development (Cacciatore et al., 2020b).

Conclusion

The final stage of qualitative content analysis involves proving explanations to address research questions (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). As such, this section will briefly address the ways in which analyzing the data helped me to answer the research questions. The main research question for Study 1 asked how pre-service educators are prepared to support the development of sexuality in early childhood. Policy mandates that training programs in Ontario must provide knowledge on how to support holistic development (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012); however, holistic development of children in the early years is not currently thought to include sexuality development based on evidence from the data. Based on the data, and on guidance from past research in the Ontario context (Timmons & Airton, 2020), current training programs do not adequately prepare educators to provide support in all areas of children’s development. While some pre-service programs discussed the role of educators in supporting the development of sexuality, on a large scale, this knowledge is missing from current pre-service training programs. Further, the current study asked if the current training publicly refers to sexuality and gender development either implicitly or explicitly. Based on these data, there were very few explicit mentions of sexuality development within pre-service programs across Ontario. However, all programs ($n = 39$) in Ontario covered a wide range of topics which could implicitly discuss sexuality development in the early years. As such, while programs are covering development, many programs are leaving out a large domain of development, leaving educators unsupported in their future practices where children will continue to develop ideas of sexuality, gender, bodily autonomy, respect, family types, stereotypes, and oppression.
Study 2: Key Informant Interview Analysis

While research has outlined the importance of supporting holistic development (WHO, 2006), and early childhood educators’ self-described need for formal training on supporting the development of sexuality (Balter et al., 2018), there is little formal guidance around what DAP looks like when supporting this domain of development in early childhood. As such, Study 2 replicated previous research which outlined DAP for supporting adolescent sexuality development (Marques et al., 2017), and informed by research which conducted interviews regarding what is developmentally appropriate sexuality education for young children (Cacciatore et al., 2020a).

Semi-structured interviews paired with an inductive-dominant approach to coding was determined to fit the goals of this project and allow for the participants to co-create the meaning of DAP in the context of sexuality education and the early years. Furthermore, inductive approaches support reliability of research designs with small, specialized sample populations (Morse, 2015). Overall, the study aimed to provide guidance to educators, and ECE pre-service training, and address what DAP means for supporting sexuality development in early childhood. The following sections outlines the methods (i.e., interview process, recruitment efforts, sample size, and interview considerations), and approach to analysis. These sections are followed by a presentation of the results.

Methods

Ethics approval was obtained through University of Guelph Research Ethics Board (REB # 21-10-023; see Appendix B). The Research Ethics Board oversees and approves all research at the University of Guelph, ensuring alignment with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), in which the researcher is certified (see Appendix C). After receiving ethics clearance, key informants were invited to participate in the study through targeted searching (Asiamah et al., 2017) and chain-referral snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). As Study 2 was both exploratory in nature and pertains to topics that are potentially sensitive, this sampling method connected with participants who have professional experience with conversations around sexuality and gender with children (Taylor & Blake, 2015). Though, this sampling technique results in a sample of key informants who support the aims of the study, higher than if participants were sampled randomly (Biernacki &
Waldorf, 1981). This bias is not a limitation, however, as several regulatory health agencies (e.g., WHO, SIECCAN) call for supporting well-being by supporting sexuality education for children; noting the bias in sampling is a consideration, nonetheless. Moreover, the exploratory nature of this study suggests that seeking highly skilled, key informants would be a strong way to establish validity and further the understanding in this area (Morse, 2015).

An initial recruitment email was sent to a targeted group of individuals and organizations, identified through professional networks of the project committee and University of Guelph faculty, as well as through internet searches of public organizations (e.g., non-profit organizations, advocacy organizations). Further recruitment efforts were shared more broadly with any individual working to support 2SLGBTQINA+ communities, and/or in sexuality education; or the organization themselves, who work sexuality education professionals with a focus on those who work with young children and their families; or professionals in early learning, including those who advocate for and support sexuality development in the early years. Considering a broad scope of professional experience hopes to ensure that anyone with intersecting experiences in this topic would be a fit for the project’s exploratory aims. Most successfully, a peer was able to pass the call for recruitment to the provincial accreditation body for RECEs in Ontario, the College of Early Childhood Educators (i.e., CECE). The College shared the call for recruitment with their members across Ontario, via their membership email list. The power of institutions, such as the CECE, to share research initiatives with the child care community across Ontario cannot be overstated. I am deeply grateful to the individual who passed along my call for recruitment, and to the CECE for their assistance with connecting this project to local experts, passionate about furthering the understanding and practice of creating supportive early learning environments.

After receiving general recruitment information, interested participants were directed to Qualtrics to review and sign an informed consent form, and answer screening and demographic questions. Screening questions asked about participants’ experience with sexuality education, and/or early childhood. Selected participants were invited to participate via email, where a brief introduction to the study’s goals and methods were provided along with the invitation to select a time for a virtual semi-structured interview through Microsoft Teams. Participants had previously signed an electronic informed consent form and the consent form was reviewed at the
beginning of the interview. Here, participants were given an opportunity to state their consent to participate. Furthermore, participants were reminded during the interview that consent is an ongoing process, and could be removed at any time, for any reason. Participants were sent a $50 honorarium, or donation to an organization of their choice, to compensate them for their time and expertise.

Participants

Key informant interviews are conducted with a selected group of participants who hold specialized knowledge on a particular topic or area (Gilchrist, 1992; Taylor & Blake, 2015). For the purposes of the study, key informants were operationalized as professionals working in sexuality education, education, or in organizations supporting 2SLGBTQINA+ youth and families. The criteria intentionally provided a wide range of potential candidates as to not gatekeep whose knowledge is considered key (Lokot & Wake, 2021). In total, 38 prospective participants completed the survey expressing interest and answering demographic questions. The study attracted potential participants whose education history, work history, and/or positionality would add insight to the current project; there were many qualified professionals with an array of experience in sexuality education and early childhood education. As key informant interviews invite highly skilled experts, when selecting participants from the pool, I selected individuals who had experiences that could help meet the aims of the project and answer the variety of research questions (i.e., defining developmentally appropriate, specifying what constitutes as supporting sexuality development, and outlining the necessary training for ECEs). Overall 10 prospective participants were invited for an interview, with seven agreeing and scheduling an interview time. One participant was not able to complete the interview and was withdrawn from the sample. In total, six participants completed key informant interviews (see Table 2).

Participants for the project ranged in age from 24 to 59 years old and declared belonging to a variety of religious groups (i.e., Christian, n = 1; Jewish, n = 1; Agnostic, n = 1; and Atheist, n = 2). Further, the sample comprised of those identifying as non-binary (n = 1), male (n = 1), and female (n = 4). Lastly, the sample of key informants was racially imbalanced with individuals identifying as white (n = 5), or East Asian (n = 1). Key-informants declared a range of relevant education with some having completed their certification to become a RECE or DECE (n = 4), some who completed or are currently completing graduate training (n = 2), as
well as other relevant professional learning (i.e., workshops about sexuality development in childhood) and professional certifications (e.g., Resource Consultant; \( n = 1 \)).

**Table 2: Professional Experiences of Key Informants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Experience in CSE</th>
<th>Experience in ECE</th>
<th>Professional Role/Experience(^8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 1</td>
<td>10-15 years</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>Organization advocating for and educating on sexual health; researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 2</td>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>Organization advocating for and educating on sexual health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 3</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>RECE; Resource Consultant (RC); professor (pre-service program)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 4</td>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>RECE; BA; Montessori (Lower Level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 5</td>
<td>Experience through practice as DECE</td>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>DECE in Full Day Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Informant 6</td>
<td>Experience through practice as RECE</td>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>RECE; researcher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility to ask follow-up and clarifying questions (Schensul et al., 1999), and provide rich descriptions that contribute to validity and reliability (Morse, 2015). Indeed, initial questions were designed to set the tone for the interview, be broad in nature, and allow for respondents to cover a variety of topics which can then be explored further. From there, interviews explored two main areas. First, the interview inquired about key informants’ perspectives on developmentally appropriate content for the early years. Additionally, the interviews discuss explored how early childhood educators could be trained to support holistic well-being of the children in their care. The participants offered ideas about what language to use, how to demonstrate concepts to children (i.e., books, activities that can be used, resources), and suggestions for additional training needed for educators, beyond the topics they would see in practice. Data consisted of six interview transcripts and were analyzed

\(^8\) Note: Each participant provided additional information on their relevant education and professional experience. To protect the privacy of each participant, generalized descriptions of their experience are provided.
using conventional content analysis.

The mainstream concept of saturation does not fit with the theoretical underpinnings of the current project which aim to remain open but ensure to answer research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019); however, there was need to ensure that the project remained both feasible and exploratory in nature. As such, the concept of information power, which uses contextual pieces of information (e.g., specificity of participant knowledge) to guide qualitative researchers in estimating their participant pool was used for this study (Malterud et al., 2016). Since the participants’ knowledge is highly specific and semi-structured interviews allow for rich, in-depth descriptions, a small pool of potential participants was predicted to be sufficient to answer the research question and explore the perspectives of the selected experts (Malterud et al., 2016). As such, I aimed to conduct a maximum of eight interviews but recognized that patterns of meaning and information might have been clear before that point. Indeed, due to a combination of challenges with recruitment, clear patterns in the data, and further connections to both past research in the field and the results of Study 1, the project concluded recruitment after six interviews.

Participants were provided with a copy of the interview questions (see Appendix D) prior to the interview. The goal of this decision was to respect the reflection process each participant might take in thinking about the topic, questions, and the way their professional roles may offer unique insight to components discussed in the interview. Interview questions explored the boundaries of sexuality education for the early years, asking what topics and ideas are developmentally appropriate as well as what topics would not be included for the age group. Further, participants were asked to explain their professional perspective on what constitutes as developmentally appropriate. This allowed participants to share their ideas of sexuality education, in addition to allowing space for them to critique the concept of DAP. Additional questions asked participants to highlight the barriers faced or anticipated when discussing sexuality education for children, and particularly for young children. While barriers were covered in the literature review, it was important for the current project to explore the barriers specifically identified by the participants to help situate their responses in Ontario’s education sector, as well as within the current Western, Canadian, sociopolitical environment. Further, this approach respects that participants’ experiences are situated in unique contexts, and that their
lived realities cannot be separated from the advice and recommendations they offered during their interviews. Lastly, questions were asked to explicitly highlight the importance and interlinking concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion. As the theoretical orientations of this project critique the dominant norms within society, it was particularly important to ensure that this was a focus in the interview questions as well. The following results of this analysis closely mirror the interview questions (see Appendix D); however, the analysis extended beyond the questions asked to explore the scope of what DAP looks like, considered the various elements within each component discussed by key informants, and situates the results in the context of Ontario’s early learning and child care landscape with connections to the literature.

**Conventional Content Analysis**

As with the first study, this portion of the project also used qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA approaches are flexible, researchers’ interpretation of meaning through systematic coding and categorisation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) with the aim of representing large amounts of textual data by shared categories of content and meaning (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). This study upholds the shift away from positivism (Devi Prasad, 2019) and quantitative methods (i.e., counting frequencies; Elo & Kyngäs, 2007), instead using the key informant’s shared experiences and knowledge of the context (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Morgan, 1993) to answer the research questions. As such, this method was determined to be in line with the aim of the study, to gather key informant perspectives on what DAP looks like for supporting sexuality development in early childhood. While the theoretical framework guides this project overall, by examining Developmentally Appropriate Practice as it is conceptualized by critical scholars (e.g., Grieshaber, & Blaise, 2019), there is no pre-existing theoretical framework which will be used to code the data for this analysis, aligning with an inductive approach (Graneheim et al., 2017). Similarly to Study 1, the second analysis also follows the steps of conventional QCA as described in the literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994),

i. immersion in the data;
ii. initial framework;
iii. initial coding;
iv. charting and category creation; and
v. interpretation.
While Study 1 and Study 2 both use conventional QCA, the approaches to key informant interview data were distinctive from course materials due to the more contextual nature of considering participant responses, particularly responses given in semi-structured interviews, which are flexible by design. Specifically, the depth and scope covered by key informants provided a rich dataset to work with. As the aim of Study 2 was to outline what DAP means when supporting sexuality development in early childhood, the richness of the data provided unique considerations and required frequent connections to Ontario’s early learning sector, previous literature on sexuality education, and child development to ground the analysis. This section describes the steps of conventional QCA and how they were applied to the analysis of key informant interview transcript data.

**Immersion in the Data**

Following guidance from literature on conventional QCA approaches (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), I began the analysis by reading the transcribed interviews to familiarize myself with the data. Throughout this stage, I noted connections between the participants’ data, and between the dataset and the literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Also in the immersion phase of analysis, I began thinking about initial codes that would support the analysis in answering the research questions. Therefore, guided by the framework which adopts an expansive approach to DAP, I considered how participants discussed the concepts of developmentally appropriate practice, sexuality development, sexuality education, and the role of early childhood education in supporting sexuality development. Through the immersion stage, I noted that interview data contained longer answers that touched on a variety of topics under the research question. As such, when analyzing the key informant interview data, the unit of analysis is the transcripts, and more specifically sentences or paragraphs from key informants’ data. Considering the whole transcript, and focusing on smaller segments of data, allowed for full context of participants’ responses to be presented in the analysis where doing so would help to thoroughly answer the research questions (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Graneheim et al., 2017).

Further, as the study is exploratory in nature, aiming to provide guidance to the early childhood education field on DAP for supporting sexuality development, rich experts from key informants would support professionals’ understandings of the research results and would help support future research initiatives in this area.
Initial Framework

When considering the interview transcript data, I was able to use the interview questions to outline the initial framework. To align with approaches of QCA, the current study extended beyond summarizing the interview questions and their responses and explored the variation of responses for each question as well as the intersection of the topics explored during the interviews (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). An example of this was identifying barriers faced by professionals when trying to support the sexual health and well-being of young children. Although interview participants were asked explicitly to name barriers, the analysis allowed for exploration of the types of barriers (e.g., lack of training and resources, lack of policy support), and the level at which that barrier was present (e.g., program level, societal level). It is these connections and further explorations of responses, as well as considerations for the context in which the data was collected, that moves the process from summary to analysis. Moreover, this approach distinguishes conventional content analysis from thematic analysis as thematic analysis would explore deeper meanings in the data, looking for unifying ideas among themes (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The current study, however, is concerned with connections to the policy landscape in Ontario to answer the research questions, which was better suited to a methodology that allowed for a critical theoretical framework and which allowed for key informants’ expert opinions to be highlighted.

Initial Coding

After initially reading and considering the dataset, I read each transcript again, using NVivo software (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2022) to create codes. This phase of the analysis involved applying the initial framework to transcripts, refining, and adjusting codes as more data are assessed (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). The open coding approach (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007) maximizes the scope of data which can be considered and provides flexibility to how connections between data are made (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), allowing for an inductive-dominant approach to analysis (Armat et al., 2018). Drawing on knowledge of early learning, the concept of early learning environments as the third teacher (see Callaghan, 2013) intersected with the project’s theoretical framework, which utilized a wide scope of DAP. Considering these together, I recognized that data about Creating Inclusive Environments for Children and Families was a key component of Defining DAP for Supporting Sexuality Development and
included the former as a sub-category of the latter. The following section describes the way in which categories were defined and refined to complete the analysis.

**Defining and Refining Categories**

To define and refine the categories, I charted potential categories after the initial coding to see the categories in relation to one another and in relation to the research questions (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Through the process of charting, I identified groups of like data that addressed the same or similar areas of interest when considering what ECEs need from pre-service training to equip them to support sexuality development. In this step of the analysis, I considered how best to present the practical strategies suggestions key informants (e.g., examples of language modeling, ways to integrate concepts into early learning environments, pedagogical strategies). Initially, these data fit together, creating a category about the elements that educators could consider in their current practices (i.e., what could DAP for sexuality development look like in early childhood?). However, upon further analysis and conceptual consideration, I ultimately decided to present practical suggestions within the other categories in the analysis. To fill gaps in the literature about sexuality development in early childhood for professionals working with young children in Ontario, presenting the approaches to supporting sexuality development alongside the identified topics included in supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood reinforces each topic in the context of DAP and intertwines the content and practice together within the analysis. I made this analytic decision to align the analysis with the integration between content and approach seen in early learning pedagogy, whereby educators carefully consider ways that children’s development can be authentically supported. Moreover, this presentation felt truer to the data from key informants, who often presented examples alongside their suggested topics to model and emphasize what it can look like (or sound like) to be supporting the development of sexuality in the early years.

Overall, the literature reviewed, the theoretical framework, and my own knowledge of policy, alongside contextual conversations with my advisor and other colleagues in the sector, furthered my understanding of Ontario’s early learning field and supported my analytic decisions. In the following section, the results of the key informant interviews are discussed, highlighting the gaps faced by professionals on the front lines as they navigate supporting
children’s developing sexuality in their various roles.

Results

While previous research has outlined what can be expected from children in early childhood (e.g., Cacciatore, et al., 2020b; Wurtele & Kenny, 2011), and regulatory health agencies have positioned sexuality education a key part of overall health and well-being (e.g., SIECCAN, 2019; WHO et al., 2010), there is little inclusion of sexuality and gender within Ontario’s pre-service early childhood educator training programs. As such, Study 2 of the current project consulted key informants who are knowledgeable professionals in sexual health and sexuality education, early childhood education, and early childhood educator pre-service training to answer the following research question and sub questions,

(2) What do sexuality education experts identify as required training for ECEs to help them support the development of sexuality in early childhood?

i. What does Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) mean in addressing sexuality education in the early years?

ii. What do educators need to support sexuality development, teach personal safety skills, and empower children in ways that align with the pedagogical approaches of the early years sector?

Data from the interviews were categorized into the following categories:

i. defining DAP for supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood;

ii. topics included in supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood;

iii. barriers to supporting comprehensive sexuality education;

iv. teaching preservice educators; and

v. finding hope in positive interactions.

In the first category, I present data from key informants which explicitly defined DAP, supported by their professional knowledge of sexuality education and early childhood education, and outlined considerations for negotiating what developmentally appropriate means when supporting development. Next, the second category outlined what topics were included in the scope of supporting sexuality development in the early years along with specific practices that educators have used or could use to support their classroom. The third category describes the barriers faced by key informants and other practicing professionals in sexuality education and
early childhood education. The fourth category contains data about what specific training would be supportive to ECEs during their pre-service education. Here, participants describe training that would strengthen pre-service educators’ initial understanding of supporting children’s sexuality development alongside other developmental domains. In the final category, participants share their hope for this domain of children’s development through personal experiences, emphasizing the importance of sharing this hope with upcoming educators. Each of these categories, along with their sub-categories, are presented in the following sections.

**Defining DAP for the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood**

Key informants were asked to define Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) for the development of sexuality in early childhood. Broadly, participants outlined that DAP is dependent on children’s needs, as well as their interests and behaviours, “developmentally appropriate means to teach children at their level of understanding and their age and stage of development” (Key Informant 5). Moreover, key informants extended this definition to include ensuring children understand the world around them:

> So when I think back of what is appropriate, I think it can be anything that children are exposed to and us as educators, whether it is a positive or a negative content that children are exposed to, we need to know how to talk about it with children. (Key Informant 6)

Key informants were clear that when discussing sexuality development, it is important for educators to use their knowledge of development and of the children in their care, to tailor their approaches to children’s age and developmental level, “what you’re going to teach someone in kindergarten is different than what someone’s learning in grade four, right? It’s the same kind of concepts, but you’re talking to them in a different way” (Key Informant 4). Key informants also discussed the tensions between developmental approaches and inclusive approaches, aligning with the position taken under a theoretical framework of DAP:

> I do wrestle with the definition of developmentally appropriate just from coming from more of a queer and reconceptualist perspective of developmentalism, I often do critique a little bit and analyze it a little bit in this in my own thinking and even in my own work. (Key Informant 6)

This participant reflection highlights that frontline professionals are aware of the limitations of
silenced approaches to development, and normative approaches that systemically exclude the experiences of all children (e.g., children and families who are 2SLGBTQINA+, disabled, neurodiverse, Black, Indigenous, racialized), in particular.

Participants also emphasized being clear when discussing personal safety skills with young children. Key informants identified that for children this young, there can be “confusion between getting messages at home that are different from school, and where do these boundaries lie and what are the rules at home versus the rules at school” (Key Informant 4). Another participant shared an experience where these boundaries were not clear for a child:

*The parents had said that they said to their child, you know, “you know that this isn’t OK, we don’t share our private parts with other people.” And he said well “I know that’s the rule at home, but no one ever told me that at school.”* (Key Informant 5)

These accounts highlight the need for clear, explicit conversations with children about boundaries and the context of certain boundaries (i.e., home rules versus school rules). As described by one participant, clear language and explanations are best:

*If kids have questions, that educators are answering them with a very clear understanding of, you know, openness, but also making sure that it’s clear that, like “OK here—here’s why this isn’t OK...” or “here’s why we don’t say those kinds of words...” and “here’s why that might be hurtful...”* (Key Informant 1)

Here, key informants identify early childhood as a natural time for supporting sexuality development. Indeed, key informants state that in early childhood classrooms, educators often see children engaging in exploration of gender:

*when they get into the classroom, there’s a very good chance there will be some children who have gender questions. Even at two and three years old [...] as soon as they’re literally able start having some personal self-skills, where they’ve got a vocabulary.* (Key Informant 3)

Moreover, in as noted in the literature review, children between one and six years old frequently display behaviours and ask questions related to their sexuality development (Cacciatore et al., 2020b). These displays would indicate the topic is developmentally appropriate and educators should be responding to these behaviours, “a gauging concept I use is if the child or youth is asking the question, they’re are old enough to receive an accurate answer. This may leave out
details, but we don’t avoid the question or lie” (Key Informant 2). Key informants outlined that support for sexuality development is necessary along the continuum of early childhood education, beginning from infancy, “for consent, I’ve learned that sort of starts as young as infancy...when [the] child can actually express back to you whether or not they would like to be picked up or hugged or touched” (Key Informant 5). Furthermore, key informants were also clear that support for sexuality development involves skill building:

[It doesn’t] look like sexuality—sexual health. They look like foundational learning skills, right? They look like media literacy more generally, they look like relationship literacy, they look like knowledge of the body more generally. But then they grow into sexual health related concepts. (Key Informant 1)

Furthermore, from this description, and research outlining the parallels between inclusive pedagogies and Ontario’s pedagogical framework (Timmons & Airton, 2020), it is evident that support for sexuality development involves foundational skill building and support for children’s authentic exploration of themselves, their feelings, and their identity. Moreover, the role of the educator in DAP for supporting sexuality education is to support children’s curiosity without shame or influence from negative biases (e.g., gender roles, heteronormativity).

Overall, key informants reiterated that, broadly, DAP aims to ensure that young children are receiving information that will help them build skills and knowledge to support their development and growth in early childhood and which will continue to support them throughout their life, “developmentally appropriate is really about building that foundational base in a way that makes sense for youth and—children and youth as they grow. [...] It’s about understanding that this is related to sexuality later on in life” (Key Informant 1). Moreover, key informants outlined that DAP for supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood means explicit information, conversations, and responses to children’s curiosities, behaviours, and experiences. The following sections outline further sub-categories in the data that help clarify the scope of DAP for supporting sexuality development in the early years.

Behaviours and Interests in Early Childhood

When discussing what Developmentally Appropriate Practice means, key informants spoke about allowing children to explore, and specifically, supporting development and well-being by supporting their curiosity:
Your role is to develop their character and their interests and see where it goes, giving them opportunities to really explore as a very young person in a safe environment, what they may want to do later on as they get into primary and in high school. (Key Informant 3)

Educators can support children’s development by scaffolding when, “kids have those questions or they’re not quite sure about something or don’t know how to respond to the things that they see in the world” (Key Informant 1). As early childhood is a time of curiosity and exploration, educators can expect to see children explore all domains of development (e.g., physical development and testing the limits of their body by running or jumping). To support sexuality and gender development, educators can support children by understanding that this exploration is developmentally appropriate, “there is a lot of exploration and discussion at this age about gender and that’s normal too. And just accepting and being loving and caring and, you know, letting—letting them be kids” (Key Informant 1). One participant gave a detailed account of some of the exploring behaviour witnessed with children:

So, they like to touch. They like to explore. And then when they do touch, ‘that feels a little different or that feels good or that makes me feel different in a certain way.’ So, they kind of touch a little bit more. Same with girls. I had a—a lot of girls, when I used to do daycare, when they—it was time for rest, they found a comfort in kind of rubbing themselves to sleep because it made them feel good and they were able to calm their bodies. That’s all developmentally appropriate at that age. They’re learning to explore what their sensations, what feels good. (Key Informant 4)

Another participant echoed that for young children, exploration is not inherently sexual, but rather pleasure focused, “it’s like, “This is cool. What does this do? This feels good.” It is very pleasure focused or explorative and learning focused and curiosity focused” (Key Informant 1).

Overall, this sub-category describes the role of the educator, to support children’s journey of building an understanding of themselves. Further, the sub-category outlined some of the behaviours that ECEs can expect to see when working with young children. Knowledge of the behaviours that can be expected from children in their educational care will help ECEs be prepared to support children’s learning and development. Further conversations with key informants on Topics Included in Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood is
Acknowledging and Respecting Children’s Competence

Following the previous sub-category where key informants addressed the reality of society and the various identities of people within it, it was interesting to note that participants also discussed children’s awareness of implicit and explicit responses to their sexuality development. Within this sub-category, key informants highlighted children’s capacity to learn about the world, “they’re like sponges from, you know, zero to six really is when they kind of take all that in and see how the world works” (Key Informant 4). Key informants further reinforced the requirement for educators to consider and respecting children as competent, “they’re tiny humans. They’re not like invalids, right? Like they are one of the smartest one of the smartest, like humans on the planet” (Key Informant 4). This view of the child aligns with Ontario’s early learning framework, which emphasizes children as capable, competent, and curious (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Indeed, when children begin to explore each domain of development, the response from an educator holds a lot of power to shape children’s perspective on their own behaviours. When children are exploring their sexuality development, the silence, stigma, and/or shame is a powerful response in and of itself:

Right away from two or three years old, the reaction is strongly negative, so immediately that child starts to pull in. They stop talking about how they feel, and they start letting adults around them make decisions that they’re so uncomfortable with. (Key Informant 3)

Rather than having children learn from negative reactions, key informants emphasized the need for educators to understand their role in supporting children as they build an increasing understanding of their identity and worldview. To keep this practice intentional, educators can reflect on their perceptions children’s competence and awareness of the world around them, “I kind of step back out a bit more and I see that those children, they do want to try their best. They know their differences; they know their situation” (Key Informant 6). Moreover, key informants emphasized that educators learn from children too:

A 4 year old junior kindergarten can teach me something that I never knew and could blow my mind away with just how I’m watching them and how they’re interacting with certain things. And if you come to the table with that mindset, it can open your classroom to all different kinds of learning experiences, acknowledging the differences. (Key
The bidirectional learning described by this key informant emphasizes the co-production of learning experiences that is discussed in Ontario’s early learning framework (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). One participant discussed more formal community-based approaches, where children democratically informing the content of their own education, “I think having if we’re updating curriculum, if we are updating things within the school having Youth Advisory Committee is really helpful even if they’re really young, that’s totally OK. They’ve got good input” (Key Informant 2). Research in the field of early learning has shown the importance of involving young children in such democratic processes which acknowledge their abilities, perspectives, and rights and give children true power to influence their education (Ribaeus & Skänfors, 2019).

Overall, this sub-category suggests that respecting children’s competence and awareness of themselves and their communities and having an open mind to learning from children are key components of DAP when supporting children’s sexuality development. Further, without conscious consideration of the way that educators’ responses shape children’s understanding of their own sexuality development, educators risk perpetuating stigma and shame around this domain of development. Ultimately, key informants advocate for having conversations with children, and incorporating support for sexuality development throughout the early learning and child care environment, to build skills for children in the early years, “when you introduce stuff like this, really young kids don’t have a problem with it. It’s just part of their language” (Key Informant 1).

**Embedded Approaches to CSE in Early Childhood**

As with other domains of development, sexuality development occurs organically as children grow; however, for young children, all areas of development are emerging simultaneously and organically. Rather, in early childhood, DAP would be to consider sexuality development as an embedded part of the human experience and an interconnected component of holistic development, “I’m not having—like I might have a literacy block at a math block in my day of teaching, but I don’t have a sexual education block because it’s all the time” (Key Informant 5). Therefore, support for sexuality development would be an intentional aspect of pedagogical practice in early learning, “the environment should be set up that way, the literature
should be set up that way. The way we speak should be set up that way” (Key Informant 5). Further, children’s sexuality development is integrated with other domains of development such as social-emotional development, and that these domains can be continuously supported throughout the daily routines in child care, “recognizing that in these everyday activities, we can promote autonomy through either decision making or in helping them out by giving them options or recognizing what their capabilities are as an individual” (Key Informant 2). Furthermore, the moments where educators’ support may be required occur organically throughout the day, “teachable moments can happen outside when they’re playing, or it could happen in gym class or even when you’re doing a language lesson, and something comes up. And then it’s important to address it at once” (Key Informant 4). Another participant extends this to give an example of the way everyday situations can provide opportunities for teaching moments:

If these children always touching each other and then some of the children may be like, ‘no, please don’t touch me’ for whatever reason, I think that’s already a way we can step in and talk about consent or that concept of consent for children right. (Key Informant 6)

Further, key informants positioned the skills and knowledge involved in DAP for supporting sexual health and well-being as foundational; starting with base-level knowledge that can be built upon as children move through development, “what we are really teaching about is, again, these foundational skills that then they can apply in their sexual lives, in their sexual relationships, in their advocacy for their own sexual health” (Key Informant 1). As this participant highlighted, these foundational concepts are building foundational skills and are part of DAP when supporting sexuality development in early childhood. The skills learned in early childhood form the foundation for children now and as they grow, “they kind of know what to do with that if they’re feeling like, wait a minute, I don’t fit into A, B, C, I’m D. They, it’s OK because they know they’ve gotten all that um starting block from before” (Key Informant 4).

While specific topics to consider when supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood will be discussed in the next category, many of the topics considered are about relationships, communication, and respect:

I feel like what a lot of ECE learning is so much about, ‘how do we get into this environment together and how do we share this environment and how do we do that in a respectful way?’ And there’s a lot—a lot of consent learning that happens there, and I
"don’t think we really tie it to what we can really—how that—what that looks like later on but it is very important foundational learning." (Key Informant 1)

The approaches used when supporting sexuality development throughout the lifespan align with emergent curriculum and scaffolding approaches seen in Ontario’s pedagogical framework for early learning (i.e., HDLH; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Specifically, extending beyond children’s curiosities and interests to offer additional perspectives and develop children’s critical thinking skills, “that’s very, very simple too, where you hear things in media where it’s like “this is a boy thing” and it’s like “is it?, why would it—why would you think that?” (Key Informant 1).

Overall, participants emphasized that part of ensuring DAP is using pedagogical strategies that are aligned with other approaches in early learning, such as child-led learning and emergent curriculum. The congruence between pedagogical approaches demonstrates that educators can integrate their existing knowledge of development, their knowledge emergent curriculum, and their specific knowledge of sexuality development in early childhood to offer learning experiences that help children build foundational skills in areas such as communication, personal safety, and relationships.

Creating Inclusive Environments for Children and Families

When conducting this analysis, I also identified another sub-category where key informants emphasize that DAP includes discussion of gender identity, sexual orientation, and relationships in the context of the children’s families and communities in care, “I do think it’s developmentally appropriate because it is part of their lives. They are going to come across different types of families, even if their family is not in that type of relationship structure” (Key Informant 1). Indeed, participants discussed the reality of children’s experiences with diverse families:

You’re going to have kids in that center with different families, whether that’s families with two parents, families with one parents, families with grandparents as a caregiver’s families with two moms, two dads, three parents, etcetera, you’re going to have diverse families. (Key Informant 1)

Children themselves will also fall outside of the cisgender, heteronormative structure that is dominantly modelled for children, “Queer children and even uh Queer families, they exist, right.
They exist” (Key Informant 6); advocating for the role of the educator to support children’s exploration and autonomy:

*I think in reality, we’re really just trying to not put children into boxes when it comes to their gender expression and even their way of expressing their attraction to others. Right. And you know it’s difficult because of the heteronormative setting of society systems.* (Key Informant 6)

As an example of this, one participant outlined a way to be more intentionally mindful of not placing children in gender boxes during classroom activities:

*I stopped saying boys and girls to get their attention a long time ago; it’s ‘class’ or ‘friends’ or any other thing but “boys and girls.” If I’m doing a sorting activity I never sort by ‘boys and girls,’ I sort by color of hair or other attributes that I might sort by, to teach the same lesson without gender divisions.* (Key Informant 5)

Moreover, participants connected this aspect of DAP to belongingness, one of the foundations for learning in Ontario’s pedagogical framework for early learning (i.e., HDLH; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), “you’re still your own person. And you know, you matter just as much as everyone else in the classroom matters. That sense of belonging is—is essential, right” (Key Informant 4). The same participant offered a way for educators to offer that idea in their classroom:

*So by dealing with it in the beginning and telling them that, you know, everybody is different and everybody is equally as unique and important in our classroom. We need you to make our classroom better in this way, the same way as we need this person to make the classroom better.* (Key Informant 4).

When defining DAP in the context of early childhood, key informants emphasized that even if support for sexuality development is included within educational spaces, there are barriers to providing sexuality education that is truly comprehensive and inclusive of all children. Therefore, to further understand ways educators can approach sexuality development from an intentionally inclusive lens, I specifically asked key informants to discuss several aspects of equity, diversity, and inclusion and how supporting sexuality development could consider these factors. Further, the ways in which conversations of sexuality, gender, personal safety, and healthy relationships intersect with social justice issues were also emphasized by participants:
Those kinds of discussions, even though they don’t seem like they’re related to sexuality, they are later on; when we talk about discrimination, when we talk about homophobia, when we talk about racism. All of those things that are very important for the prevention of problematic things that contribute to the gender-based violence and racialized-violence, and homophobic-, and trans-violence and etcetera. So there’s a lot of those really big foundational things that can start young and should start young. (Key Informant 1)

Therefore, following sections outline the participants thoughts on the intersections between social justice issues and sexuality education, as well as the information gathered from participants on how early childhood educators can intentionally consider and examine these issues in their practice.

**Anti-Racism.** As discussions of sexuality are intertwined with other identities, such as race (e.g., Crenshaw, 1991; Shelton, 2017), it is important to be intentionally anti-racist in approaches to supporting sexuality in early childhood. Data in this category are from participants describing how early childhood educators might take this intentional approach to their pedagogical practice. One participant noted, “anything around like sexuality and race and stereotypes or racialized stereotypes and even all of those conversations, I think can be begin very young again by making sure that there are vast representations” (Key Informant 1).

Another participant suggested that this representation should be authentic:

> everybody that comes into your classroom—you might have someone who’s Metis to come in and talk to you about something. You might have somebody who is Black, that comes in and tells you about something else. Maybe it’s about being a Black person or maybe it’s not. (Key Informant 5)

In addition to how educators might be mindful of the intersections between race, sexuality, and gender, data in this category also include key informants’ suggestions of ensuring professional learning integrates the knowledge of Black, trans women whose labour was essential to the conversations around supporting sexuality development as it unfolds from birth:

> recognizing who’s been doing the work before you. Umm. And who’s um yeah, who has come first. So making sure that the education for supporting ECE’s through this kind of education to recognize sexual advocacy often comes from Black women or Black trans-
women or Black trans-people in general. (Key Informant 2)

Lastly, participants outlined that, without embedding conversations of anti-oppression into children’s learning experiences, educators, children, and families can feel the performative nature of representation:

Everyone says that, ‘well, I’m not racist.’ But then you look and you’re like, well, you’re only talking about Black History Month in February. You’re not making it a part of your curriculum and you’re not trying to dismantle the stereotypes. (Key Informant 4).

Without commitment from educators, attempts to include activities around anti-bias can be performative, and harmful to colleagues, children, and families (Kutlaca & Radke, 2023).

Decolonizing Views of Sexuality and Childhood. In this category, key informants discuss first-steps to decolonizing curriculum and worldviews. It is important to note that the researcher and majority of participants are white; conversations between white settlers are essential, “Indigenous people need allies to support the work behind the scenes and White people also need to take on the burden and the risks of educating ourselves and others about colonialism, racism, and White supremacy” (Breen, 2019, p. 58). Further, the culture of critical and collective learning and accountability aligns with reflective practice as early learning professional development (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). As a foundation to decolonizing, children can be taught to consider a variety of perspectives outside the dominant narratives, “it is not all just about that western development holistic view of early childhood” (Key Informant 6).

Another key informant further explains the importance of incorporating pre-colonial ways of thinking and connects this back to sexuality development, “recognizing the roots of sexual stigma from colonialism, is a really big, main point to start with. And so there, that leads into gender leads into the creation of the binary” (Key Informant 2). When consulting Indigenous scholarship for program planning, authentic relationships with local Indigenous communities are essential, “when you’re integrating Indigenous teachings and learnings, there are regional approaches as well and that has to be honored and that has to be built and that—those relationships have to be built and grown and maintained” (Key Informant 1). Further, these relationships are an inherent part of decolonizing approaches to curriculum design. One key informant discussed how curriculum for supporting sexuality development should be “developed with Indigenous communities and partners and elders and those relationships are strong and
that there’s lots of feedback and connection with and from those groups” (Key Informant 1). Further, the aligning curriculum with Indigenous ways of knowing teaches children, from birth, about the history and impact of colonialism, in ways that match their level of understanding.

Overall, the approaches key informants suggested for decolonizing sexuality development in early childhood education involved inviting alternative ways of thinking and building relationships with local Indigenous communities for long-term, sustained relations. Further, children can learn about the impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples, and challenge dominant ways of viewing gender and sexuality, as discussed in the literature review, and more broadly in scholarly research, making room for Indigenous ways of understanding gender and sexuality (e.g., the significance of Two-Spirit). Moreover, discussing decolonizing early childhood practice, decolonized ways of thinking, knowing, and being are essential components of creating welcoming spaces and should be considered in all conversations and recommendations that arise from the current project.

**Inclusion.** Key informants highlighted that disability isn’t often included in conversations of sexuality, and even less so when conversations of sexuality development, disability, and childhood intersect, “there’s often a stigma or this myth that children who—children and youth with disabilities are asexual, that they don’t need information on sexuality” (Key Informant 1). The key informant further explained the absence of support for children and youth with disabilities as they navigate their own sexuality development is harmful:

> Not understanding and not learning about their bodies and not learning about sexuality, and all of these things put them at a greater risk of experiencing abuse and violence. So, we want to make sure that children with disabilities are always included in these conversations and that they are getting information that meets their needs and developing skills to express themselves in ways that are helpful for them, and also meets the consent and well-being of others. (Key Informant 1)

The idea of disability and sexuality, and specifically the exclusion of disability and disabled experiences in comprehensive sexuality education, is further reinforced in the literature (Davies et al., 2023). Another participant echoes the necessity of support children with disabilities rather than using their disability as a reason to not support sexuality development, “by stepping back and, you know, not using one’s disability as a crutch for those children because they just need
more or different support” (Key Informant 6). The call for institutions to find approaches to meet children’s differentiated styles of learning has previously been emphasized by scholars as essential to creating inclusive environments (Underwood, 2013).

**Integrating Authentic Representation.** Within this sub-category, participants discussed the importance of representation and inclusion of diverse bodies, relationships, people, and experiences in the early childhood classroom to help support children’s understandings of the diversity found within society:

> It is really important to make sure that there is lots of representation in the materials that the kids have. Because depending on where they are in their community, they may not see themselves represented. So making sure that there’s materials [present]. (Key Informant 1)

The same key informant went on to discuss the importance of being intentional that for children who are themselves, or are part of a family, that occupies diverse positionalities, this representation is particularly vital, “a lot of the time we also see, in sex ed generally, that trans and non-binary youth, Queer youth, they don’t see themselves represented in sexual health education materials; those aren’t tailored to their needs” (Key Informant 1). Further, educators can support children’s diversity by intentionally incorporating aspects of culture, language, and identity into their interactions with the child, children, or families:

> you bring in, you try to bring in, like, um, their own multicultural experiences [...] I try to include all that in the classroom, in books; there are things around that you see in the classroom; if I’ve been lucky enough to know some of the language because I’ve worked with so many different kinds of kids, I may even like say hello in Spanish or you know, if I know a little bit of Russian. (Key Informant 4)

Additionally, external factors can also push educators to include representation of linguistic, racial, and cultural differences in their classroom. One key informant discussed the requirement to have diverse families represented as well as racial and cultural representation embedded into their classroom due to the region’s quality assessment tool, which mandated diversity in classroom materials:

> That’s [diversity] supposed to be evident in your classroom, on the walls and in terms of cultural diversity, in terms of materials that you use, in terms of the food at the dramatic
play center – there should be different, a variety of food, there should be sushi, there should be roti. There should be different kinds of foods that are representative of different cultures. So that the children in your classroom may—will identify with something that’s familiar to them but may also learn something from another culture that is not familiar that may be interested to try another time (Key Informant 5).

This point highlights how external policies influence the materials and focus of educators in early learning environments. Another key informant went on to provide an example of including authentic representation, “have a speaker that can come in, and teach the kids how to bake bread, who happens to be trans or transitioning into another gender. Not necessarily that they even come and talk about their sexuality to the children” (Key Informant 5). Key informants emphasized that authentic discussions of race, inclusion, sexuality, or gender identity should be occurring to ensure that representation in the early learning classroom is intentional and an embedded part of children’s learning experiences.

Overall, key informants were clear that DAP for supporting sexuality development includes understanding the experiences of intersecting oppression and the role of ECEs in creating inclusive environments that ensure holistic well-being through inclusive pedagogies (e.g., anti-racism, decolonization). Moreover, the key informants’ collective perspective aligns with the theoretical orientations of the current project. This congruence emphasizes that the literature, reporting on the need to expand ideas of Developmentally Appropriate Practice, is known by practicing professionals, and that policy and formal curricular support can better align with what the research and practitioners already know.

Not Included Within the Scope of Developmentally Appropriate Practice

While describing what constitutes as developmentally appropriate, participants also clarified the boundaries of developmentally appropriate practice; this category presents data where participants discussed the limits of supporting sexuality development in early childhood. Within this section, key informants discussed that discrimination is developmentally inappropriate for children and emphasized that teaching about the act of sex is developmentally inappropriate for early childhood. This category presents data where key informants describe how training on sexuality development supports educators’ knowledge of prevention and detection of issues such as child abuse, and gender-based violence. Further, key informants
outlined developmentally inappropriate approaches to responding to children’s curiosities about bodies, families, relationships, and people.

Firstly, participants discussed general behaviours that educators would address, “things that are not appropriate might be things like, I’d say violence, bullying, discrimination. Anything that is hurtful. Whether it’s physically or verbally, I think that aspect of it is inappropriate for children” (Key Informant 6). Here, the participant highlights how exposure to violence or trauma of can be detrimental to children’s well-being and development. Additionally, key informants discussed the role of educators to detect abuse by noticing ‘red flags’ of what would be considered normal:

we’re looking for signs of abuse, like when it starts to become more imitation of actual physical acts like pretending to [imitate sex] and talking about [sexual acts] or like those kinds of that kind of language. That kind of behavior, that kind of play acting is the red— that’s the red flag type behavior. (Key Informant 5)

When talking about children’s sexuality development in early childhood, participants were clear that explicit information about sex is not developmentally appropriate, “it’s really important to recognize that sexuality education is not about the act of sex, especially in ECE” (Key Informant 2). Rather, in early childhood, “it is about building empathy, it’s about building relationships, understanding bodily autonomy, etcetera. It’s not about this very sexually explicit stuff that people are scared that kids are going to learn very early on” (Key Informant 1). Another participant expanded this to explain that consideration should be given for families’ perspectives:

as far as procreation and anything like that, I leave that up to parents because that’s again—that’s a cultural thing, right? Some people won’t want their toddler to know about sperm and eggs and whatever, but some would. So let them do that at this age (Key Informant 5).

Overall key informants highlighted that in early childhood education, and following an emergent approach, the focus is supporting children as they develop their worldview. Further, developmentally appropriate does not include imposing discussions onto children, and emphasizes respecting children’s autonomy and well-being, “I think meeting them where they’re at and making sure that we’re not pushing them to want to know something that is a little bit beyond where they are” (Key Informant 1).
Key informants also emphasized that when children engage in play or behaviours to explore their sexuality development, educators should be intentional to avoid shame-based responses:

*You don’t make jokes and you don’t shame them. You build upon then—kids kind of—right away because they learn from modeling. They’ll pick up on that and they’ll know that you don’t need to giggle every time someone says, you know, “your vagina” or “penis” or whatever it is, right? (Key Informant 4)*

Here, the participant is referring to theories of social learning, whereby children learn from watching the behaviours of adults and peers. Moreover, demeaning approaches to behaviour guidance contradict the goals of the ECE profession, which are to support positive, compassionate, and affirming interactions that support well-being (CECE, 2017).

Overall, key informants drew a boundary between developmentally appropriate and inappropriate approaches to supporting sexuality development. Broadly, key informants identified any type of discrimination or bullying as inappropriate for early childhood. Further, discussions of explicit acts of sex were not considered by key informants to be included in DAP for supporting sexuality development, and are in fact, a red flag behaviour that educators are taught to be aware of (CECE, 2022a). Lastly, key informants emphasized that shame-based methods of behaviours guidance are not developmentally appropriate and do not support learning or positive well-being. The following category presents the data from key informants to outline a framework of what is included in supporting sexuality development in early childhood.

**Topics Included in Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood**

Key informants noted that the topics of discussion in early childhood education stem from the curiosities and interests of children, as described in the previous category, “*it’s more about following their lead as well and seeing what kind of questions they’re asking and asking questions to them back and see what they understand from that too is important*” (Key Informant 1). Through considering the data, the policy context, and the literature, I identified the following topics in key informants’ discussions on DAP for supporting sexuality in early childhood,

i. Learning about bodies

ii. Building an understanding of self

iii. Boundaries and autonomy
iv. Relationships and families

v. Being a citizen in society

When discussing Learning About Bodies, key-informants discussed the importance of helping children understand their bodies, the function of their bodies, as well as how to care for our bodies (e.g., hygiene), and how these skills support personal safety. When discussing Building an Understanding of Self, key informants discussed that DAP for supporting sexuality development would include supporting children’s identity exploration and helping them build the foundation of emotional awareness (i.e., identifying feelings). When discussing Boundaries and Autonomy, key informants discussed helping children to set and respect boundaries, as well as supporting children’s early understandings of autonomy. When discussing Relationships and Families, key informants discussed that DAP for supporting sexuality development includes conversations around building health relationships, as well as highlighting the different relationships that exist with society (i.e., different family types). Finally, key informants also stated that support for sexuality development includes conversations about Being a Citizen in Society, which encompasses supporting children to understand their actions and the impact they may have on others through conversations about anti-bullying. Additionally, key informants emphasized the importance of early media literacy skills as children having increasing access to internet communication technologies (ICTs; Konca & Koksalan, 2017).

**Learning About Bodies**

Children are commonly curious about bodies (e.g., “I mean we sort of typically will see children being curious about themselves and their bodies” Key Informant 5), and have a lot of questions about bodies in early childhood, “what do bodies do? And what is my body? And how does it look compared to all of these bodies?” (Key Informant 1). Thus, participants identified knowledge of the body as a key concept for children in early learning, “there’s nothing wrong with saying like, you know, this is our bodies, this is this beautiful body that, you know, you were born with and this is what it is” (Key Informant 4), ensuring to present a range of body types. However, it is essential to consider whether our representation of bodies is representative of children’s lived experience. One participant pointed out that intersex experiences are excluded from conversations on bodies and this can be especially harmful, “there might be even kids in that—in that classroom who have had surgeries or going through some of these experiences, and
they may not understand them, or they may not have the words” (Key Informant 1).

Within the topic of bodies, key informants described why knowledge of the body also includes functions of body parts, sensations of body parts, and specifically, ensuring children know the correct names for their body parts:

*If they’re feeling a pain, or if they’re trying to tell you how they’re feeling with their body, they can tell you which part of their body. [...] It’s important to use at least the proper terminology so kids know what their parts are.* (Key Informant 4)

Additionally, key informants emphasized that supporting sexuality development includes discussions of joy and pleasure, normalizing a positive relationship between children and their own bodies, “they’re learning to explore what their sensations, what feels good, what doesn’t feel good, or ‘wait a minute this makes my body feel different.’ Those are all kind of developmentally appropriate at that age” (Key Informant 4). Moreover, participants discussed helping children set boundaries around time for exploring their bodies and sensations, with one participant modelling language that could be used in the moment:

*Rather say, “OK” quietly you know, “I understand that it feels nice to touch yourself, but it’s better to—you need to be doing that in private. You can go to the washroom if that’s what you need to do. And then wash your hands when you come out like you always do after the washroom.” Kind of like a gentle way of doing it.* (Key Informant 5)

Knowledge of the body builds children’s personal safety skills, “we know that this is important for reporting and abuse prevention. Those kinds of like ‘cutesie’ names or incorrect names, you know, is kind of confusing for youth” (Key Informant 1), referring to the wide literature base on promoting personal safety skills for children (e.g., Kenny & Wurtele, 2012). Participants also mentioned that educators should have an awareness of child sexual abuse and what personal safety skills support child protection; this will be discussed further in the analysis.

Supporting knowledge of the body helps children learn how to care for themselves (e.g., “toilet training, brushing their teeth, hand washing, etcetera” and “how we care for our genitals by cleaning them and keeping them to ourselves” Key Informant 2). The same participant went on to give an example of introducing hygiene practices in the classroom:

*demonstrating how to properly wipe after peeing or pooping can be done with two balloons attached to a chair as the butt. I don’t know if you’ve seen that on Tik Tok [...]"
you stick to balloons on the back of a chair and that’s the butt, then you can demonstrate to children how to properly wipe after peeing and pooping. (Key Informant 2)

This example of toileting hygiene also highlights how social media can be a powerful tool for educators to share ideas and find teaching strategies that might work for the children in their classrooms.

Overall, for this sub-topic, participants explained that educating about the body is a key element of support for children’s sexuality development and well-being, “it’s about ensuring young children understand their body as it continues to develop, encourage autonomy, think about pleasure and self-enjoyment, and communicate when something is hurt, wrong, or uncomfortable” (Key Informant 2). Included in conversations about the body, key informants identified knowledge of body parts (i.e., names, functions, and care routines, sensations) as well as general hygiene as developmentally appropriate supports for sexuality development in early childhood.

Building an Understanding of Self

A key part of early childhood is “fostering your own sense of identity” (Key Informant 4). As such, participants highlighted building an understanding of self as a key component of sexual health and well-being. Indeed, key informants identified gender development, exploring and building identity, and social-emotion skills (e.g., emotion recognition) as key components of supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood. Key informants identified that when supporting children’s gender identity, it is important to consider, “when to use certain pronouns...the gender identity, gender expression. But then also stereotypes around gender and breaking those down” (Key Informant 1). The same participant later explained:

Kids are exploring concepts of gender. They’re starting to see differentiations of gender at very early ages and they’re starting to understand who they are and what their gender identity is. So just talking to them about different things and keeping that open space.

(Key Informant 1)

With regards to gender stereotypes, another participant expanded, “what’s a boy thing, what’s a girl thing? I mean, some students come into the class with very strong ideas like ‘soccer is for boys and ballet for girls’” (Key Informant 5), referring to the gender socialization that begins in childhood and impacts young children’s sense of gender identity (e.g., Esra, 2014). This
participant went on to describe how they intentionally challenged gender norms in the classroom,
“I pulled in some videos of men doing ballet and other kinds of dance, not just ballet and tap dancing [...] I pulled up the soccer championship for when the girls won the Canadian soccer championship at the Olympics” (Key Informant 5).

Key informants highlighted that early childhood is a time for exploration in all areas, including gender (Poulin-Dubois et al., 1994; Serbin et al, 2002). Participants emphasized that gender creativity is developmentally appropriate and should be considered by early childhood spaces, “gender creativity in young children – how to make the classroom safer for gender nonconforming children, talking to parents about gender creativity too” (Key Informant 2). Further, key informants reiterated why supporting child’s creativity and exploration are developmentally appropriate practices and applicable in early childhood, “kids under five do know that they are queer or gender nonconforming, gender curious. [...] labels can be helpful tools for young folks, but we can also just encourage their curiosity” (Key Informant 2). Another key informant provided some examples of modelling this language with regards to transgender, gender non-conforming, and non-binary folks:

It's easy to explain, “no, this person, this person feels like they're boy inside” or “this person feels like they’re girl inside,” “this person’s not—this person doesn’t feel like a boy or a girl, this is how they feel.” There’s lots of different language. (Key Informant 1)

Furthermore, decolonizing our approaches to gender is key for an embedded, inclusive approach to sexuality development and child development:

even thinking about diverse cultural conceptions of gender and sexuality, I think you can introduce very young and what Two-Spirit means, what it means to be under that trans-umbrella and nonbinary-umbrella. I think there’s a lot of different understandings that can be introduced very young. It’s just about finding the right language. And I think getting some good training about how to do that with really young kids is very important. (Key Informant 1)

Additionally, as an integrated domain of development, sexuality development is deeply intertwined with emotional development. As such, participants outline that helping children identifying they feel (i.e., emotion recognition) is a key competency of educators working to support children’s development:
working on emotion recognition [...] recognizing a vast range of emotions too. So what can it feel like to feel unsafe as a child? Why might we have tantrums and big feelings? What to do with those emotions? What does that look like when you get older? Like, where do those big emotions go?” (Key Informant 2)

Furthermore, both as a personal safety skill, and to support children’s sexuality development, it is important to empower them to identify safe versus unsafe situations and listen to their intuition, “there’s a reason it feels yucky. You need to identify that yucky feeling and do something about it. Don’t pretend it’s not yucky, it is yucky, and our bodies naturally pull away from bad behavior” (Key Informant 3).

Overall, as part of supporting children’s overall health and well-being, including sexuality development, key informants suggested that children should build an understanding of self. Based on the data, helping children understand who they are (e.g., identity, gender identity, gender expression) and supporting their emotional intelligence (i.e., identifying how they feel) are key components of supporting children in building an understanding of identity, and awareness of how others may identify.

**Boundaries and Autonomy**

Key informants emphasized that supporting children to build bodily autonomy, practice consent and boundaries, and learn about privacy in the early childhood classroom is a necessary component of DAP for supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood. Further, this sub-category is connected to supporting the development of sexuality, as children are able to develop their personal safety skills and autonomy through discussions of boundaries, privacy, consent, and safe versus unsafe feelings and experiences. First, key informants mentioned helping children to understand their own bodily boundaries with others. Participants identified personal safety skills such as, identifying something is wrong, disclosure to a trusted adult, and secrecy (i.e., no such thing as secrets, “rules about private parts, what are private parts, and we don’t do secrets,” Key Informant 3). Participants emphasized general communication skills as integral to this personal safety skill:

*Building like those skills for communicating because then if something’s wrong, you want them to communicate with a trusted adult and say like, “hey, I’m not so sure about this. This is what’s happening” or “I don’t know where to go next. Something feels off.”* (Key
Informant 1)

Building an understanding of consent is connected to bodily autonomy, “body autonomy and knowing it’s your body and you have the control over how it is touched, who touches it and what happens to it. [...] You can say “no, I don’t want to hug because it’s your body” (Key Informant 5). Educators play a key role in modelling consent skills, which can be worked into everyday interactions with children, “talking to kids and getting basic consent, ‘do you want me to put this picture on the wall?’ ‘Do you want me to put this picture in the newsletter?’ And if they say no, don’t do it” (Key Informant 1). Additionally, participants discussed bidirectional consent (i.e., decisions to consent and responses to receiving consent or hearing no). Key informants emphasized that truly comprehensive conversations about consent touch upon both setting one’s own boundaries and respecting the boundaries of others:

Teaching various ways to say and hear no. It’s really important that we’re enhancing the fact that, yes, we want to know how to say no, but we need to be talking about how to hear no. That is super big and is a really big barrier to children’s understanding of consent. (Key Informant 2)

Further, building children’s understanding of their own autonomy is most impactful when children are allowed to assert their boundaries with all adults and have those boundaries respected by all adults, “you don’t want them to learn that physical affection needs to be given whether you want it or not, because adult told you to” (Key Informant 5). This idea is particularly salient when asserting consent between a child and an adult family member, “even if it's family like, you know, everybody's like, “oh, go give Grandma or Grandpa hug.” Well, if the kid is not really wanting at that point to give a hug, that’s consent” (Key Informant 4). Indeed, as CSA can perpetrated by close family members (Clayton et al., 2018), supporting children’s understanding of consent and boundaries within their adult-child relationships is crucial to supporting their personal safety skills.

Another participant suggested that boundaries would also include conversations about privacy, describing an example from their classroom, “sometimes the teacher or an ECE might need to help you in the washroom, but it’s a private thing and you don’t show your private parts to anyone at school” (Key Informant 5). Extending this to “privacy without shame” and giving an example of this practice in the classroom, “we learned right away. This is where the
washroom is in our classroom. You can use it anytime that you want. [...] it's your private business in the washroom” (Key Informant 5).

Overall, conversations about what consent is, how to set and respect boundaries, and empowering children to understand and exercise their own autonomy are important facets of supporting sexuality development in early childhood. Key informants also extended this to assert that educators can support children’s understanding of consent, boundaries, and bodily autonomy by respecting children’s wishes, which in turn, helps model the adult role in respectful child-adult interactions.

**Relationships**

This sub-topic contains key informants discussing healthy and respectful relationships as well as one of the most influential relationships for young children, families. First, key informants emphasized that supporting children to develop an understanding of healthy and safe relationships is part of supporting sexuality development in the early years. When discussing relationships with children in early childhood, key informants emphasized that, “it is about building empathy; it’s about building relationships” (Key Informant 1), and that “[educators] need to encourage and you need to model empathy” (Key Informant 4), indicating the importance of these prosocial skills and the process of connecting with one another and actively building relationships. Another participant described an activity aimed at building this skill which integrated emotion recognition and prompting children to inherently consider consent:

› we’ve looked at pictures of children and different emotions on their face and ‘identify the emotion,’ ‘what they think they might be feeling?’ ‘How might they feel better and [what might we do to help them]?’ And then someone might say ‘I would give them a hug.’ ‘Well, what if they don’t want a hug?’” (Key Informant 5)

In early education spaces, children must negotiate their relationships with peers (e.g., sharing spaces and materials with other children in a classroom). As children progress through their social development, those peer relationships can turn into friendships. As such, it is important to “talk about friendship, talk healthy friendships” (Key Informant 2), and help children integrate their communication and relationship building skills with their sense of self, interests, and boundaries. Furthermore, in this sub-topic, key informants emphasized that it is important that children build an understanding of, “healthy and safe relationships with peers and adults” (Key
Informant 2), to add to their collection of skills that build personal safety.

Professionals working with young children understand the importance and influence of families on children’s development. Moreover, the current framework in Ontario for early learning pedagogy outlines the uniqueness and strength that all families bring, including families that fall outside nuclear or normative family types and structures (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). When discussing how to support children’s sexuality development, and overall well-being, key informants were clear that ensuring children understand the various families that exist is DAP, “talking about family, make sure to talk about family diversity” (Key Informant 2). Furthermore, children should build an early understanding of concepts such as, “the family roles, the family genders, the different dynamics of families” (Key Informant 5). Indeed, educators should ensure representation of children’s own family, which contributes to child’s sense of belonging and enhances learning opportunities for other children:

all [some children know] is ‘mom and dad’ and that’s how it is. And then, you know, they come into a classroom that’s filled with so many different children that come. And maybe Sally has two moms or two dads. And [the child says] “what do you mean?” [...] They’ve just never been around it. But how to educate them and how to be like, “well, no, that’s just a different family, but it’s normal, two moms love you just the same as a mom and a dad.’ (Key Informant 4)

Furthermore, it is important to make considerations for the variety of living situations that children may be coming from when entering early learning environments, (i.e., adoption, family care, foster care, group homes):

Really enhancing the fact that families come in all different makeups. Some people live with parents, some don’t. Some have two moms, two dads, more than two parents, etcetera. Especially because we have a lot of people coparenting now in these newer generations. So I think it’s really important to highlight that. That it’s not just divorced families coparenting that it may be polyamorous couples—or families. Then also just the acknowledgement that not everybody’s parents are alive and a lot of folks might be or folks might be in group homes, foster care, maybe. (Key Informant 2)

Key informants discussed the importance of general relationship skills, as well as respecting the established relationships within families. Key informants connected relationship building skills
as important general skills (i.e., empathy) and as personal safety skills (i.e., healthy child-adult relationships). Furthermore, key informants emphasized that respecting and representing all families in the early learning classroom is DAP and supports sexuality development as it exposes children to the experiences of their peers and offers children a chance to explore and understand new ways of being and having relationships.

**Being a Citizen in Society**

The final sub-topic contains data where key informants discuss children as members of society and how early childhood educators are responsible for supporting children’s development as citizens of society. Within this sub-topic, key informants discussed how it is important to for children to build an understanding of, “ethics and values and building those understandings of care for others. Making it clear that those are all related to sexual health and sexuality broadly” (Key Informant 1).

When supporting children as citizens in society, it is important to support them in being aware of their own behaviours too. Specifically, participants discussed bullying and discrimination (i.e., racism, homophobia, transphobia) and the connection to supporting children to become caring citizens, “if they do express or act out in a way that is bullying, violent or discriminatory, um we have to also have those conversations with children as to why it is inappropriate” (Key Informant 6). One participant discussed how children understand the idea of discrimination as an aspect of bullying:

*It’s not OK to make them feel bad for the color of their skin. It’s not OK for them to feel bad—make others feel bad about how they what the clothes are wearing. So kind of to children at that age, it seems to kind of fit into that puzzle [...] We celebrate our differences, we and we embrace the differences of others, sort of that kind of feeling throughout. So when we get into these topics, it’s clicks with them right away.* (Key Informant 5)

Moreover, key informants connected the skills of recognizing bullying behaviour to bystander intervention, “the idea of standing up for others. I think that’s a really early skill for bystander intervention [...] basic things that we don’t necessarily think to link to sexuality and sexual health but are linked in various ways” (Key Informant 1).

Finally, in an age of digital technology, key informants also noted that media literacy
skills (i.e., privacy, photos, online communication) are important skills to begin building in early childhood, as children will eventually become digital citizens (i.e., have a digital footprint). One participant indicated the link between sexuality development and media literacy:

*Media literacy is directly related to sexual health. [...] We need to talk to kids about their photos. And even at this age, we need to be talking to parents about it. Because that also relates later on to digital sharing of information and privacy.* (Key Informant 1)

Media literacy skills connect many of the previous topics such as privacy, relationships, and ethical behaviours through digital citizenship. Furthermore, approaches to media literacy align with other age-appropriate approaches suggested by key informants (e.g., storytelling; Maureen et al, 2018).

**Summary of Topics**

Overall, key informants identified that to support children in early childhood, early childhood education should include conversations and experiences that help children learn about bodies; build an understanding of themselves and their evolving identity; learn about asserting and respecting boundaries; learn about relationships and the uniqueness of families; and build skills to support themselves as citizens in society (see Table 3 below). The range of topics and sub-topics discussed by key informants is broad, but as identified earlier in the analysis, early learning involves embedded approaches that create a web of connections to support learning and development. Furthermore, the range of topics outlined by participants aligned with the literature and results of Study 1, both of which show that sexuality development is intertwined throughout a variety of topics and facets of a child’s life. Therefore, it is unsurprising and affirming that key informants echoed these findings in their own depictions of developmentally appropriate practice. As one key informant stated, topics themselves are not inherently inappropriate, “it’s hard for me to say what isn’t appropriate because I think all of the foundational pieces like are appropriate, they just look different when they’re very young” (Key Informant 1). Thus, when looking to bridge the gap in policy supports for early childhood educators, it is important to consider the practical aspects (i.e., learning experiences and pedagogy) of supporting sexuality development in early childhood.
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<td>Boundaries and Autonomy</td>
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Barriers to Supporting Comprehensive Sexuality Education

The literature review highlighted some key barriers to addressing sexuality development in early childhood (e.g., Balter et al., 2021a; Bialystok et al., 2020). The current study also asked key informants to explain the specific barriers they encounter in their practices. Asking about ongoing barriers allowed participants to share the context in which their experiences were situated. This category describes the barriers discussed by participants at both the educator level (e.g., Lack of Training and Resources, barriers to Engaging in Professional Learning, considering their Perceptions of Sexuality and Sexuality Education) and more broadly (e.g., navigating Perceptions of Sexuality and Sexuality Education, and the barriers caused by Lack of Workplace Leadership, and Lack of Policy Support). Unsurprisingly, the barriers highlighted by participants aligned with the themes represented in the literature review.

Lack of Training and Resources

Literature on sexuality education in the early years has highlighted educators’ self-described need for both pre-service (i.e., post-secondary training) and post-service training (e.g., professional learning; Balter et al., 2018). As Balter and colleagues also conducted their research in Ontario, it was unsurprising to hear participants in the current study echo that, “the educator at that moment, including myself, we weren’t equipped to address this situation” (Key Informant 6). In this category, participants emphasize that for educators, conversations of sexuality and gender in early childhood are new, and historically, have not been included in their pre-service training:

Nobody talked about gender and sexuality 10 years ago. No one talked about gender. There was not a single thing that I learned as an ECE about gender and sexuality. Not a single topic at all. We talked about implicit bias. We did a—we did a lot on self-reflection and bias etcetera, but nothing to do with sexuality, nothing to do with the children and nothing to do with gender. None of that. (Key Informant 3)

Currently, the knowledge and spaces for conversations on sexuality and gender are missing in ECE pre-service training, and, as demonstrated by the analysis of course materials in Study 1, is an ongoing gap in educators’ ability to support all domains of development, well-being, and health (WHO et al., 2010). Since there are a lack of training opportunities available during pre-service education, educators turn to professional learning to offer them knowledge and strategies
for supporting sexuality development in their practice, “we had a professional development session talking about gender identity and different gender identities and how to introduce that” (Key Informant 5). However, often these professional learning sessions are not geared towards early years professionals:

“I basically took notes on what I thought might be appropriate for kindergarten or what I thought might be a way to—what I’ve been doing up until [the] point that I had that professional development. So—so even within my own organization, there isn’t anything specific for kindergarten. (Key Informant 5)

The lack of relevant professional learning opportunities leaves educators with the additional labour of working to translate knowledge to be helpful and developmentally appropriate for their practices. Further, for educators who are interested in expanding their thinking on the topic, there are fewer that involve a variety of theoretical perspectives, “the more developmentalist workshops are more accessible. Well, the ones about inclusion, specifically that are more reconceptualist and even more, you know, outside of the developmentalism is harder to find” (Key Informant 6). Overall participants share that few resources exist for educators looking to expand their knowledge through professional learning.

Furthermore, an aim of the current study was to explore training for ECEs, and thus participants’ interdisciplinary knowledge provided insight into additional gaps in professionals receiving knowledge about supporting sexuality and gender:

“I mean it’s even missing a lot in teachers’ college courses, it’s still—it’s minimal across the board. It’s minimal in primary care training. It’s still—it’s minimal generally. But I do think that it’s missing in this training because there’s this idea that people who are working with kids that young don’t need it. (Key Informant 1)

The knowledge from the participants highlights that many professionals involved in the care of children in their early years have no formal training to support them in their practice as cases around gender, sexuality, as well as the connections to well-being and health, emerge.

In addition to a lack of training available, educators are not provided resources or explicit direction for their practice, “I haven’t ever been given a ‘this is what should be that taught’. So I’m basically following my instincts and taking sexuality education at as it comes” (Key Informant 5). Absence of formal support leaves educators to navigate this domain of
development as it becomes necessary in their practice. As an example, one participant described the lack of age appropriate training for educators of young children:

*Lack of resources and professional development for the younger age. And as I said, I’m kind of going by the seat of my pants in terms of what seems to—what the kids seem to need.* (Key Informant 5)

The same key informant also shared the labour that has gone into building an understanding of how to react and support children in their care, “*I pretty much have added in more as my own understanding and my own biases and stuff have been challenged*” (Key Informant 5). This participant also noted that in a Full Day Kindergarten setting (i.e., where an ECE works alongside a teacher to support a kindergarten classroom in Ontario; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2022), materials to support all areas of learning would be provided by the school; however materials and resources for teaching about sexuality development are not provided to educators of younger age-groups. The necessity of support from leadership (e.g., “*those are a lot of the things are things that need to kind of come from the top down,*” Key Informant 5), and burden on educators (e.g., needing “*budget to source real materials to include diverse—diversity,*” Key Informant 5) are additional barriers. Further, there are limited resources available:

*Those books that are more, I guess, diverse are so difficult to find still, even though there’s a lot out there. So using the library as a resource, they have many great books but sometimes depending on certain topics, it’s a little harder to find still.* (Key Informant 6)

As research has noted, early childhood educators in Ontario have expressed a need for training to support their practice (Balter et al., 2018). Materials, training, and resources support educators’ thinking about a topic and how it may relate to the needs of children in their program (i.e., reflective practice). The lack of preparation leaves educators unequipped to navigate perspectives of sexuality development, “*when [educators] don’t know about the topic or they don’t know how it integrates into these other concepts that they’re already teaching, then there’s a lack of comfort*” (Key Informant 1). Key informants also discussed how a lack of preparation can leave educators unsure of how to communicate with parents when topics of sexuality and gender come up in practice. When discussing a situation observed in the field, where parents were shocked and upset by their child exploring gender expression (i.e., wearing a dress), a key
informant discussed the impact on families, “the teacher didn’t have the knowledge to explain it appropriately to the parents. And the parents, because of that, had no confidence in, now, their child’s kindergarten teacher and didn’t understand” (Key Informant 3). Further, if educators do not feel prepared, they may not address sexuality development in their practice at all:

Oh, I’m not comfortable talking about gender identity, so I’m not even going to talk about. That kind of thing, right, like there’s or “I—I’m not comfortable talking about touching their private bodies, so I’m not even going to talk about it unless the problem happens. And then I’ll talk about it.” Well, that’s a little bit too late then. (Key Informant 5)

Overall, key informants noted a lack of training, both pre-service and through professional learning, to help them support children’s sexuality development. This aligns with previous research conducted with educators who described the need for more formal training that aligns with their practice (Balter et al., 2018). The congruence between the established literature and the perspectives of expert participants in the sector further highlights the need to ensure that, as students, pre-service educators are trained and prepared to support sexuality along the continuum of development as part of their professional practice. Key informants further highlighted that without training, educators feel unprepared to navigate sexuality development, leaving families unsupported in their questions, or leaving sexuality development out of their practice.

Engaging in Professional Learning

Professional learning is one way that educators can further their knowledge and build new skills throughout their career. While participants discussed the lack of professional learning opportunities geared towards the early childhood development of gender and sexuality, there are some relevant trainings available in Ontario (e.g., Balter et al., 2021b). However, “the real-life barriers of training resources and time” (Key Informant 1) present challenges to finding and participating in these professional learning sessions. Particularly for the professionals on frontlines of the practice, who may not have paid time to plan programming or engage in professional development, “I think early child educators don’t have you know, you already not enough pay, but they also don’t have the time out of their schedule to try to find these workshops” (Key Informant 6). Furthermore, educators are often left to fund their own professional development, “unfortunately when it comes to that kind of thing, its—it usually ends
“up being out of our pocket” (Key Informant 5). Even though professionals want to engage in continuous learning opportunities, professional learning cannot always be top priority when there are other demands:

*I think more people need to see that professional development is essential that way. Unfortunately, I know with being pulled in so many different directions people are like ‘I don’t have any more like energy to give. I’m burned out.’ It’s hard. (Key Informant 4)*

Some educators with knowledge on this topic have taken on the labour of creating and offering training sessions for their colleagues, however this further contributes to burnout in staff, “I did my own presentation and workshop on querying early child education [...] I don’t mind doing it, it just it really contributes to the burnout [laughing]. So yeah, I just do it out of passion regardless” (Key Informant 6). Overall, while more training is needed for ECEs, practical barriers such as money, time, and educators’ capacity are also important factors to consider when discussing how educators might receive further training on supporting the sexual health and well-being of children in their care.

**Perceptions of Sexuality and Sexuality Education**

Ontario’s early childhood educators are reflective practitioners (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), meaning educators are continuously asking questions as a way of creating meaning and understanding of themselves and their experiences. As such, it was unsurprising that participants discussed perceptions of sexuality on an educator-level barriers, as well as how those barriers present themselves when children are exploring their own bodies and identities:

*The number one [barrier] would be our own biases and our own backgrounds and—and how we—how we view sexual our own sexuality and the sexuality of others. Um that would be the first thing that could be a barrier. (Key Informant 5)*

Further, key informants noted that preconceived ideas of how sexuality development intersects with early childhood can come out in practice if educators are not aware of their own explicit biases:

*I was literally working with the teacher and a child was sort of sitting there with her hands in her pants and just playing with herself and the teacher just was like, “Stop that! That’s dirty! Go wash your hands right now!” And like, yelled at her across the room. And I was just like. ‘Oh, my gosh, don’t do that,’ you know. [...] Her own physical*
boundary, that whatever is underneath, that it’s sort of came out that way. (Key Informant 5)

Moreover, particularly with young children, there is reluctance to discuss issues of oppression, “that goes the same with anything to do with homophobia and transphobia. We don’t really know how to talk about those things with children” (Key Informant 6), and how to scaffold children’s thinking to be more inclusive. As with other areas of an educator’s practice, it is important to have time to reflect on their own beliefs and how those might intersect with practice:

The key is to recognize your own bias, leave it at the door and step into your classroom and empty a full empty slate without any preconceived ideas. That’s an almost impossible task for most people. However, to be an appropriate educator, you have to learn how to do that, and it is a learned behavior. (Key Informant 3)

Here, the participant emphasizes that a state of reflection and awareness of one’s own biases is a learned skill, suggesting that building this skill is an important part of the training for educators on how to respond in developmentally appropriate ways to children’s early displays of sexuality development.

Key informants discussed tensions between societal understandings of childhood, sexuality development, and developmentally appropriate practice and educators own knowledge about child development and what supporting sexuality development. As discussed in the literature review, there is a belief that children in early childhood do not need support in their sexuality development, “nobody likes to broach the subject of sexuality in kids. It’s like they don’t think kids are sexual beings” (Key Informant 4). This widespread belief contributes to the lack of training for pre-service educators, “it’s missed again because people think that kids at that age don’t—or that people who are working with kids at that age don’t need it, that it’s not something that may necessarily need to be aware of” (Key Informant 1). Additionally, key informants discussed the varied beliefs about children’s sexuality development and how to support that, “there’s differences in how people want to attend or want to approach these topics or believe these topics should be approached.” (Key Informant 1). These perspectives range from not knowing about the development of sexuality in early childhood to not wanting it included and make it difficult for practicing professionals to address sexuality development in
their work, “parents and their belief system, whether it’s political, family norms, religious beliefs, or—or ignorance to different ways of life or gender roles, that kind of thing. It can be very difficult” (Key Informant 5). Research on cultural differences in approaching sexuality education is established in the literature (e.g., Kenny et al., 2008). Further, educators must navigate misconceptions about what is included in sexuality education more broadly, “when adults and parents with conservative beliefs hear sexuality, they hear sexual activity” (Key Informant 2). Moreover, broader societal beliefs about age, ability, and autonomy come into play when discussing children:

*Ageism and paternalism are really big barriers, too. Beliefs that children shouldn’t have autonomy, push back against children’s rights, and what the parent says go, and the parents is always right, you’re just a kid, you don’t know what you want, etcetera [...] Yes, children are children, but also children have they are their own person, they have their own autonomy and all of that too.* (Key Informant 2)

Participants also discussed tensions with families as a large barrier to being able to adequately support children’s sexuality development in practice. Key informants specifically referenced the sexuality curriculum repeal in Ontario discussed in the literature review:

*I know a lot of people right now with, um, the sexual education like um act that got passed with the Ministry of Education. A lot of parents were pushing back on what’s appropriate or what age to kind of go and talk to your child about sexuality, homosexuality and all that.* (Key Informant 4)

Seeing the public debates unfold can manifesting as fear for professionals, “educators are scared of getting that push back” (Key Informant 1). Particularly as many of the public debates around sexuality education contained ideas of children being too young, and therefore innocent, to be exposed to concepts of sexuality and gender (Jarkovská & Lamb, 2019), this fear would be particularly salient to ECEs as educators of young children. Further, key informants discussed lived experiences with parents’ reactions to their child’s exploration of expression and identity:

*When the parents came in and they saw their four-year-old son in a frilly little pink dress, [they] went nuts. “What are you trying to do to my son? Why did you put him in a dress? Are you trying to make him gay?”* (Key Informant 3)

In addition to explicit tension with parents, educators are also aware of the societal perceptions
of sexuality and gender and the implicit stigma that accompanies those perceptions, “I feel like as a society we’ve come really far at you know, welcoming diverse cultures and you know diverse sexualities, but they’re still like that stigma” (Key Informant 4). Knowing the strong opinions from parents who do not agree with sexuality, gender identify, family dynamics, and other topics within supporting children’s sexuality and gender development can manifest as anticipatory fear:

I’m half waiting one day for someone to jump down my throat about ‘how—how dare you teach my child about same sex marriage’ or ‘how dare you tell my child to call his weewee his penis. He’s—he’s too young for that’ or whatever is like that kind of thing. I’m anticipating that happening because there is no specific consent for kindergarten. (Key Informant 5)

Key informants connected these barriers back to educators’ responsibility to support children in the context of their families:

I think too many people take for granted that all youth will have adequate parenting at home. So some families cover sexuality education at home, but many are stopped by stigma and shame. So as ECEs we should be stepping up because as part of the curriculum, it’s part of our job. If the parents are being stopped by stigma and shame, as educators, we should be educating ourselves through that stigma and shame and if we can’t walk the families along with us as we walk the children, we can at least walk the children through some less stigma and shame-based messaging. (Key Informant 2)

Overall, key informants highlighted how aware educators are of the societal perceptions of sexuality and sexuality education, as well as how those perceptions are carried over into conversations about and with young children. Further, key informants discussed the specific conversations around sexuality education in Ontario and how those debates influence educators’ confidence in supporting sexuality development, citing both explicit pushback and anticipatory fear of receiving backlash from the families they work with.

**Lack of Support from Workplace Leadership**

To understand why frontline professionals will need leadership support with, specifically, supporting children’s sexuality development, leadership needs to understand what educators are doing (i.e., what sexuality development is, what DAP looks like, and what training and resources
staff need) and the necessity of supporting this area of development (i.e., supporting 2SLGBTQINA+ rights and equality; Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017; Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021):

If [management/administration] don’t understand what they’re trying to tell us that we need to do, then that big, huge like deficit happens right? Like, “well, you told us that you wanted [sexuality education/support], this is a part of it.” [Leaders] need to kind of have a better understanding and be comfortable with it too. (Key Informant 4)

Key informants outlined that a lack of support from workplace leadership is barrier to feeling confident in supporting children’s sexuality development, “the support needs to be there too from your educators or managerial supervisor as well, right?” (Key Informant 6). Specifically, key informants discussed the need for leadership support when navigating pushback from families. Further, participants discussed that leaders of educational spaces (e.g., principals, school boards, child care supervisors) need to understand the importance and content involved in supporting sexuality development as it unfolds throughout early childhood.

Working alongside families is a core part of Ontario’s early childhood education sector (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), as emphasized by the prevalence of pre-service ECE training given to working with families presented in the first analysis of the current study. Educators need support when difficult conversations with parents arise or there are tensions their role as an ECE, to support children’s well-being, and family’s beliefs of what supporting well-being could look like, “you get the pushback from parents that are like, “what are what are you teaching my kid?” And they’re not like, “well, you know, they should, it’s important.” Then you kind of you’re stuck too” (Key Informant 4). Further, employers have power over educators’ practices, “[at] the end of the day, they’re signing my paycheck, and I have a family that I have to support as well” (Key Informant 4). Moreover, leaders have more power in their roles to ensure that educators have the resources needed to support their practice:

The educators want to have these resources to pull from, but I feel like a lot of it also has to do with management and those who have more power to, and resources as well, right, to bring it into the classroom. (Key Informant 6)

Overall, while key informants cited many barriers to being prepared and confident to support children’s holistic development, participants also identified that without an organization that has
leaders that understand and support their staff, educators are still in a precarious place (i.e., leaders have power over employment). Thus, key informants discuss the need for leaders to understand what DAP looks like for all domains of development and use their power and resources to support all frontline professionals with this element of educational practice.

**Lack of Policy Support**

Similarly to conversations about sexuality education in public education (Bialystok & Wright, 2019), support from policy protecting children’s access to support for sexuality development is missing for early childhood educators. Key informants identified that the lack of support in policy is a barrier, “there’s always like the barrier of like buy in and political will and making sure that can you—you have to have it at the top, right, for it to get into curricula and training” (Key Informant 1). Indeed, policy support is how evidence-based practices are enshrined in curriculum for pre-service educator training. In Ontario, “it’s the government that’s [sic] decides what we teach” (Key Informant 3), referring to the Ministry of Education which is responsible for deciding what materials should be included in ECEs pre-service training. Moreover, policy support ensures consistent information is available for all children, and children getting same level of education across the board:

> [Curriculum] standardizes it. Because my teaching is different than the people and the other—then the team in the next classroom over and the other team in the other—like everyone might have a different take on it. (Key Informant 5)

Although, key informants also highlighted the existing connections between supporting holistic development and existing provincial frameworks, “and that’s kind of mandated in the, I guess, in Ontario, the How Does Learning Happen document right as well” (Key Informant 6).

Further, key informants highlighted that policy support also comes from organizations’ protection of children’s autonomy over their own identity, through internal policies:

> [School Board] has specific policies, anti-bullying policies, acceptance policies, like there’s literally policies in place that if a child changes their iden—their gender identity to the opposite, like if they are a boy, they were named Danielle and now they want to be called Daniel. And they’re—they identify as male, then the teacher and everyone at the school will call them to Daniel whether the parent agrees or not. (Key Informant 5)

Policies such as the one described here ensure that children are supported if families are upset by
a child’s identity and expression. However, policies like this also ensure that educators are protected when they support children’s development by affirming their identity, “that is the protection I’d stand behind if a parent were to approach me and be angry about something I had taught their child,” continuing to say that they could refer parents to the specific areas in curriculum, allowing educators to be able to say, “well, it says right here, this is what’s to be taught for this age group.” So that would help with a little bit of that barrier if it were to come up” (Key Informant 5). Having policy in place gives educators the knowledge that their organization values 2SLGBTQINA+ families, children, and educators, as well as reinforces the right for all children to be supported in the development of sexuality in their early childhood.

**Teaching Pre-Service Educators**

In addition to educators requiring a broad knowledge base to support children in the topics listed in the results above, through conversations with key informants, educators need additional professional supports. Key informants were clear that pre-service training was an essential component of equipping professionals to deal with children’s sexuality development, “[educators have] no experience to deal with this unless you teach it in a formal academic environment” (Key Informant 3). Furthermore, RECEs support the development of children in their professional care (CECE, 2017), which can include early adolescence, “ECE’s obviously are allowed to teach up to 12 years old. Those are the crucial years of development, sexuality, puberty; all these things are happening not just to the body, to the brain” (Key Informant 3). This participant’s point highlights that with this consideration, it is the professional responsibility for early childhood educators to support children’s sexuality development.

Further, the early learning sector emphasizes the importance of creating trusting relationships with children and their families. As families in a community will be queer, it is essential to support them (e.g., Cherrington et al., 2021). Indeed, it is specifically relevant to understand diversity in sexuality and gender, “knowing that you will be in contact with and closely working with families and people of all genders, all sexualities, all you know, whether it’s the parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles or the children themselves” (Key Informant 5). Moreover, for some children, formal education and care environments are the only way they will receive support for their sexuality development. One key informant beautifully described the role of the educator in supporting children, “students have a diverse range in home life, and there
can’t—there can be children who fall through the cracks on knowing basic care skills” (Key Informant 2). The participant went on to describe how educators have power to support children where parents may not have the resources or knowledge to do so:

If the parents are being stopped by stigma and shame, as educators, we should be educating ourselves through that stigma and shame and if we can’t walk the families along with us as we walk the children, we can at least walk the children through some less stigma and shame based messaging. (Key Informant 2)

This aligns with research where healthcare professionals described being unequipped themselves related to children’s sexuality development and thus were in favour of formal sexuality education for their own children (Kurtuncu et al., 2015). Key informants further emphasized the dangers of continuing to leave educators unprepared to address sexuality development in the classroom:

what are your young teachers going to do in a classroom and they come they observe something?, they know something’s going on and they don’t feel they have any tools to deal with it. So, they put on their blinders and they try not to deal with it at all. That child is going through life without a safe place. School isn’t even safe for them if their teacher is wearing blinders. (Key Informant 3)

In addition to clarifying the role of early childhood educators in supporting the continuum of development for children birth to age twelve, key informants outlined various ways that pre-service training programs can equip educators to support children’s sexuality and gender development. Within this category, participants discussed the importance of Comprehensive Sexuality Education to Support Educators’ Well-Being, the need for early childhood educators to have Training on Supporting Sexual Health and Well-Being, which includes knowledge of sexuality, gender, and relationship building, as well as the topics listed in the previously presented categories. Additionally, pre-service training is important to support educators in Learning to Address Personal and Systemic Biases, as well as Training on Communication and Knowledge Translation to help communicate pedagogical decisions to parents and families. Further key informants discuss the importance of Equipping Educators with Specific Practices and Resources to support their pedagogy. Finally, key informants discussed Considerations for Pre-Service Training in which participants offer strategies and suggestions for building pre-service training programs that equip educators to support sexuality development. Overall, the
following sub-sections will outline key informants’ discussions of necessary training for preservice educators to help equip them to support sexuality development and reflect on their own pedagogy related to sexuality and gender.

**Comprehensive Sexuality Education to Support Educators’ Well-Being**

While the above section outlined the role of early childhood educators in supporting the development of sexuality, it is necessary to consider what knowledge early childhood educators need to adequately support this domain of development. As there are significant gaps in the content of public school sexuality education (see Farmer et al., 2019), discussions of supporting sexuality development as practicing professionals will only be effective if sexuality education for pre-service educators themselves is also considered, “given that we do see so many adults reporting that they’ve had limited sexual health education, there is a huge role for ongoing continued sexual health education across the board regardless of age” (Key Informant 1). Supporting adult sexuality education requires post-secondary instructors to create an environment that supports open dialogue. As one instructor discussed, a supportive classroom involves “opening the conversation up so that no topic is not touchable. Every topic is touchable. Whatever your question is, let’s deal with that face value” (Key Informant 3). Allowing students to ask questions about any aspect of sexuality development will only support their understanding of the topic, normalize discussions of sexuality and sexuality development across the lifespan, “I think we should really start in the pre service years of education to have these conversations deeply, right, and critically so, that at least they’re prepared, at least educators are prepared to some degree to talk about these topics” (Key Informant 6). Here, the participants emphasizes the power of post-secondary institutions to begin conversations of sexuality development in early childhood education pre-service training so that educators can ask questions about this topic prior to entering the field.

**Training on Supporting Sexual Health and Well-Being**

In the context of previous literature (Balter et al., 2018) and the barriers discussed by key informants in a previous section, training and preparation for encountering sexuality development in the early childhood classroom will help ECEs feel more confident in their ability to handle such situations. Confidence is an important part of creating an inviting space for
children to explore their own development, “you have to feel comfortable talking about this stuff if you don’t feel comfortable talking about sexual education, then your kid, the kids that you’re speaking about it with are not going to feel comfortable, right?” (Key Informant 4). The following sub-sections will further expand on specific knowledge educators should be learning during pre-service training regarding Sexuality and Gender Development, which includes ensuring educators understand the concepts of sexuality and gender, as well as being aware of the curiosities, interests, and ranges of development that exist in early childhood.

Basic knowledge of sexuality and gender spectrums is an important foundation for educators beginning their understanding of sexuality development in early childhood. Key informants discussed that educator should understand various terms and concepts related to sexuality, “training and understandings of gender, gender expression and anything to do with gender identity is important” (Key Informant 1), going on to say, “educators, again, should know what those different terms mean so that they can then explain that to young people” (Key Informant 1). Here, a participant discussed not only equipping educators with an understanding, but also a deep enough understanding that they can communicate these concepts to children in ways that align with each child’s needs, interests, and capabilities. The idea that pre-service educators should have Training on Communication and Knowledge Translation will be discussed in another sub-section of this category.

Key informants also stated that educators should be prepared for the behaviours and interests that children might display while in their educational care, “they should be prepared to know that, you know, children of this age have a very are very curious and interested in their bodies and what their bodies can do” (Key Informant 5). Further, as required by the Ontario Ministry of Education, educators have legal responsibilities to report abuse (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012). Key informants connected this core competency to supporting children’s sexuality development, explaining that to support educators’ duty to report, an understanding of the difference between curiosity and signs of abuse is essential. Indeed, a key informant outlined that educators are engaging in discourse about reporting abuse in early childhood, “one of the things that that has come up recently for teachers and for early childhood educators is learning about child abuse and sex—sexuality abuse and sort of bringing the conversation much earlier than we had in the past and teaching (Key Informant 5). Another key
informant connects this to the content of pre-service training:

*part of the training would be to notice those particular red flags and notice the difference
between curiosity and learning and exploration that is within that normal developmental range, and then the behaviors that do signify those red flags, have other—problematic things that are going on.* (Key Informant 1)

Indeed, pre-service educators need to be introduced to specific connections between observation and assessment and sexuality development to ensure they are prepared for this element of their professional practice. At the time of this analysis, and in keeping with what the literature and the above data support, the College of Early Childhood Educators recently released the *Sexual Abuse Prevention Program* for all RECEs in Ontario (CECE, 2022a). The timely release of this program recognizes a need in the field.

Additionally in this category, participants discussed other elements of understanding sexuality and gender. Specifically, one key informant discussed two considerations that should be incorporated into sexual health education and education for youth. First, ensuring that early childhood educators are “*learning about gender-based violence prevention*” (Key Informant 1), and understanding why supporting sexuality development is included in preventing violence. Moreover:

*When you’re doing any sexual health teaching I think this is very important, but especially when you’re working with really young kids, recognizing that some of them already in the room, may have experienced abuse. [...] I think that trauma informed lens is very important.* (Key Informant 1)

Here, the participant outlines the importance of considering the lived experiences of those in your educational care. Indeed educators, both those teaching pre-service educators and those working with young children, should learn about trauma-informed pedagogical approaches to ensure support for sexuality development is done with care.

**Learning to Address Personal and Systemic Biases**

When considering personal biases, key informants discussed that pre-service educators could consider situations that challenge cisgender, heterosexual norms and their reactions with the aim of not perpetuating the same biases with children. As an example, “*a boy that comes to your class and likes wearing frilly hats and pink sparkly shoes and dresses sometimes, you know.*
Do you have a bias against that?” (Key Informant 5). This key informant offered some reflection questions for pre-service educators to consider when unpacking their own biases, “what is your reaction to something like this? How would you feel seeing something like this? Where would you mind go if this scenario happened? To sort of unpack that a little bit” (Key Informant 5). The participant explained that training in this type of critical thinking supports students’ ability to critically examine the influence of bias on their own practices, “early childhood educators in any profession working with children should be sort of preloaded with that sort of understanding and sort of be able to release their biases” (Key Informant 5).

Similarly, key informants emphasized that educators should consider their own reactions to observing sexuality development in the classroom, “how to react to [children touching their genitals] without making them uncomfortable and making others uncomfortable but also—and also without shaming” (Key Informant 5). Another participant outlined that pre-service education is where future ECEs can learn these skills and integrate them into other areas of their training, “I really think it starts in the classroom with the ECE and it starts first semester, changing the attitudes, making them self-aware about their own bias and their own baggage and teaching them and giving them skills” (Key Informant 3). However, challenging pre-service educators to examine their biases first requires an understanding what developmentally appropriate sexual development looks like in early childhood as mentioned above.

Also in this sub-category, key informant discussed the importance of understanding systemic biases, different lived experiences as a result of systemic biases, and the impact of intersectionality on these lived experiences. Key informants connected this to the role of early childhood educators in perpetuating systemic biases, and emphasized the role of pre-service training, “teaching the next generation of educators to be gender conscious, to not put children in a specific role, to allow them to grow and develop naturally into whomever they’re going to be” (Key Informant 3). To support educators in this learning journey, key informants suggested that pre-service programs look at their programming to ensure curriculum is informed by critical (i.e., anti-bias) and decolonized theories alongside dominant theories (i.e., developmentalism):

I think if there was a better ratio between more developmentalism focus and also more critical theories or reconceptualist ways of thinking about early child or even decolonized ways of thinking about early childhood honestly because I didn’t learn about
that until um like bachelors and masters, so I think there needs to be a better, a more fair ratio of those courses offered for preservice early child educators. (Key Informant 6)

Overall, data in this sub-category comprise of key informants comments about understanding, unpacking, and unlearning both personal and systemic biases and the way theses biases show up in the conversations and intersections of sexuality development, anti-bias, and early childhood education.

**Training on Communication and Knowledge Translation**

The previous sections discussed supporting educators’ understanding of sexuality through CSE aimed at adults, equipping early childhood educators with an understanding of sexuality development, and preparing educators to address biases within themselves and their classrooms. Key informants identified that alongside this knowledge, communication is a core competency required when discussing support for sexuality development. Pre-service educators need training that “teaches you how to adapt your communication skills with different types of people in different circumstances, under different clouds, you know, different challenges. It’s not easy, but it can be taught, it can be learned” (Key Informant 3). Moreover, as identified in the literature, and in conversations with key informants, educators’ fear of pushback is one barrier to feeling confident in their professional knowledge about this domain of development, “educators are scared of getting that push back. I think learning about how to engage with parents and caregivers could be very beneficial, What are some good strategies for them?” (Key Informant 1). Specifically, building educators’ communication skills specific to children’s sexuality development is essential to give educators the knowledge and confidence to explain to parents and families what supporting sexuality development looks like in early childhood, “this is not sex in the classroom, this is our body in the classroom. These are body parts. Real words for real body parts that affect children in their real lives” (Key Informant 3). Another key informant suggested using alternative terms for sexuality development, “utilizing terms like health and hygiene, or being—or relational safety, and healthy friendships, etcetera, that don’t utilize the term sexuality but address what sexuality education actually gives children” (Key Informant 2).

When describing what these communication skills might look like, key informants discussed building reciprocal, trusting relationships with the families in your program, “I think it first starts with the respect and trust Then it has to do with your communication skills and how
you adapt your personal communication skill to the need of the parents” (Key Informant 3). A key component of communication and relationship building is listening to the perspectives of families:

I really try to have [families] tell me their experience first and their story to better understand perhaps there’s cultural aspects of it that I need to know. Or there is [sic] possible situations that they’re in to see how that fits into my box of tools, I can pull out to help them guide their children’s growth. (Key Informant 6)

Hearing the concerns and expertise of families is aligned with Ontario’s early learning pedagogy which positions families as capable and knowledgeable about their children in unique ways that intersect with the role of the RECE to create a web of support for young children (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Another participant beautifully summarized why communication skills are an essential component of supporting families:

I really, really believe that communication, your skills of communicating, how you can eloquently get your point across without offending, showing empathy, and understanding, and caring so that set of parents looks at you, hears you, and actually believes you care about their child. (Key Informant 3)

Here, this participant refers to the care that educators have for families and children, and how communication skills help build relationships and create a trusting connection, which is a key part of allowing educators to share their professional knowledge and pedagogical approaches to sexuality development with families.

**Equipping Educators with Specific Practices and Resources**

As discussed in the results above where key informants defined the scope of DAP for supporting children’s sexuality development, approaches to programming in early childhood education are emergent and embedded (see *Embedded Approaches to CSE in Early Childhood*). As such, key informants reiterated that training for educators should incorporate a variety of skills that can be transferred to the everchanging early learning classroom, “it’s a balance of formal and informal teaching always with an ear open for you know any kind of inappropriate conversation or something that might need to intervene about” (Key Informant 5). Another participant described how these transferrable skills build the overall practice of educators:

You can have a toolbox filled with support. And you may never need half of it, but you
will come across situations in your career that you’re going to need to step into that toolbox, open it up, and figure out what you’ve got in there to help you get through a circumstance that you’re dealing with. (Key Informant 3)

Further, key informants discussed that early childhood educators should learn strategies for creating inclusive environments that support exploration and represent a variety of people, cultures, and families:

*it’s making sure that we have lots of different books with different representations is very important, whether that’s gender or race or bodies, etcetera. But even if they don’t, like switching, I’ll switch them anyway. Sometimes I’ll say he and sometimes I’ll say she and sometimes I’ll say they and that ends up trickling down. If you do that frequently and it’s just part of the regular kind of narrative.* (Key Informant 1)

Moreover, educators can use their creativity to embed learning into other experiences using methods that work for their classroom. One participant gave an example of this spontaneous creativity:

*other things too can be songs, right? We do like, “head, shoulder, knees and toes.” We can do like. “head, shoulders, knees and toes, if my hand goes in my pants, then I go to the washroom” [laughing] something that rhymes.* (Key Informant 2)

Here, these two participants illustrate that existing books, songs, and other materials can be adjusted to suit teachable moments. In the context of the *Lack of Training and Resources*, outlined as a barrier in the above category, this offering can work for a variety of early learning settings in the absence of, or in addition to, other inclusive resources. Also within this sub-category, key informants discussed equipping educators with the skills to find additional resources to further their learning, and the skills to advocate for more resources where none exist:

*making sure that there’s resources for ECE’s. So there’s the training piece, making sure that they have their own resources, like there’s resources that they can turn to do their own learning as well, that there’s resources that they can use to advocate for better training.* (Key Informant 1)

Another participant highlighted the power of social media and digital creators as a source of materials that educators can use to inspire their practices, “*there’s a lot of really great videos. I*
think we don’t give enough credit to a lot of digital creators these days” (Key Informant 2). This participant shared a great example of innovation being shared on social media platforms with the example of using balloons to demonstrate toileting and wiping (see *Learning About Bodies*). Overall, key informants emphasized the importance of connecting pre-service educators to sources of further learning and resources to provide them with continuous opportunities to learn more about sexuality development throughout their career.

**Considerations for Pre-Service Training**

Another category in the analysis describes the types of supports that would be needed in pre-service training to equip educators with the knowledge and skills to support children’s sexuality development. One participant gave two examples of teaching strategies that might help educator transfer their knowledge to practice. First, pre-service classrooms could incorporate “some role-playing or some scenarios to work through of sort of identifying a specific scenario and how you might react to that and what you might be looking at” (Key Informant 5). Next, to support emerging confidence and communication skills when discussing sexuality development, the participants suggested “scripting [examples] that give some ideas of what to say to that how to respond” (Key Informant 5). While previous categories described the emergent and unpredictable nature of teaching moments in early childhood, having scripts to follow can be an excellent starting point for educators to build off of as they learn and encounter more.

While most content can be covered by the knowledgeable professionals teaching in pre-service training programs, key informants emphasized the need for expert consultation for advanced topics (i.e., decolonization, domestic violence, abuse, and CSA prevention). One participant further explains this, saying, “there is this distinction and understanding between basic training and knowledge, and then understanding that sometimes you do need experts to come in and teach about more nuance and contextualized and more advanced things” (Key Informant 1). Here, the key informant highlighted that there are limits to one expert’s knowledge and that specialized experts should deliver some subject matter. Overall, this category exemplifies how key informants described strategies professors can use to help students practice the skills and knowledge described throughout the results which range from role playing and scripting, to bringing in guest expertise.
Finding Hope in Positive Interactions

In discussing the barriers and scope of supporting sexuality development, the complexities faced by ECEs should be balanced with hope and opportunity. Throughout their practice, educators collaborate with children, families, colleagues, leaders, and communities to fully support children’s learning and development. Indeed, the key informants also highlighted positive aspects of working with children and families and supporting children’s holistic development, “I do have hope—positive hope for changes in the future and I think that’s why I keep doing the work that I do this despite barriers that I do see moments where the barrier has been broken” (Key Informant 6). This key informant went on to say, “we do have an impact when we do talk about this and that just even just and cis hetero families or parents and caregivers are accepting and listening to it” (Key Informant 6). Another participant gave an example of when they saw this knowledge translation move into a parent’s practice:

One student was telling was saying goodbye to his mom and he didn’t give his mom a kiss goodbye. And my coworker said, “go give Mommy a kiss.” And his mom said “no, no, that’s his choice. He can choose when he wants to give affection.” And it was like, so it was like so some parents are like right on it and stuff. (Key Informant 5)

The hope and positivity shared by professionals is just as important to share with pre-service educators among all the barriers and difficulties described above.

Conclusion

The aim of Study 2 was to outline what DAP looks like for supporting sexuality development in early childhood from the perspective of experts working in sexuality education and sexual health, early childhood education, and/or pre-service training. While the scope of this research endeavor is broad, the key informants provided clear direction for educators and professors teaching future educators as to how support for sexuality development can be embedded in early learning environments and pedagogies. Overall results from key informants clearly indicate that supporting sexuality is developmentally appropriate, embedded within supporting children’s holistic well-being, and aligned with Ontario’s early learning pedagogy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; Timmons & Airton, 2020). Indeed, when defining DAP in this context of sexuality and gender in early learning, key informants outlined that DAP is what children are asking about, experiencing, and curious to learn more about. Further, DAP includes
what children need to know to stay healthy and safe, as well as to support their unique
development, including skills that integrate domains of development (e.g., “those core concepts
of building care, and building ethics, and building communication and understanding, and
bodily autonomy and those very key concepts that you then build upon later on” Key Informant
1). Overall, the results demonstrate that support for sexuality development is holistic and
involves many topics that are interwoven throughout other areas of development. Moreover,
DAP for supporting sexuality education involves letting children explore and, ultimately, is
developmentally appropriate. A summary of the results is presented in Table 4 below.
Table 4: Categories and Sub-Categories Presented in Study 2 Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and Sub-Categories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1) Defining DAP for Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Behaviours and interests in early childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Acknowledging and respecting children’s competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Embedded approaches to CSE in early childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Creating inclusive environments for children and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Not included within the scope of DAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2) Topics Included in Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Learning about bodies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Building and understanding of self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Boundaries and autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Relationships and families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Being a citizen in society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3) Barriers to Supporting CSE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Lack of training and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Engaging in professional learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Perceptions of sexuality and sexuality education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Lack of support from workplace leaderships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Lack of policy support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4) Considerations for Pre-Service Training</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Comprehensive sexuality education to support educators’ well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Training on supporting sexuality development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Learning to address personal and systemic biases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Training on communication and knowledge translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Equipping educators with specific practices and resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Logistics of teaching pre-service educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5) Finding Hope in Positive Interactions</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The project outlined, based on evidence from regulatory health bodies (WHO, 2006; WHO et al., 2017), research on child protection (e.g., Wurtele & Kenny, 2011), and developmental research (e.g., Serbin et al., 2002), that children need developmentally appropriate support for their sexuality development. Therefore, as the regulated profession for the early years in Ontario, Registered Early Childhood Educators have a responsibility to consider sexuality as a domain of holistic development. Furthermore, to align with pedagogical
practices seen when discussing children’s overall development, educators need to be trained in how make considerations for children’s diverse sexuality development when planning children’s learning experiences.

As such, Study 1 examined a snapshot of pre-service training program course materials to assess whether programs dedicated explicit and substantial instructional time to training educators to support children’s sexuality development. Results of this analysis indicated that while support for sexuality development aligns and overlaps with many of the other competencies for early childhood educators, specific knowledge of and consideration for the role of the educator in supporting sexuality development was found in a small minority of programs and a smaller proportion of courses. This is congruent with previous research which highlights that early childhood educators in Ontario have self-identified the need for training and professional learning to enhance their practices regarding support for sexuality development (Balter et al., 2018).

The current project also consulted professionals working at the intersections of early childhood education, sexuality education, and advocacy and social justice to determine what DAP looks like when supporting sexuality development for young children in early childhood education classrooms. In Study 2, key informants highlighted the need for children to have a well-rounded understanding of their bodies, support for their developing identity, and transferrable skills in communication, relationship building, emotion recognition and empathy, as well as an understanding of social issues such as bullying and discrimination. Furthermore, to equip early childhood educators in supporting children in these areas, key informants also identified that educators should have an in-depth understanding of early and lifelong sexuality development to support children and families throughout the early years. Additionally, educators should understand personal, cultural, and social perceptions of sexuality and be equipped with skills to navigate conversations about sexuality development and the importance of nurturing curiosity and exploration in the early years.

The results of the project highlight the gaps in pre-service training programs that leave early childhood educators unprepared to support children’s sexuality development. Furthermore, the current project outlined what falls under the scope of developmentally appropriate practice for support sexuality development in the early years. Together, the results of the two studies
indicate that, while current pre-service training overlaps with the content necessary for educators to support sexuality development, the lack of explicit discussions about sexuality education and children’s sexuality development still create many barriers. The following sections will summarize Study 1, Study 2, and discuss the overall findings from the project. Next, I will discuss the limitations to the project. Finally, the future directions section will describe future directions for academic research, present the resources found during the course of the project, and outline some recommendations for where policy in Ontario’s early learning sector can support children receiving holistic support from educators who are knowledgeable about all domains of development.

**Summary of Study 1: Review of Ontario’s Pre-Service Programs**

The first study aimed to answer the research question, how are pre-service educators currently trained to support the development of sexuality in early childhood and well-being in the early years in Ontario? A review of Ontario’s pre-service early childhood education programs was conducted to answer this question. The results of the program review indicate that Ontario’s pre-service training programs include courses on topics such child development, pedagogical practices, and social issues. However, educator training rarely discussed sexuality development or prepare educators to support the development of sexuality, as it unfolds from birth. This section will summarize the methods and results of Study 1 and discuss the implications of the findings presented.

To collect data, publicly available course materials (i.e., course descriptions and, where available, course outlines) were gathered from all accredited post-secondary institutions in Ontario offering early childhood education programs. Textual data were analyzed using conventional content analysis to see how frequently and to what depth course materials discuss sexuality development in early childhood, and specifically, the role of educators in supporting children’s sexuality development. Further, data were examined using the framework of DAP outlined previously, which included consideration of adjacent knowledge, skills, and abilities found within the pre-service programs that may support early childhood educators’ understanding of sexuality development as a component of holistic health and well-being, as well as an authentic part of development in the early years. Results highlighted that pre-service educator programs across Ontario give pre-service educators an *Understanding of Sexuality and*
Gender, including *General Knowledge on Sexuality and Gender* as concepts and lived experiences (i.e., sexual orientation, gender expression, gender identity), as well as specific knowledge for *Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood*. However, instances of this content across Ontario were scarce and not found with enough frequency to conclude that Ontario’s pre-service educators are receiving training in this area. Pre-service educators across Ontario are receiving training on the role of early childhood educator’s in detecting abuse, violence, or neglect, abuse prevention, and duty to report abuse (i.e., *Sexual Abuse Awareness and Prevention*). Further results indicated extensive training on *Domains of Development*, including the interconnectedness of developmental domains. Finally, course materials indicated that pre-service educators receive substantial training on the *Landscape of Early Learning in Ontario*, including the *Goals of Early Childhood Education* which outlines the foundations of learning (i.e., belonging, expression, engagement, and well-being; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), and introduces future ECEs to *Approaches to Programming Using Emergent Curriculum*.

The results of this analysis indicate that explicit mentions of sexuality development were not found often or consistently throughout all training programs. The exclusion of sexuality development from pre-service training programs represents the normativity of developmentalism and the influence on education systems guiding early childhood education. However, when combining the results of the literature and the Ontario early learning policy landscape with the results from this study, it is evident that supporting holistic development in early childhood includes sexuality education (i.e., helping all children to develop skills related to sexual and overall well-being and health) which, indeed, fits within the framework of the existing pre-service training programs. Furthermore, an expanded view of developmentally appropriate, the provincial documents (e.g., HDLH; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014) and mandated scope of ECEs professional practice (CECE, 2017) also support this conclusion.

Another consideration from the results came from considering the data where Developmentally Appropriate Practice was mentioned as DAP is the guiding framework of the project. Conversations of DAP in the data were paired with discussion of holistic well-being. However, when discussing development, pre-service training programs largely did not include sexuality development. Therefore, the current training practices in Ontario are maintaining the
status quo of traditional developmentally appropriate practice, rather than problematizing the normativity and exclusion that comes from developmental only approaches (Goldstein, 2008). That is, educators are being trained on development, but sexuality development in the early years is excluded. An approach that perpetuates this violence, is not in line with the approaches of the early learning profession (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2104; Timmons & Airton, 2020). Further, the College of Early Childhood Educators upholds the need to support diversity (e.g., CECE, 2020b), anti-bias education (CECE, 2022b), protection against CSA (CECE, 2022a), and child development (CECE, 2022c). As discussed in the literature review, educational systems that leave out sexuality development, and further do not strive to support sexuality development along the continuum of development, are complicit in reproducing harmful discourses of childhood and sexuality (Surtees, 2008).

Overall, there are significant gaps in early childhood educators’ pre-service training for students to learn about sexuality development before entering the field to care for children who need support for all areas of development. Furthermore, through the assessment of current training available to pre-service educators, it is evident that current course materials in pre-service training programs do not have explicit information about sexuality development and the role of the educator in supporting this domain of development in the early years.

Summary of Study 2: Key Informant Interviews

The second study aimed to answer the following research question and sub-questions, what is required training for ECEs to help them support the development of sexuality in early childhood; what does Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) mean in addressing sexuality education in the early years; and finally, what do educators need to support sexuality development, teach personal safety skills, and empower children in ways that align with the pedagogical approaches of the early years sector? To answer these questions, I conducted interviews with key informants who are professionals working in sexual health and education, early childhood education, and early childhood education pre-service training programs. The methodology for this study was inspired by Marques and colleagues (2017) who conducted a similar exploration into DAP for supporting sexuality development in adolescence by interviewing key informants. The expertise from key informants produced rich conversations about supporting sexuality development in early childhood. Transcript data was analyzed using
conventional content analysis and the theoretical framework which problematizes normative notions of DAP.

Overall, a notable contribution from Study 2 was *Defining DAP for Supporting the Development of in Early Childhood* and outlining the *Topics Included in Supporting the Development of Sexuality in Early Childhood*. Within these categories, key informants presented a range of knowledge, skills, and abilities that educators should have to support their professional practice, as well as providing various topics that are included within supporting sexuality development in early childhood such as helping children learn about bodies and how to care for their own bodies; identity and self-expression; boundaries, autonomy, and privacy; the various relationships and families within society as well as relationship building skills; and being a citizen in society. Results from this analysis further described the *Barriers to Supporting Comprehensive Sexuality Education* faced by professionals working to support the learning and development of young children. Additionally, results presented data where key informants described specific *Considerations for Pre-Service Training* (i.e., teaching future ECEs), and specific recommendations for supporting educators’ understandings of sexuality, gender, and sexuality development. Finally, key informants emphasized the importance of *Finding Hope in Positive Interactions* and sharing the positive impact that early childhood educators can have on children and families, and the knowledge translation they witness in their community as a result of their pedagogies and care practices.

Emphasized by key informants were the connections between social-emotional development and sexual health. Specifically, key informants discussed that the foundational skills in early childhood outlined in the results, are directly related to concepts that children will explore throughout their development (sexual health, identity, communication, etc.). The intersection between social-emotional, communication, and relationship skills in sexuality education has been studied in Dutch populations where adolescents have safer sex practices than American youth (Ferguson et al., 2008). Ferguson and colleagues explored the content of sexuality education for children in middle and late childhood (i.e., 11-18 years old) and demonstrated that open conversations about sexuality development are encouraged (Ferguson et al., 2008). Further, a national program for students helped build skills in communication, relationship building, and knowledge about sexual health, all of which helped students feel more
comfortable discussing and asserting preferences and boundaries with peers and partners. The social support for comprehensive sexuality education is reflective of Dutch socio-political norms, which understand that sexuality development unfolds throughout childhood and must be supported by health education (Ferguson et al., 2008). Surrounded by normalization of sexuality, and public education about safe relationship and sexual practices helps create support for Dutch children’s well-being. It is this social support that the current study envisions for children in Ontario.

In addition to burdens placed on educators due to regulatory demands and a need for further advancements in creating decent work (AECEO, 2016), educators face additional barriers to supporting children’s sexuality development. Educators care about the well-being of children and know that includes supporting children’s holistic well-being, however, they do not feel comfortable in supporting sexuality and gender development because they face a lack of training, little formal support, and sexuality education is highly contentious in Ontario. Formal support (i.e., explicit policies, training, support for curriculum and programming, materials and resources, support from leadership at their organization) was identified as a theme throughout key informants’ discussions and offers a solution to a lot of the barriers presented by key informants.

**Overall Project Findings**

The current study presents a lengthy description of results to fully explain categories and the connections to Ontario’s early childhood education policy and pedagogy that guided the analytic decisions. Policy research is strengthened by these contextual connections and “researchers have to find ways of organizing their analysis so that it provides a lens that represents but also explains a highly complex environment” (Walt et al., 2008, p. 310).

Together, the combined findings from both studies indicate that the necessary supports for early childhood educators to support children’s sexuality development include preparation in pre-service training programs. Moreover, there is a need to ensure that educators are adequately prepared, not only in their theoretical knowledge of sexuality development but also that frontline professionals need to feel comfortable in addressing children’s sexuality and gender development, as it unfolds throughout their early childhood and integrates with other developmental domains.
The content presented from my conversations with key informants can act as an initial framework to the scope and depth of DAP for supporting sexuality development. Key informants discussed additional considerations that should be incorporated into this work such as trauma informed approaches and decolonized views of sexuality, gender, and pedagogy. As such, knowledge of the development of sexuality in the early years should be explicitly named as a professional competency for preservice educators. Explicit considerations of sexuality development can occur throughout the daily schedule in a child care environment (e.g., when considering developmental stages or in educators’ responses to behaviours and knowledge in children). Implicit, but essential, considerations of sexuality development can occur through promoting an authentic understanding of the lived experiences of the children, families, and educators in the child care community (e.g., anti-bias pedagogies).

**Project Limitations**

It is important to note the limitations of the project as this transparency contributes to overall trustworthiness (Graneheim et al., 2017). As such, this section describes the various limitations across the theoretical framework, research design, and within each of the two studies conducted. Firstly, the theoretical framework of Developmentally Appropriate Practice, and the aim of defining DAP should be considered within this section. DAP originated in developmentalism (Bredekamp & Cobble, 1987; 1997; Sexton et al., 2002) and brings about conversations about appropriate versus inappropriate education practices based in dominant views of development. However, recently, DAP has been reconceptualized to include considerations of lived experiences and how those experiences are influenced by the sociocultural and political context (NAEYC, 2009; NAEYC, 2020). As such, the current study worked to use more nuanced approaches to considering DAP and problematize the traditional views of what content is appropriate for children (Lather, 2007), bringing in early learning pedagogy which emphasizes holistic and inclusive approaches to educational practices in the early years (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

Study 1 analyzed pre-service training programs to looking for how sexuality development in early childhood is currently represented in pre-service training programs. However, it is difficult to assess the content and quality of early childhood education programs through course outlines alone. Moreover, post-secondary courses are everchanging and the snapshot of courses
presented in this study (collected in 2021), have likely been updated or replaced. Indeed new professors and policies in pre-service programs can change term over term, occurring as frequently as every 4 months. The flexibility of courses in post-secondary institutions, while a limitation of Study 1, offers an opportunity for post-secondary educators to ensure their course materials include discussions of sexuality development where it overlaps with current course materials. Moreover, the course material data overlap significantly with the topics and themes identified in Study 2 by key informants offering many points of connection between current course content and recommendations from key informants described throughout the project.

As discussed previously, course materials specific to Indigenous ways of knowing, or general courses from Indigenous institutions were not included in the analysis due to availability. Moreover, it would be inappropriate for myself, as a settler in the context of academia, to comment on Indigenous knowledges. Although it is important to note that Indigenous cultures across Turtle Island have a variety of understandings of gender, sexuality, childhood, and identity (Sheppard & Mayo Jr., 2013). Post-secondary institutions in Ontario have varying relationships with Indigenous communities Indigenous knowledge keepers and elders should be involved in creating culturally and locally relevant curriculum for early childhood educators regarding understandings of sexuality and gender development specific to these communities. Nonetheless, it is vital to acknowledge the lack of Indigenous perspectives in the analysis and even more essential to recommend the inclusion of decolonized perspectives of sexuality and gender, child development, early childhood education, and educator training.

Courses that we not examined during the analysis could offer amazing opportunities for pre-service educators to learn authentic ways of support sexuality development. Practical and experiential learning (seminar, practicum, placement, etc.) courses could offer pre-service educators opportunities to see observe children’s curiosity and recognize authentic occurrences of emerging sexuality development. Content courses, such as courses on child development, could introduce and reinforce educators’ knowledge to complement this experiential learning. Further, general communications courses that focus on general writing, language, and/or communication skills could be educational spaces that help pre-service students become more comfortable communicating sensitive topics or communicating across differences in understandings of sexuality and gender development in childhood. Research related courses that
focus on literature reviews and analytical skills, as well as project, paper writing, and special topics courses, could offer pre-service educators a space to engage with the theories (e.g., reconceptualist theories which challenge developmentalism) and concepts (e.g., gender-based violence) discussed by key informants. Lastly, general workplace health and safety courses can discuss the importance of an environment that supports the identity children and staff and include conversations of psychological safety, resilience, and trauma-informed practices. While these courses were excluded from the analysis, they can offer countless opportunities to explicitly equip educators to support sexuality development, alongside the other domains of development considered.

Study 2 interviewed key informants who are subject matter experts in sexual health, sexuality education, early childhood education, and pre-service training. A limitation of this study was the small sample size, including only six participants in the study. While small sample sizes are critiqued for their lack of depth and objectivity (e.g., Morse 2015) and reduce the degree to which the findings can be generalized, these critiques oppose the objectives and nature of the project. The current study did not aim to outline a fully realized curriculum or redesign pre-service training programs; as the study was exploratory in nature, a targeted sample made conceptual and methodological sense. Moreover, the range of participant experiences and alignment among participants’ contributions gives the results theoretical generalizability (Marques et al., 2017; Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, the sample, high in its information power (Malterud et al., 2016), supported the current study to describe the context early childhood education in Ontario.

Finally, the current study does not discuss the high rate of burnout among educators in Ontario (Koenig et al., 2018), or the ongoing efforts to advocate for decent work (McCuaig et al., 2022). This project examined sexuality development in early childhood education, focusing on the training needs of educators, however, the widespread workforce issues must be considered to create working conditions that allow educators to be curious practitioners who can spend their energy on care and pedagogy to create environments that support children’s sexuality development.

Future Directions

Guided by the methodology presented by Ritchie and Spencer (1994), the discussion
section of qualitative content analysis is key for developing strategies to address the initial research problem. As such, this section describes implications of the results in the context of supporting children’s sexuality development in early learning environments in Ontario. Furthermore, the current section is explained in the context of research, practice, and policy, as three pillars\(^9\) of actioning research and supporting our current practicing professionals (Balter, 2021, personal communication).

**Future Research**

Future research should incorporate the missing perspectives that were not included in the current study to provide a well-rounded framework for designing pre-service training and pedagogical supports. Primarily, research should examine the perspectives of children and what they would like to be learning about regarding the topics discussed by key informants (i.e., bodies, self, boundaries, relationships, and citizenship). Involving children in the creation of their learning experiences is aligned with the emergent curriculum approaches discussed throughout this project and extend those notions to democratic process of co-creating the early childhood classroom (Ribaeus & Skånfors, 2019).

Another perspective that needs further exploration is the family’s perspective. While research indicates that largely, parents are supportive of sexual health education for their children (see Wood et al., 2021), there are those who oppose the inclusion of this education. Indeed, as reflective and curious professionals, key informants and modeled asking questions as a pedagogical approach. One key informant discussed the backlash seen from families when the Ontario public school sexuality education curriculum was being updated (see *A Journey Through Sexuality Education Curriculum in Ontario*) and emphasized the need to explore various perspectives further, “there is a small group of parents and caregivers who are like, “no, don't want this, I don't want it for my kid.” And I'd be curious to learn more about them and what their reasons are” (Key Informant 1).

Lastly, it is essential to explore the educator’s perspective throughout the creation and

\(^9\) 3-Legged Stool analogy – ensuring you consider research, policy, and practice (Balter, 2021, personal communication). This analogy from Dr. Balter helped me, as a researcher, keep these 3 considerations in mind throughout the research project and provided a fitting framework for which to discusses the project’s implications and contributions.
implementation of training and formal supports for their practice. Specifically, previous research has demonstrated that educators’ comfort and understanding of sexuality has a substantial impact on their ability to support children’s sexuality development (Cheung et al., 2021). Moreover, research can examine existing professional learning opportunities (see Balter et al., 2021b) to determine their effectiveness in increasing educators knowledge, skills, and abilities in supporting children sexuality development. Evaluations should be intentional to include interdisciplinary (i.e., more than just developmentalism) approaches to determining program goals and evaluating outcomes.

Yet, it is important to note that while the aforementioned future directions for research are important, the literature is clear that early childhood educators have long identified their need for increased training opportunities related to support sexuality development in early childhood (see Balter et al., 2018). Immediate next steps should focus on the practice and policy side of this section. As such, the following sections address practical support for early childhood educators, followed by a description of the policy supports that would be impactful for embedding key informants’ recommendations throughout the early childhood education pedagogy and pre-service training.

**Support for Practicing Early Childhood Educators**

As demonstrated by inclusion of this in key informants’ definitions of DAP, it is essential that children are supported in their sexuality and gender development. Further, supporting sexuality development involves clear conversations with children about bodies, boundaries, and building relationships. These results are further supported by the literature (e.g., Balter & van Rhijn, in press; Cacciatore et al., 2020a). Literature on child sexuality development has outlined typical behaviours that educators can expect to see and can help them guide their understandings of normative development in the absence of formal supports (see Cacciatore et al., 2019; Wurtele & Kenny, 2011). Moreover, educators can engage in self-reflection about their biases and how these might intersect with their pedagogical practices and language use with children in the classroom.

Furthermore, results from key informants highlight the importance of policy support and curriculum resources for early childhood educators. Throughout the current study, key informants highlighted resources that can support educators who may be interested in furthering
their supply of resources and knowledge for supporting children’s sexuality development. A summary of the resources collected throughout the study is presented in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Resources for Supporting Sexuality Development in Early Childhood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Resources</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSA Prevention</td>
<td>• <em>Sexual Abuse Prevention Program</em> by College of ECEs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>The Canadian Centre for Child Protection</em> – resources for professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>working with children, research on child protection in Canadian context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Literature</td>
<td>• <em>Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress</em> by Christine Baldacchino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Red: A Crayon’s Story</em> by Michael Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>It’s My Body: A Book about Body Privacy for Young Children</em> by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Louise Spilsbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Pink Is for Boys</em> by Robb Pearlman and Eda Kaban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Don’t Mess with Edgar's Tutu</em> by Tania Newell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Bodies Are Cool</em> by Tyler Feder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Parts; More Parts; and Even More Parts</em> all by Tedd Arnold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>A Family Is a Family Is a Family</em> by Sara O’Leary and Qin Leng</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>C is for Consent</em> by Eleanor Morrison and Faye Orlove</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>A Is For Activism</em> by Charlotte Millington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>A First Conversation</em> series by Megan Madison and Jessica Ralli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(books about bodies, gender, consent, race, etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>• Raising Sexually Healthy Children Workshop by University of Toronto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sexual Health Begins At Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>• Rainbow Health Ontario</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sister Song</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SHORE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Physical Health and Education Canada (PHE Canada)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Media Smarts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Native Youth Sexual Health Network</td>
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<tr>
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<td>• EGALE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Center for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CGSD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pride Speaks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• OK To Be Me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Spectrum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>• Gender Variant Working Group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• GEGI Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming Resources</td>
<td>• Canadian Guidelines for Sexual Health Education</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note:* All key informants contributed to the list above; however, for privacy reasons, resource recommendations are not tied to a specific participant.

*Note:* workshops listed were mentioned by key informants and may no longer be offered.
Recommendations for Policy

Policy in early childhood education ranges from legislation (i.e., CCEYA, 2014), to pedagogical frameworks (i.e., How Does Learning Happen?; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), to training upcoming professionals (e.g., Early Childhood Education Program Standard; Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012), to quality assurance frameworks (e.g., AQI; City of Toronto, 2014). Each area of policy regulates and shapes the practice of early childhood education and intersects with societal beliefs to influence the care that children receive in early learning environments. As such, it essential for policy to be clear and explicit in outlining the role of early childhood education and of the educator in supporting sexuality development in early learning. The current section outlines the various ways that policy can be more supportive to educators fostering children’s sexuality development in early childhood, based on the literature, the information gathered in Study 1 on current pre-service training, and the scope of DAP described by key informants.

Specifically, the results of the study showed that in pre-service training, educators learn about typical developmental progression, abuse prevention and protection, supporting and appreciating the diversity in family values, practices, and makeups, as well as learning pedagogical practices that can be used to support children in their care. However, explicit discussions of sexuality development in early childhood and of the role of RECEs in supporting this development are largely excluded from pre-service training. Early childhood education and care is inherently about the development and well-being of children. As such, any pre-service training courses that discuss development (which is most courses, e.g., domains of development, theories/research on childhood) or relationships (e.g., child-teacher relationships, family-educator relationships) have room to include the development of sexuality and relationship education within the scope of their course. Considerations for children with disabilities also need to be explicitly discussed and considered in educator training (Davies et al., 2021; 2023). Integrating these considerations involve viewing families and educators, each as valued, knowledgeable as experts (Underwood et al., 2019). It is through collaboration and connection that educators and families build caring environments that facilitate children’s learning and well-being. Policy supports must acknowledge and support the relational nature and possibilities of child care communities.
As discussed by key informants, supporting the development of sexuality in early childhood includes considerations for abuse prevention. Specifically, supporting children’s sexuality development includes building skills that are also personal protective skills (e.g., Kenny & Wurtele, 2013). As an example, knowing the names of their own body parts also gives children the language to communicate possible instances of abuse to a trusted adult. Similarly, teaching children about bodily boundaries (e.g., needing permission to touch other people’s bodies), not only builds foundational knowledge for later years, when notions of consent start to include sexual intimacy, but also helps children understand their own bodily boundaries and the importance of having them respected. Including knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices, within the context of CSA prevention, can help pre-service educators be prepared to support children in acquiring these personal safety skills which, in turn, protects children against abuse (Wurtele & Kenny, 2011). Although the College of Early Childhood Educators has taken steps to mandate training for member RECEs (CECE, 2022a) and training on CSA prevention is an explicit requirement for all pre-service training programs (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2012), there is no mandate as to whether pre-service educators must also learn about personal safety approaches to sexual abuse prevention prior to entering the field. Based on the course materials reviewed, there is some discussion of abuse prevention, but little on supporting children to build personal safety skills, in part, through support for sexuality development. Literature on CSA guides the skills and abilities that educators and children should be building (e.g., Wurtele & Kenny, 2011).

Additional policy supports such as a framework to outline sexuality development in early childhood, as is done for other domains of development (i.e., ELECT; Best Start Expert Panel, 2007), would provide additional support to early childhood educators. Such frameworks can be developed using research, such as the key informant ideas presented in the current project, alongside existing sexual health and sexuality education resources (SIECCAN, 2019; WHO 2017). The current lack of specification as to how educators can support children’s sexuality development does not offer adequate support as described by the results from key informant interviews and previous literature (Balter et al., 2018). Farther, the lack of policy leaves educators’ unprotected and unprepared to support children’s sexuality development; nonetheless, as demonstrated by key informants’ accounts, they persist in showing up for the children in their
Despite the evidence that the development of sexuality should be supported, beginning in the early years, the training, resources, and pedagogical supports for educators regarding CSE has not reflected the importance of sexual health education that national and international regulatory health agencies emphasize (Balter et al., 2016; 2021a; SIECCAN, 2019).

**Conclusion**

The Ontario sexuality health curriculum (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2019), which has children beginning to learn about healthy relationships and diversity in Grade 3 (i.e., ages 7-10), contradicts the recommendations by key informants which has this topic being covered in early childhood education (i.e., ages 0-6), beginning long before the scope of this curriculum. Moreover, the provincial pedagogical framework, *How Does Learning Happen?*, emphasizes the whole child and lays out foundations for learning to occur (i.e., belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). The contradiction between policy choices from the Ministry of Education and expert recommendations is indicative of the post-truth era discussed in the literature review (Bialystok et al., 2020). Indeed there is still substantial work to be done to advance understandings of sexuality development throughout early and middle childhood and enact evidence-based policies to protect children’s access to supportive educational and care environments that reflect the authentic lived experiences of children and families (i.e., anti-biased, inclusive).

As demonstrated by the experiences shared by key informants, educators persist in their support for children, and are resourceful in their efforts to support children’s holistic development. Formal supports from policy and leadership should match the endeavors of educators. The considerations presented in this project overlap with considerations outlined in prior research, which identified that the Sex Information Education Council of Canada, and other leading organizations have been advocating for professionals to have access to resources, content, training, and a community informed, ethics lens on sexuality education for decades (Barrett, 1994; SIECCAN, 2019). While projects like the current study are important for contributing to conversations on support sexuality development, there is an extensive literature base for supporting sexuality development through education. The issues and recommendations presented here are an extension of an ongoing attempt to bring comprehensive sexuality education to public education. The unique element to the conversations presented in the current
study, along with other scholars working to further the research base (e.g., Balter et al., 2016; 2018; 2021a), is tailoring the conversation of support for sexuality development to early childhood education in Ontario.
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https://doi.org/10.58295/2375-3668.1089.


World Health Organization (WHO), BZgA Germany (Federal Centre for Health Education), & European Expert Group on Sexuality Education. (2010). *Standards for sexuality*
education in Europe: a framework for policy makers, educational and health authorities and specialists. Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA).


## Appendices

### Appendix A: Post-Secondary Institutes and Courses Screened for Analysis

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
<th>Courses Excluded</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>• degree: 8</td>
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<td><strong># of included courses:</strong> 559</td>
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<td>Courses are numbered where course codes were not provided.</td>
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</table>

### 1. Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology

**Data:** diploma; course outline; analyzed 16 courses; excluded 12 courses

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<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
<th>Courses Excluded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAM1000 - Observation Skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>FAM1015 - Preparation for Placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM1236 - Introduction to Curriculum</td>
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<td>FAM1233 - Seminar I</td>
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<td>FAM1241 - Health and Wellness for Children</td>
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<td>FAM1240 - Seminar II</td>
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<td>FAM1242 - Foundations of Early Childhood Education</td>
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<td>FAM1238 - Seminar III</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAM1243 - Child Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>FAM1234 - Practice Teaching I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM1003 - Psychology of Learning</td>
<td></td>
<td>FAM1033 - Practice Teaching II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENL1904F - Children's Literature</td>
<td></td>
<td>FAM1043 - Practice Teaching III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAM1245 - Environments for Young Children</td>
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<td>FAM1249 - Math &amp; Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAM1246 - Introduction to Children with Exceptionalities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Experiences for Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAM1248 - Guiding Children's Behaviour</td>
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<td>FAM0030 - Creative Art Experiences for Children</td>
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<td>FAM1244 - Environments for Kindergarten &amp; School-age Children</td>
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<td>FAM1247 - Creating an Effective Curriculum</td>
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<td>FAM1250 - Language and Emergent Literacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAM1251 - Families and Community</td>
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<td>FAM1252 - Assessment of Children's Learning</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>FAM1253 - Professional and Administrative Practices in ECE</td>
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### 2. Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology

**Data:** degree; course

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<tr>
<td>EDU4110 - Human Development I</td>
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<td>EDU4113 - Historical Overview of Early Learning &amp; Family Services</td>
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<td>EDU4122 - Ethics and Legislation in Early Learning</td>
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<td>FLD4244 - Field Placement I</td>
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<td>PSY4111 - Social Psychology</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
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| outlines; analyzed 22 courses; excluded 16 courses | EDU4120 - Human Development II  
EDU4123 - Supporting Children with Exceptionalities  
EDU4200 - Mentorship II  
EDU4230 - Effective Indoor Environments  
EDU4232 - Guiding Behaviour  
FAM4233 - Legislation & Ethics in Family Services  
FAM4234 - Working with Adults  
EDU4240 - Foundations of Literacy Numeracy & Science Development  
EDU4353 - Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health  
FAM4351 - Community Organization  
NAT4352 - Nature-Based Early Learning  
PHI2004 - Foundations of Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, & Actions  
EDU4360 - Developing Proposals  
EDU4354 - Cross-Cultural Competencies  
FAM4362 - Group Dynamics and Organizational Behaviour  
NAT4473 - Outdoor Learning Environments  
EDU4400 - Global Perspectives of Pedagogy  
FAM4482 - Leadership, Community Development & Advocacy | EDU4478 - Early Learning & Community Development Work Term  
EDU4472 - Special Studies in Early Learning & Community Development I  
FLD4474 - Field Placement III  
QUA2001 - Statistics for the Social Sciences  
EDU4480 - Special Studies & Research in Early Learning & Community Development II  
PHI1000 - Logic and Critical Thinking  
*EDU4100 - Mentorship I  
*EDU4114 - Introduction to Curriculum  
*PSY4121 - Educational Psychology  
*EDU4242 - Creative Arts for Children  
*EDU4243 - Administrative Practices  
*EDU4231 - Play-Based Pedagogy  
*EDU4241 - Assessment & Program Evaluation |

3. Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology (Intensive)  

**Data:** diploma; course outline; analyzed 9 courses; excluded 12 courses  

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<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
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| ENL1755 - Fundamentals of Communication for ECE  
FAM0062 - Guiding Children's Behaviour  
FAM1200 - Child Psychology and Development  
FAM1210 - Preparation for Experience  
FAM1222 - Fostering Children's Creativity  
FAM1231 - Observation Skills  
FAM1232 - Introduction to Early Childhood Education  
FAM0101 - Psychomotor Education  
ENL1908 - Literature for Young Children | FAM1208 - Music for Children  
FAM1212 - Placement I  
FAM1220 - Seminar I  
FAM0102 - Placement II  
FAM1230 - Seminar II  
*FAM1201 - Curriculum Design for Young Children  
*FAM1207 - Assessment  
*FAM1213 - Introduction to Inclusive Education |
<table>
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<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
<th>Courses Excluded</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ECE 1050 - Health &amp; Nutrition</td>
<td>*FAM1223 - Programs for Young Children</td>
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<td>ECE 1024 - Child Growth and Development</td>
<td>*FAM1224 - Management of Early Learning Programs</td>
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<td>ECE 1115 - Intro Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>*FAM1225 - Programs for Kindergarten &amp; School Age Children</td>
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<td>ECE 1201 - Curriculum Planning I</td>
<td>*FAM1228 - Health &amp; Safety for Children</td>
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<td>ECE 1205 - Observation and Documentation</td>
<td>ECE 1130 - Field Seminar I</td>
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<td>PSY 1050 - Introduction To Psychology I</td>
<td>ECE 1230 - Field Seminar II</td>
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<td>ECE 1140 -The Creative Learning Environment</td>
<td>ECE 1239 - Field Practicum II</td>
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<td>ECE 1295 - Child Guidance</td>
<td>ECE 2330 - Field Seminar III</td>
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<td>ECE 2040 - Culturally Relevant Practice</td>
<td>ECE 2339 - Field Practicum III</td>
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<td>ECE 2301 - Curriculum Planning II</td>
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<td>ECE 2320 - Infant and Toddler Care</td>
<td>ECE 2439 - Field Practicum IV</td>
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<td>ECE 2395 - Family Liaison</td>
<td>ENG 1002 - College Communications</td>
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<td>ECE 1012 - Leadership in ECE</td>
<td>ENG 1242 - Speaking/Writing Comm. Services I</td>
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<td>ECE 1013 - Child Abuse</td>
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<td>4. Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology Data:</td>
<td>ECE 2315 - Curriculum Models In ECE</td>
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<td>4. Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology Data:</td>
<td>ECE 2450 - Inclusive Theory &amp; Practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology Data:</td>
<td>ECE 2455 - Program for the School Age Child</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology Data:</td>
<td>ECE 111 - Child Development I</td>
<td>AEC102 - Immersion Education 1</td>
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<td>4. Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology Data:</td>
<td>ECE 118 - Health, Safety &amp; Nutrition</td>
<td>AEC203 - Immersion Education 2</td>
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<td>AEC224 - Field Placement 1</td>
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<td>AEC325 - Field Placement 2</td>
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<td>4. Cambrian College of Applied Arts and Technology Data:</td>
<td>HUM 100 - Interpersonal Relations</td>
<td>ECE140 - Field Placement I</td>
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<p>| 5. Canadore College of Applied Arts and Technology | AEC111 - Child Development I | |
| 5. Canadore College of Applied Arts and Technology | AEC118 - Health, Safety &amp; Nutrition | |
| 5. Canadore College of Applied Arts and Technology | AEC120 - Introduction to Practice | |
| 5. Canadore College of Applied Arts and Technology | AEC145 - Guidance &amp; Self-Regulation | |
| 5. Canadore College of Applied Arts and Technology | HUM 100 - Interpersonal Relations | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
<th>Courses Excluded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Data:** diploma; course outlines; 22 courses; excluded 11 courses | SOC 100 - Foundations of Sociology  
ECE 125 - Observation  
ECE 110 - Language & Literacy  
ECE 156 - Supporting Infants & Toddlers | ECE223 - Field Placement II  
ECE265 - Field Placement III  
GED110 - Introduction to Personal Finance |
| **6. a)** First Nations Technical Institute  
(same program) | ECE 115 - Supporting Preschool Children  
ECE 135 - Child Development II  
HUM 200 - Group Dynamics  
ECE 227 - Working With Diverse Families | ECE 204 - Children's Science and Math  
ECE 222 - Creative Arts  
CMM 125 - College Communication |
| **7. b)** Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The WenJack Education Institute  
(overlapped courses) | ECE 255 - Outdoor Education  
ECE 235 - Supporting School Age Children  
ECE 245 - Diversity & Inclusion  
ECE 212 - Special Education | * d) AEC100 Orientation Retreat  
* d) AEC104 Introduction to ECE  
* d) AEC105 Mino-Maadiziwin  
* d) AEC107 Shki-Maajiging 1  
* d) AEC111 Introduction to Curriculum Planning (Infant & Toddler)  
* d) AEC116 Dibaadendiziwin  
* d) AEC208 Shki-Maajiging 2  
* d) AEC109 Niin-Anishinaabewoyaanh  
* d) AEC212 Curriculum Planning 2: Preschool  
* d) AEC215 - Dibaamjigewin  
* d) AEC218 - Infant Care  
* d) AEC219 - Ezhi-N’sastading 1: Personal and Family Communication  
* d) AEC306 The Creative Environment  
* d) AEC313 Curriculum Planning 3: Kindergarten  
* d) AEC317 Mno-Daapinidiwin  
* d) AEC320 Ezhi-N’sastading 2: Workplace & Community  
* d) AEC414 Holistic Models in ECE |
| **8. c)** Seven Generations Education Institute  
(same courses) | ECE 218 - Administration in Early Learning Setting  
ECE 226 - Advocacy in Early Childhood | * d) AEC116 Dibaadendiziwin  
* d) AEC208 Shki-Maajiging 2  
* d) AEC109 Niin-Anishinaabewoyaanh  
* d) AEC212 Curriculum Planning 2: Preschool  
* d) AEC215 - Dibaamjigewin  
* d) AEC218 - Infant Care  
* d) AEC219 - Ezhi-N’sastading 1: Personal and Family Communication  
* d) AEC306 The Creative Environment  
* d) AEC313 Curriculum Planning 3: Kindergarten  
* d) AEC317 Mno-Daapinidiwin  
* d) AEC320 Ezhi-N’sastading 2: Workplace & Community  
* d) AEC414 Holistic Models in ECE |
| **9. d)** Kenjgewin Teg  
(overlapping courses) | b) CLT 100 - Canada’s First Peoples  
b) ECE 250 - Children’s Technology  
d) GED100 - Environmental Citizenship  
d) Strategies | * d) AEC100 Orientation Retreat  
* d) AEC104 Introduction to ECE  
* d) AEC105 Mino-Maadiziwin  
* d) AEC107 Shki-Maajiging 1  
* d) AEC111 Introduction to Curriculum Planning (Infant & Toddler)  
* d) AEC116 Dibaadendiziwin  
* d) AEC208 Shki-Maajiging 2  
* d) AEC109 Niin-Anishinaabewoyaanh  
* d) AEC212 Curriculum Planning 2: Preschool  
* d) AEC215 - Dibaamjigewin  
* d) AEC218 - Infant Care  
* d) AEC219 - Ezhi-N’sastading 1: Personal and Family Communication  
* d) AEC306 The Creative Environment  
* d) AEC313 Curriculum Planning 3: Kindergarten  
* d) AEC317 Mno-Daapinidiwin  
* d) AEC320 Ezhi-N’sastading 2: Workplace & Community  
* d) AEC414 Holistic Models in ECE |
<table>
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<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
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<tr>
<td>10. Centennial College of Applied Arts and Technology</td>
<td>ECEP-101 - Keys to Success in ECE</td>
<td>COMM-160/COMM-161 - College Communications 1</td>
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<td>ECEP-102 - The Learning Environment: The Third Teacher</td>
<td>COMM-170/COMM-171 - College Communications 2</td>
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<td>ECEP-103 - The Healthy Development of the Whole Child</td>
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<td>ECEP-104 - An Introduction to Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>ECEP-238 - Seminar 2</td>
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<td>ECEP-130 - Observing Infant and Toddler Development</td>
<td>ECEP-135 - Field Placement 1: Infant and Toddler</td>
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<td>ECEP-131 - Child Centred Curriculum</td>
<td>ECEP-245 - Preschool, School-Age, Specialized Field Practicum</td>
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<td>ECEP-132 - Guidance 1</td>
<td>ECEP-234 - Preschool/School-Age Curriculum: The Project Approach</td>
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<td>ECEP-235 - Preschool Field Practicum</td>
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<td>ECEP-231 - Observing Preschool &amp; School-Age Development</td>
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<td>ECEP-232 - Understanding and Communicating with Families</td>
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<td>ECEP-239 - Preschool Curriculum: Supporting Children's Inquiry</td>
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<td>GNED-500 - Global Citizenship: From Social Analysis to Social Action</td>
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<td>ECEP-233 - Inclusion of Children with Special Needs</td>
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<td>ECEP-236 - Advocacy and The Emerging Professional</td>
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<td>ECEP-237 - Child Abuse</td>
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<tr>
<th>11. Collège Boréal</th>
<th>ESE1002 Children's Services Technology</th>
<th>FRA1005 English I</th>
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<td>Data*: diploma; course descriptions; analyzed 17 courses; excluded 9 courses.</td>
<td>ESE1003 The child's family and social environment</td>
<td>ENG1009 Français in the workplace</td>
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<td>ESE1004 Safety, Health and Nutrition in SEA</td>
<td>STG1116 Stage I - Orientation and initiation in SEA</td>
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<td>ESE1005 Child Development I</td>
<td>ESE1028 Play Experiences: Infants / Toddlers</td>
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<td>ESE1006 Play-based pedagogy</td>
<td>ESE1029 Play Experiences: Preschool</td>
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<td>ESE1022 Learning Environments in Ontario</td>
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### Program Name and Data Collected

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<td>ESE1009 Child Development II</td>
<td>STG1105 Stage II-Experimentation in SEA</td>
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<td>ESE1026 Observation tools and techniques in SEA</td>
<td>ESE1024 Play Experiences: School Age</td>
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<td>SOC1010 Interpersonal communication</td>
<td>STG1106 Internship III-Integration in SEA</td>
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<td>ESE1012 Psychomotor development of the child</td>
<td>ESE1030 Synthesis seminar and internship preparation</td>
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<td>ESE1013 Methods of intervention</td>
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<td>ESE1015 Children's Services Management</td>
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<td>ESE1016 Inclusion of children with special needs</td>
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<td>ESE1027 Child protection</td>
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<td>ESE1031 Professional growth</td>
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### Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning

#### Data: degree; course descriptions; analyzed 20 courses; excluded 15 courses

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<td>ECE71000 – Human Growth &amp; Development: The Early Years</td>
<td>FPLT71025 – Field Placement I</td>
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<td>ECE71010 Designing Responsive Curriculum in the Early Years</td>
<td>OHS71320 – Safety in the Workplace</td>
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<td>SOCS71000 – Child, Family, and Society</td>
<td>FPLT71045 – Field Placement II</td>
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<td>SOCS71010 – Diversity &amp; Social Inclusion in Program Development</td>
<td>FPLT72065 – Field Placement III</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECE72050 – Health &amp; Wellness in Early Learning Community Programs</td>
<td>FPLT72085 – Field Placement IV</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDUC72000 Curriculum Studies and Program Design</td>
<td>CEPR71050 – Co-op and Career Preparation</td>
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<td>EDUC72010 – History &amp; Philosophy in Learning &amp; Education</td>
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<td>EDUC72070 – Integrative Learning &amp; Curriculum Design</td>
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<td>EDUC72020 – Contemporary Perspective in Early Learning Community Practice</td>
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<td>PHIL72900 – Principles of Ethical Reasoning</td>
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<td>SOCS73030 – Examining Social Problems in Canadian Society</td>
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<td>SOCS71020 – Child, Family and Community Literacy</td>
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<td>ECE73010 – Designing and Evaluating Responsive Programs</td>
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<td>SOCS73000 – Social Action and Program Leadership</td>
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<td>EDUC74030 – Reconceptualizing Educational Theory in Practice</td>
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<td>SOCS74000 – Population and Developmental Health</td>
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<td>13. Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning</td>
<td>ECE1015 – Curriculum in Early Learning</td>
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<td>ECE1375 – Introduction to Early Learning</td>
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<td>ECE2190 – Supporting Children Through Families &amp; Community</td>
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<td>14. Confederation College of Applied Arts and Technology</td>
<td>ED 117 – Theoretical Approaches in ECE</td>
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<td>ED 142 – Effective Interpersonal Communications</td>
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<td>SY 066 – Sociology of Community: The Indigenous Context</td>
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<td>ED 330 – Building FDK Partnerships</td>
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<td>ED 337 – Pedagogical Approaches in ECE 2</td>
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<td>ED 431 – Reflective Educator in Professional Practice</td>
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<td>15. Durham College of Applied Arts and Technology</td>
<td>Child Development 1 (CHLD 1100)</td>
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<td>Curriculum Development 1 (EDUC 1105)</td>
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<td>Guidance Of the Young Child (CHLD 1200)</td>
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<td>Observing The Young Child (CHLD 1201)</td>
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<td>Child Development 2 (CHLD 1202)</td>
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<td>Curriculum Development 3 (EDUC 2100)</td>
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<td>Partnerships With Parents (EDUC 2200)</td>
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<td>Prevention and Identification of Child Abuse (LAWW 2203)</td>
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<td>Philosophies Of Early Childhood Education (PHIL 2200)</td>
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<td>16. Fanshawe College of Applied Arts and Technology</td>
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<td>ECED-7005 – Observing, Recording &amp; Assessing</td>
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<td>ECED-7024 – Principles to Practice in Early Years</td>
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<td>HLTH-7002 Wellness &amp; the Young Child</td>
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<td>ECED-7009 Human Development to Late Adult</td>
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<td>PHIL-7011 Philosophy &amp; History of ECE</td>
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<td>SOCI-7016 Family Studies-Research &amp; Application</td>
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<td>ECED-7002 Intro to Early Childhood Leadership</td>
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<td>MGMT-7001 Organizational Structure</td>
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<td>ECED-7001 Evidence-Based Practice in Early Childhood</td>
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<td>ECED-7014 Quality Assurance in ECE</td>
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<td>MGMT-7002 Leadership in Learning Organizations</td>
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<td>MGMT-7003 Leadership in a Tech World</td>
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<td>ECED-7017 Healthy Community-Advocacy &amp; Leadership</td>
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| **17. Fanshawe College of Applied Arts and Technology** | ECED1084 – Foundations of ECE  
ECED1003 – Emotional Development & Early Relations  
ECED1074 – Child Development: Intro  
PSYC1101 – Interpersonal Development  
ECED1075 – Child Development 0-3 Years  
ECED1076 – Curriculum and Pedagogy 0-3 Years  
ECED1005 – Health Safety & Nutrition in ECE  
ECED3022 – Partnerships with Families  
ECED3003 – Educational Perspectives  
ECED3037 – Inclusive Practice  
ECED3038 – Child Development 3-6 Years  
ECED3042 – Curriculum and Pedagogy 3-6 Years  
ECED1053 – Promoting Prosocial Behaviour  
ECED3039 – Child Development 6-12 Years  
ECED3041 – Understanding Child Abuse & Neglect  
ECED3040 – Professionalism, Ethics & Advocacy  
ECED3044 – Best Practices: Reflective Practitioner  
SOCI3003 – Canadian Families Change & Diversity | WRIT1094 – Reason & Writing 1 for Community Studies  
FLDP1021 – Field Orientation  
COMM3082 – Communications for Community Studies  
FLDP1022 – Field Practicum 0-3 Years  
FLDP1024 – Field Seminar 0-3 Years  
FLDP3023 – Field Practicum 3-6 Years  
FLDP3027 – Field Seminar 3-6 Years  
FLDP3024 – Field Practicum 0-12 Years |
| **18. Fleming College (of Applied Arts and Technology)** | EDUC 131 Child Development I  
SOCI 249 Foundations in College Success for ECE  
EDUC 130 Pedagogical Foundations to Learning  
GNED 49 Introduction to Indigenous Studies  
SOCI 36 Introduction to Psychology  
EDUC 135 Children's Health and the Environment  
EDUC 133 Guiding Behaviours of Young Children  
EDUC 132 Inquiry and Play  
EDUC 134 Observing Children’s Competencies  
EDUC 140 Building Inclusive Environments | FLPL 123 Early Learning Practicum I  
FLPL 249 Early Learning Practicum II  
FLPL 251 Early Learning Practicum III  
FLPL 246 Strategies for Practicum Success  
FLPL 248 Strategies for Practicum Success II  
FLPL 250 Strategies for Practicum Success III  
COMM 201 Communications I |
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<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
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| 19. George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology | EDUC 136 Child Development II  
EDUC 137 Creating Early Learning Sustainable Environments  
EDUC 138 Interactive Learning with Children and Families  
EDUC 139 Partnering with Families  
EDUC 141 Administration of Preschool | COMM 202 Communications II  
ECE1181 - Integrated Seminar I  
ECE1024 - Field Practice I  
COMM1007 - College English  
ECE1026 - Field Practice II  
ECE1182 - Integrated Seminar II  
ECE1000 - Professional Development Workshop 1  
ECE2014 - Field Practice III  
ECE1080 - Professional Development Workshop 2  
ECE1183 - Integrated Seminar III  
ECE2017 - Field Practice IV  
ECE2057 - Current Issues  
ECE1184 - Integrated Seminar IV |
| Data: diploma; course descriptions; analyzed 14 courses; excluded 12 courses | ECE1075 - Foundations of ECE  
PSY1075 - Infant and Child Development II  
ECE1069 - Health, Safety and Nutrition  
ECE1070 - Interpersonal Communication  
ECE2045 - Applied Curriculum  
GSSC1064 - Introduction to Sociology  
ECE1076 - Observation, Planning and Evaluation  
ECE2045 - Applied Curriculum  
ECE2048 - Policy, Advocacy and Legislation  
ECE2049 - Inclusion in Early Childhood  
ECE2050 - Working with Families  
GHUM1041 - History of Social Policy in Canada  
ECE2053 - Curriculum Theory  
ECE2056 - Creative Curriculum | |
| 20. Georgian College of Applied Arts and Technology | ECED 1012 Child Development (conception to 6 years)  
ECED 1013 Experiences in Language Arts  
ECED 1018 Foundations in ECE  
ECED 1029 Observation and Documentation  
ECED 1033 Supporting Play Experiences  
ECED 1034 School Age Development & Programming  
ECED 2014 Partnerships with Families  
ECED 1014 Nurturing Infants and Toddlers  
ECED 1025 Children's Health and Wellness  
ECED 2011 Social/Emotional Health and Behaviour  
ECED 2021 Best Practices in Early Intervention | ECED 1035 Personal and Professional Preparation for Field Placement  
ECED 1036 Field Placement: Early Learning 1 - Childcare  
ECED 1031 Field Placement Seminar 1  
ECED 2023 Field Placement Seminar 2  
ECED 2030 Field Placement: Early Learning 2 Kindergarten and Unique  
ECED 1021 Math, Science and Creative Art  
ECED 1030 Music and Movement |
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<td>ENTR 1004 Social Entrepreneurship</td>
<td>ECED 2012 Administration and Governance</td>
<td>WRIT 100: College Reading and Writing Skills</td>
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<td>ECED 2025 Ethics and Advocacy for the Field of ECE</td>
<td>ECED 2027 Adapting Play and Learning Strategies</td>
<td>WRIT 200: Workplace Writing Skills</td>
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<td>ECED 2031 Curriculum and Practice</td>
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<td>GNED 101: An Introduction to Arts and Sciences</td>
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**21. Humber College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning**

**Data:** diploma; course descriptions; analyzed 17 courses; excluded 6 courses

- ECE 111: Responsive Relationships in Inclusive Environments
- ECE 113: Children, Play and Creativity
- ECE 114: Child Development: Prenatal to 2 1/2 Years
- ECE 115: Promoting Health and Safety
- ECE 120: Introduction to the ECE Profession
- ECE 125: Understanding Children through Observation
- ECE 122: Social Justice: Nurturing Communities
- ECE 123: Curriculum Design
- ECE 124: Child Development: 2 to 6 Years
- ECE 232: Creating Inclusive Environments
- ECE 233: Family Perspectives
- ECE 234: Two-Eyed Land-based Play and Co-Learning
- ECE 235: Transforming Practice Through Observation
- ECE 242: Community Collaborations
- ECE 243: Advocacy & Leadership in ECE
- ECE 244: Child Development: 6 to 12 Years
- ECE 245: The Reflective Professional

- WRIT 100: College Reading and Writing Skills
- WRIT 200: Workplace Writing Skills
- GNED 101: An Introduction to Arts and Sciences
- ECE 130: Field Practicum 1
- ECE 230: Field Practicum 2
- ECE 250: Field Practicum 3

**22. La Cité Collégiale**

**Data**: diploma; course descriptions; analyzed 10 courses; excluded 6 courses.

- 026630 SSC – Educator’s Profession in Ontario
- 026632 SSC - Continuum of child development
- 026657 SSC - Holistic needs and well-being
- 026635 SSC - Safe environment
- 026640 SSC - Children's rights
- 026641 SSC - Learning experiences in kindergarten & school age
- 026654 SSC - Extracurricular learning experiences
- 026643 SSC - Early childhood learning experience

- 029765 TSG - Learning integration internship
- 029766 TSG - Learning consolidation internship
- *029763 SSC - Personal development and interpersonal communication

*029763 SSC - Personal development and interpersonal communication
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<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
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| **23. Lambton College of Applied Arts and Technology** | ECE-1102: Foundations of ECE  
ECE-1174: Health, Safety and Nutrition  
ECE-1184: Child Development: The Early Years  
ECE-1153: Observation and Documentation  
ECE-1224: Play Based Learning II: Storytelling & Literacy  
ECE-2473: Children with Diverse Abilities  
ECE-2483: Working with Families  
ECE-1243: Infant and Toddler Curriculum  
ECE-2344: School-Age Curriculum  
ECE-2323: Play Based Learning III: S.T.E.M.  
ECE-2363: Pedagogy and Curriculum Models  
ECE-2493: Diversity  
ECE-2463: Professionalism and Group Dynamics | ECE-1149: Field and Seminar I  
COM-1013: Critical Thinking and Writing  
ECE-1259: Field and Seminar II  
ECE-2359: Field and Seminar III  
ECE-2459: Field and Seminar IV  
ECE-1164: Play Based Learning I: Music, Art, Drama & Movement  
ECE-2413: Current Practices (capstone) |  

| **24. Loyalist College of Applied Arts and Technology** | CADW1005 Creative Play  
CADW1007 Introduction to Child Development  
ECEP1006 Introduction to Early Childhood Education  
ECEP1010 Observing Early Development  
ECEP1013 Health, Safety & Nutrition  
CADW1006 Infant Toddler Development  
ECEP1008 Infant Toddler Learning Environment  
ECEP1012 Responsive Relationships 1  
ECEP2008 Child, Family & Community  
CADW2001 Preschool Development  
ECEP2002 Preschool Learning Environment  
ECEP2009 Responsive Relationships 2  
CADW2002 Children with Exceptionalities | COMM1048 College Writing Skills  
WKPL1032 Practicum 1  
PROF1010 Practicum Seminar 1  
WKPL2049 Practicum 2  
PROF2017 Practicum Seminar 2  
WKPL2072 Practicum 3 |
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| **25. Mohawk College of Applied Arts and Technology** | ECEP2007 Evidence-Informed Practices  
ECEP2010 Policy, Advocacy & Professionalism  
CADW2003 School-Age Development  
ECEP2005 School-Age Learning Environment | EDUC10093 - Field Placement Prep  
WORK10156 - ECE Practicum 1  
WORK10157 - ECE Practicum 2  
WORK10158 - ECE Practicum 3 |
| **Data:** diploma; course descriptions; analyzed 15 courses; excluded 4 courses | EDUC10074 - Responsive Care for Infants & Toddlers  
EDUCEC115 - Learning Environment 1  
EDUCEC121 - Child Development & Behaviour 1  
EDUCEC128 - Parent Teacher Child Relationship 1  
HLTHEC101 - Health, Safety & Nutrition  
EDUCEC215 - Learning Environment 2  
EDUCEC221 - Child Development & Behaviour 2  
EDUCEC228 - Parent Teacher Child Relationship 2  
EDUC10113 - Advocacy, Ethics and Policy  
EDUC10118 - Curriculum Theory and Approaches  
EDUCEC301 - Inclusion in the ECE Classroom  
EDUCEC420 - Parents As Partners  
EDUC10114 - Supervising for Leadership and Quality  
EDUC10119 - Philosophy and Curriculum Design  
EDUCEC129 - Family Dynamics | |
| **26. Mothercraft College of Early Childhood Education** | 1. Anti-Bias Approach  
2. Prevention Of Child Abuse  
3. Child Development I  
4. Child Development II  
5. Child Development III  
6. Children With Special Needs  
7. Curriculum & Program Planning I  
8. Curriculum & Program Planning II  
9. Curriculum & Program Planning III  
10. Curriculum & Program Planning IV  
11. Ethics And Professionalism | 21. Interpersonal Communication  
22. CPP IV: Art  
23. CPP IV: Drama  
24. CPP IV: Music  
25. Writing Skills  
26. Applied Computer Skills  
27. Enrichment Seminars and Independent Studies |
<p>| <strong>Data:</strong> degree; course descriptions; analyzed 20 courses; excluded 7 courses | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
<th>Courses Excluded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Guidance Of the Young Child</td>
<td>EDUC1130 Working with Infants and Toddlers</td>
<td>COMM1140 Essential Communication Skills for Community Services</td>
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<td>13. Health Care</td>
<td>EDUC1131 Arts and Science I</td>
<td>PRAC1101 Field Placement I - Early Childhood Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Introduction To Sociology</td>
<td>HDEV1123 Child Development</td>
<td>PRAC1306 Field Placement III - ECE</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Introductory Psychology</td>
<td>EDUC1216 Diversity in the Early Years</td>
<td>PRAC1407 Field Placement IV - ECE</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Law And Administration</td>
<td>EDUC1233 Foundations of ECE - II</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Observation And Assessment</td>
<td>EDUC1326 Stress and Resiliency</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Nutrition</td>
<td>PSYC1100 Introductory Psychology</td>
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<tr>
<td>20. Working With Families</td>
<td>EDUC1330 Arts and Science II</td>
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<td>27. Niagara College of Applied Arts and Technology</td>
<td>EDUC1232 Working with School-Age Children</td>
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<td>Data: diploma; course outline; analyzed 16 courses; excluded 5 courses</td>
<td>SOCL1328 Child Abuse and Family Violence</td>
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<td>EDUC1327 Entry to Practice</td>
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<td>EDUC1332 Program Administration</td>
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<td>EDUC1433 Working with Families</td>
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<td>HDEV1434 Child Health and Well-Being</td>
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<td>28. a) Six Nations Polytechnic (same program)</td>
<td>EC1073 Outdoor and Nature Play</td>
<td>CM1913 Communications I – Model B</td>
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<td>EC1083 Child Development</td>
<td>EC4003 ECE Fieldwork Placement</td>
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<td>EC1093 Intro to Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>EC4061 ECE Fieldwork Seminar</td>
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<tr>
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<td>EC1103 Observation/documentation</td>
<td>CM2913 Communications II- Model B</td>
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<td>EC2023 Pre-school Environment</td>
<td>EC2103 Preparation for Placement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Name and Data Collected</td>
<td>Courses Analyzed</td>
<td>Courses Excluded</td>
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| **Data: diploma; course descriptions; analyzed 18 courses; excluded 5 courses** | EC4033 Infant Toddler Environment  
EC1053 School Age Environment  
EC1063 Kindergarten Curriculum  
EC2003 Creative Teaching Strategies  
EC2013 Creative arts Workshop  
EC2073 Child Guidance  
AA2063 Autism Spectrum Disorders  
SW3113 Working with Diverse Families  
DS4063 Health and Nutrition  
EC2033 Working with Diversity  
EC2083 Children with Exceptionalities  
EC4016 Child Care Administration  
SW3133 Addiction and Mental Health |                                                                                  |
| **30. Sault College of Applied Arts and Technology** | ED 124 - Healthy Foundations in ECE  
ED 130 - Teaching Methods I in ECE  
ED 134 - Creative Expression  
ED 135 - Introduction to Early Childhood Education  
PSY128 - Intro to the Psychology of Early Learning  
ED 141 - Introduction to Human Relations  
ED 131 - Teaching Methods II in ECE  
ED 132 - Language and Literacy  
HSC104 - Child and Adolescent Development Part I  
ED 223 - Teaching Methods III  
ED 270 - School Age Child Care and Programming  
ED 274 - Children with Special Needs in Inclusive Settings  
GEN100 - Global Citizenship  
ED 213 - Infant Toddler Care  
ED 247 - Teaching Methods IV in ECE  
ED 285 - Building Partnerships in Early Childhood Settings  
ED 288 - Quality Assurance in Early Childhood Settings | CMM110 - College Communication Skills  
ED 136 - Field Practice II  
ED 137 - Integrated Seminar II  
ED 286 - Field Practice III  
ED 287 - Integrated Seminar III  
ED 289 - Field Practice IV  
ED 290 - Integrated Seminar IV  
CMM225 - Human Services Communication |
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<tr>
<td>31. Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology</td>
<td>ECE110 - Visual Arts in Preschool Curriculum</td>
<td>COM101 - Communicating Across Contexts</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ECE112 - Healthy Safe Environments</td>
<td>ECE116 - Field Placement: 2-6 Years</td>
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<td>ECE113 - Curriculum and Applied Theory: 2-6 Years</td>
<td>ECE216 - Field Placement: 6-12 Years</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ECE114 - Observation and Development: 2-6 Years</td>
<td>ECE316 - Field Placement: Birth - 3 Years</td>
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<td>ECE209 - Understanding Self and Others</td>
<td>ECE416 - Field Placement: inclusive Practices</td>
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<tr>
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<td>ECE213 - Curriculum and Applied Theory: 6-12 Years</td>
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<td>ECE214 - Child Development and Observation: 6-12 Years</td>
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<td>ECE215 - Interpersonal Relationships</td>
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<td>PSY100X - Introduction to Psychology</td>
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<td>ECE310 - Music and Movement in the Early Years</td>
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<td>ECE312 - Understanding &amp; Responding to Child Abuse</td>
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<td>ECE313 - Curriculum &amp; Applied Theory: Birth-3 Years</td>
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<td>ECE314 - Observations &amp; Development: Birth-3 Years</td>
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<td>ECE315 - Building Relationships: Families with Young Children</td>
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<td>ECE409 - History and Models of Early Childhood Education</td>
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<td>ECE412 - Legislation, Advocacy and Social Policy</td>
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<td>ECE413 - Curriculum &amp; Applied Theory: Inclusive Community Practices</td>
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<td>ECE414 - Children with Exceptionalities</td>
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<td>ECE415 - Professional Practice</td>
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<td>32. Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology</td>
<td>BCD102- Healthy Environments: Health, Safety &amp; Nutrition</td>
<td>ENG106 - Writing Strategies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>BCD104 - Human Development &amp; Observation: Conception to Toddlerhood</td>
<td>BCD206 - Art and Science to Explore the Natural World</td>
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<td>BCD106 - Foundations of Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>BCD200 - Integrative Seminar: Preschool Placement</td>
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<td>BCD108 - Professional Practice in a Diverse Culture</td>
<td>BCD400 Integrative Seminar: Kindergarten to Grade 3 Placement</td>
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<td>BCD204 - Human Development &amp; Observation: Preschool to School Age</td>
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<td>BCD208 - Ethics, Policy and Legislation</td>
<td>BCD406 - Mathematics and Digital Literacy</td>
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<td>BCD304 - Children with Diverse Abilities</td>
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<td>BCD306 - Physical Literacy and Music</td>
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<td>Program Name and Data Collected</td>
<td>Courses Analyzed</td>
<td>Courses Excluded</td>
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<td>BCD308 - Developing &amp; Sustaining Partnership with Families</td>
<td>BCD881 - Childhood Development Work Term</td>
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<td>BCD404 - Attachment Across the Lifespan</td>
<td>BCD500 - Integrative Seminar: Community Placement</td>
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<td>BCD408 - Child &amp; Family Relationships Theoretical Foundations</td>
<td>WTP200 - Work Term Preparation</td>
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<td>BCD410 - Critical Social Theories</td>
<td>BCD606 - Introduction to Research Methods</td>
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<td>BCD502 - Mental Health Intervention Planning for Children</td>
<td>BCD706 - Applied Research Proposal</td>
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<td>BCD504 - Children's Emotional Well-Being</td>
<td>BCD806 - Applied Research Paper</td>
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<td>BCD508 - Interprofessional Collaboration</td>
<td>BCD808 - Family Focused Practice: Early Intervention</td>
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<td>LSO510 - Indigenous Awareness: Towards Truth &amp; Reconciliation</td>
<td>BCD300 - Integrative Seminar: Infant and Toddler Placement</td>
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<td>BCD604 - Brain Research and Cognitive Development</td>
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<td>BCD608 - Care Collaboration with Families</td>
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<td>BCD610 - Language Development</td>
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<td>BCD702 - Effects of Stress, Trauma &amp; Violence on Children's Learning</td>
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<td>BCD708 - Methods of Screening and Assessment</td>
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<td>BCD710 - Childhood in Global Contexts</td>
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<td>BCD802 - Transformative Learning in Communities</td>
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<td><strong>33. Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning</strong></td>
<td><strong>EDUC16800 Foundations of the Early Learning Environment</strong></td>
<td><strong>COMM19999 Essential Communication Skills</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>EDUC11582 Foundations of Play-based Curriculum</strong></td>
<td><strong>FLPL15892 Field Practice &amp; Seminar 1</strong></td>
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<td><strong>COMM16117 Interpersonal Communication &amp; the ECE</strong></td>
<td><strong>FLPL20799 Field Practice &amp; Seminar 2</strong></td>
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<td><strong>EDUC11044 Child’s Growth and Development</strong></td>
<td><strong>FLPL29207 Field Practice &amp; Seminar 3</strong></td>
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<td><strong>EDUC12375 Observation in Early Childhood Education</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SOCI12029G Understanding Families</strong></td>
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<td><strong>EDUC14648 Intentional Strategies in the Early Learning Environment</strong></td>
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<td><strong>EDUC10065 Building on Play-based Curriculum</strong></td>
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<td><strong>EDUC23329 Responsive Caregiving for Infants &amp; Toddlers</strong></td>
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<td><strong>EDUC15323 The Science of Child Development</strong></td>
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<td><strong>EDUC13764 Nutrition, Health and Safety</strong></td>
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<td><strong>EDUC20705 Working with School Age Children</strong></td>
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Data: diploma; course outlines; analyzed 17 courses; excluded 4 courses
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<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
<th>Courses Excluded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDUC25283 Reflective Practice &amp; Responsive Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDUC23109 Inclusion in Early Learning Settings</td>
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<td>EDUC25436 Curriculum Theory and Approaches in ECEC</td>
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<td>EDUC22629 Professional Ethics and Advocacy in ECEC</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDUC25372 The Competent Child</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>34. Sheridan College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning</strong></td>
<td>EDUC38263 - Quality Assurance for Early Childhood Programs</td>
<td>SOCS10123 - Applied Research Methods in Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data: degree; course outline; analyzed 8 courses; excluded 6 courses</td>
<td>MGMT27900 - Global Leadership &amp; Leaders</td>
<td>COWT10023 - Cooperative Education Internship Forum</td>
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<td>PSYC34579 - Human Development: Current Topics</td>
<td>INFO22158 - Leadership in a Technological World (Hybrid)</td>
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<td>EDUC49014 - Pedagogical Leadership in Early Learning &amp; Care</td>
<td>SOCS30065 - Research &amp; Project Solutions in Early Childhood Studies</td>
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<td>SOCS28448 - Advocacy &amp; Leadership: Building Healthy Communities</td>
<td>FLPL37545 - Field 3 &amp; Seminar Solutions for Early Childhood Leadership</td>
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<td>MGMT39207 - Introduction to Projects as an Early Childhood Leader</td>
<td>EDUC44579 - Leadership for Quality (Independent Studies)</td>
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<td>EDUC30199 - Early Childhood Program and System Delivery</td>
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<td>SOCS37721 - Social Policy in Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Note:</strong> program overlaps courses from diploma program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Name and Data Collected</td>
<td>Courses Analyzed</td>
<td>Courses Excluded</td>
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<tr>
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</table>
| **Data:** analyzed 14 courses; excluded 6 courses | ECE422 - Issues and Leadership  
ECE205G - Anti-Oppression in Canadian Society  
1. a) Child Growth and Development I  
2. a) Methods I: Role of the Teacher  
3. a) Introduction to Native Studies  
4. a) Introduction to Early Childhood  
5. a) Child Growth and Development II  
6. a) Methods II: Curriculum Planning  
7. a) Positive Relationships  
8. a) Methods III: Advanced Applications  
9. a) Exceptional Child  
10. a) Health, Nutrition & Safety  
11. a) Basic Psychology  
12. a) Methods IV: Program Management  
13. a) Day Care in the Community  
14. a) Community Development | 16. a) Fundamentals of Academic Writing  
17. a) Communications  
18. a) Field Work I  
19. a) Field Work II  
20. a) Field Work III |
| **37. St. Lawrence College of Applied Arts and Technology** | CHIL1004 – Child Development 1  
EARL4 – Introduction to ECE  
EARL6 – Arts-Based Curriculum  
EARL40 – Philosophies of Curriculum  
HEAL200 – Health and Safety  
CHIL1005 – Child Development 2  
EARL3 – The Learning Environment  
EARL36 – Guiding Children’s Behaviour 1  
EARL30 – Planning and Learning with Young Children  
EARL61 – Observation & Documentation Writing Workshop  
BEHA1026 – Childhood Exceptionalities  
EARL38 - Guiding Children’s Behaviour 2  
EARL24 – Planning and Learning with Kinder & School Age | COMM 110 – Communications for College  
CASE 104 – ECE Teaching Practice 1  
CASE 2 – ECE Teaching Practice 2  
CASE 12 – ECE Teaching Practice 2  
COMM 49 – Communication Skills 3 |
<table>
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<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
<th>Courses Excluded</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EARL5</strong> – Partnerships with Parents and Families</td>
<td>ANTH*1150 - Introduction to Anthropology</td>
<td>STAT*2080 - Introductory Applied Statistics I</td>
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<td><strong>EARL46</strong> – ECE Program Administration</td>
<td>SOC*1100 - Sociology</td>
<td>STAT*2090 - Introductory Applied Statistics II</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EARL8</strong> – Arts-Based Curriculum 2</td>
<td>FRHD*1010 - Human Development</td>
<td>FRHD*3070 - Research Methods: Family Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>38. University of Guelph</strong></td>
<td>NUTR*1010 - Introduction to Nutrition</td>
<td>FRHD*3200 - Practicum I: Child 1</td>
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<td>Data: degree; course outlines; analyzed 19 courses; excluded 7 courses</td>
<td>PSYC*1000 - Introduction to Psychology</td>
<td>FRHD*4330 Practicum II: Child</td>
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<td>FRHD*1020 - Couple and Family Relationships</td>
<td>FRHD*4350 Practicum III: Child</td>
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<td>FRHD*2260 - Infant Development</td>
<td>FRHD*4210 - Senior Seminar in Early Education and Care</td>
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<td>MBG*1000 - Genetics and Society</td>
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<td>FRHD*2110 - Children and Youth with Exceptionalities</td>
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<td>FRHD*2270 - Development in Early and Middle Childhood</td>
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<td>FRHD*2040 - Principles of Program Design for Children</td>
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<td>FRHD*2100 - Development of Human Sexuality</td>
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<td>POLS*2230 - Public Policy</td>
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<td>FRHD*3180 - Observation and Assessment Laboratory</td>
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<td>FRHD*3400 - Communication and Counselling Skills</td>
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<td>FRHD*3040 - Parenting and Intergenerational Relationships</td>
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<td>FRHD*3190 - Administration of Programs for Children</td>
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<td>FRHD*4310 - Professional Issues</td>
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<td>FRHD*4320 - Social Policies for Children and Families</td>
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<td><strong>39. Toronto Metropolitan University</strong>¹⁰</td>
<td>CLD 101 - Human Development I</td>
<td>CLD 161 - Field Education I</td>
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<td>CLD 102 - Observation/ELC</td>
<td>CLD 262 - Field Education II</td>
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<td>CLD 111 - Curriculum I: Environments</td>
<td>CLD 363 - Field Education III</td>
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¹⁰ Toronto Metropolitan University was approved until 2026 with a condition that they “shall, no later than March 31, 2023, provide evidence satisfactory to the College that appropriate and sufficient content relating to child abuse prevention and educator reporting obligations has been embedded throughout the Bachelor of Early Childhood Studies program.” As of April 1, 2023, this condition is no longer listed on the CECE website (see https://www.college-ece.ca/applicants/education-programs/).
<table>
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<th>Program Name and Data Collected</th>
<th>Courses Analyzed</th>
<th>Courses Excluded</th>
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<td>PSY 102 - Introduction to Psychology I</td>
<td>CLD 215 - Creative Arts I</td>
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<td>CLD 103 - Human Development II</td>
<td>CLD 315 - Creative Arts II</td>
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<td>CLD 212 - Curriculum II: Program Planning</td>
<td>CLD 317 - Concept Development in Math</td>
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<td>SOC 104 - Understanding Society</td>
<td>CLD 464 - Senior Internship</td>
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<td>CLD 231 - Families in Canadian Context I</td>
<td>CLD 322 - Research I: Methods</td>
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<td>CLD 241 - Children with Disabilities</td>
<td>CLD 323 - Research II: Applications</td>
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<td>CLD 204 - Physical Development</td>
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<td>CLD 205 - Children's Social/Emotional Well-Being</td>
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<td>CLD 213 - History and Philosophy of ECE</td>
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<td>CLD 332 - Families in Canadian Context II</td>
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<td>CLD 342 - Assessment for Programming</td>
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<td>CLD 445 - Inclusion and Consultation</td>
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<td>CLD 454 - Policy in ECEC</td>
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Appendix B: Research Ethics Board Certification of Approval

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARDS
Certification of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Human Participants

ECE’s Need to Know?

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Appendix C: Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS-2) Certification
### Appendix D: Interview Questions

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<tr>
<th>Source * adapted</th>
<th>Questions and Probing Questions</th>
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| Cacciatore et al., 2020a; Marques et al., 2017 * | 1. What does “developmentally appropriate” mean for sexuality education with young children?  
  a. What kind of sexual behaviour/children expressing themselves do you think is appropriate for a child?  
  b. What kind of behaviour should be intervened with? |
| Cacciatore et al., 2020a; Marques et al., 2017 * | 2. What sexuality topics are developmentally appropriate for young children to be learning about?  
  a. What is NOT developmentally appropriate for children?  
  b. How are these topics identified? |
| Cacciatore et al., 2020a * | 3. What topics related to the development of sexuality in early childhood are needed in ECE training?  
  a. What is included within that topic?  
  b. What topics are not necessary for this work? |
| Cacciatore et al., 2020a * | 4. How do you implement sexuality education for young children?  
  a. What training is offered on how to do this (if any)?  
  b. What resources/materials exist here? |
| Cacciatore et al., 2020a; Marques et al., 2017 * | 5. What barriers do you face when implementing sexuality education for young children?  
  a. Where is this barrier coming from?  
  b. What training is offered on how navigate this (if any)? |
| Marques et al., 2017 * | 6. How do you incorporate principles of social justice in your work?  
  • Principles of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion  
  • Principles of decolonization\(^{11}\)  
  • Intentionally addressing developmental diversity  
  a. How is this done?  
  b. Who leads this work? |

\(^{11}\)“Decolonization is the act of undoing or removing colonial ideals and Indigenization goes one step further and calls for the inclusion of Indigenous traditions and ways of knowing. Decolonizing sexual health education requires an intersectional lens where educators are able to consider students’ varying experiences and needs. Indigenization calls on educators to include Indigenous people, ideas, and culture in their lessons. Culturally considerate sex ed can create space for students with different experiences to discuss and strengthen their sexual identity.” (Saskatoon Sexual Health, 2021)