Pre-service Early Childhood Educators’ career aspirations: Examining decisions to enter the field and professional identity formation

by

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ABSTRACT

PRE-SERVICE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS’ CAREER ASPIRATIONS: EXAMINING DECISIONS TO ENTER THE FIELD AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION

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This study examined intentions to enter the field of Early Childhood Education and Care of pre-service Early Childhood Education students enrolled in degree programs. Participants were recruited from nine institutions across Ontario. Two hundred and sixty-nine participants completed an online survey. The use of a mixed methods study design made it possible for the data to be analyzed using: independent sample t-tests and thematic analysis. Independent samples t-tests indicated that there were statistically significant differences between students who intend to enter the field and those who do not. Those not intending to enter the field reported a significantly higher level of barriers related to pay and working conditions. The thematic analysis then provided insights into these differences explaining the career choices and identities that these students were aligning with, such as teacher and social worker. Participants identified a number of barriers to entering the field such as wages, working conditions, and recognition; along with incentives such as opportunity for leadership and children’s well-being. The thesis concludes with recommendations for policy makers and post-secondary institutions who are attempting to attract a highly qualified workforce to the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.
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Introduction

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is a controversial topic in Ontario and Canada as a whole. Discussions regarding the provision of ECEC in Ontario have moved up the political agenda in recent years (Moss, 2006). As a result, more attention has been paid to the workforce which provides these services (Moss, 2006). Following their cross-national review of ECEC in twenty countries, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) commented that the educational and social responsibilities of the early years workforce have grown (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001). The study concluded that there is a, “critical need to recruit and retain a qualified, diverse, gender-mixed work force and to ensure that a career in Early Childhood Education and Care is satisfying, respected and financially viable” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001, p. 11). Further research that identifies the issues of recruiting and retaining this workforce is crucial. There are many research projects which explain issues of ECE retention (e.g., Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, & Amsden, 2009; Totenhagen, Hawkins, Casper, Bosch, Hawkey, & Borden, 2016); however, recruitment is a less commonly researched topic. An even less researched topic is the recruitment of degree qualified Early Childhood Educators. The Ministry of Labour (2016) reported in regards to Early Childhood Education students that, "increasing numbers of students were choosing not to continue their work after initial training because of low wages, limited job opportunities, and current workers are leaving to pursue other careers" (p. 34). Leaving the field in which one has studied results in a loss of investment, both financially and in regards to time (Ministry of Labour, 2016). The aim of the current study was to investigate degree pre-service Early Childhood Educators (ECE) intentions to enter the field.
of ECEC and also to assess perceived barriers and incentives to entering the field, the researchers will also begin to address professional identity formation of pre-service ECEs.

**Literature Review**

One of the largest issues on the child care agenda is quality. Quality child care has been found to improve outcomes in children in a variety of developmental (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2011) such as cognitive, language, fine and gross motor, and social/emotional (Brewer, 2007). Furthermore, a causal relationship has been established between attending high quality ECEC programs and positive life courses for children who attend these programs (Reynolds et al., 2001; Schweinhart et al., 2005). ECEC programs have been found to be the basis for positive development, well-being, and social inclusion in adulthood (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The greatest predictor of quality child care is the status of the child care workforce, which includes their educational status, compensation status, and working conditions (Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, 2004).

An abundance of literature suggests that retention of qualified Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) is a long-standing issue in the child care sector (e.g., Flanagan, Beach, & Varmuza, 2013; Holochwost, DeMott, Buell, Yannetta, & Amsden, 2009). A Canada-wide survey of licensed child care centres, *You Bet We Still Care*, reported that 65.5% of centres experienced a permanent staff leave in the last 12 months, 73.4% of whom were qualified ECEs (Flanagan et al., 2013). Many ECE’s who leave child care centres pursue higher paying positions (e.g., working as an ECE at a school board), while others pursue positions outside of the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. The study also found that only 72% of newly hired staff in Ontario were ECE qualified, and 11% of the total workforce holds university degrees. When employers filled a vacancy, 62.6% of positions were filled with a less qualified applicant, in
many instances vacancies were filled by individuals who were not ECE qualified. It can be drawn from the report that this is due to a lack of qualified applicants rather than for budgeting reasons. When asked about challenges to recruiting qualified applicants, 65.4% of employers reported applicants’ lack of skills, 65.2% reported few or no applicants, and 60.3% stated applicants had a lack of related work experience (Flanagan et al., 2013).

The challenge of child care centres to hire qualified staff is concerning due to the causal relationship between the staff’s educational status and increased positive child outcomes (Boyd, 2013; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Therefore, there is a need to investigate pre-service ECEs’ intentions to pursue a career in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care, particularly those who are obtaining degrees in ECEC, as they would be a population of qualified candidates to fill future vacancies. Investigating who these individuals are, the formation of these individuals’ professional identities, as well as incentives and barriers to working in the child care sector can inform policy makers of changes that need to be made to the field to make it a more desirable career choice. This is beneficial to Ontario on both a social and an economic level.

Very little literature exists that examines pre-service Early Childhood Educators’ intentions to work in the child care sector (Thorpe et al., 2011). An in-depth review of the literature found only five published studies assessing pre-service Early Childhood Educators’ attitudes towards working in the sector (e.g., Thorpe et al., 2012). Of these five studies, only one of them was completed in Canada (Field & Varga, 1997). These studies shared one common finding: that degree students have negative attitudes towards entering the child care workforce (Ailwood & Boyd, 2006; Thorpe et al., 2011). It has been found, again in the field of teaching, that individuals who select careers based on intrinsic motivations, such as serving others, are more likely to exhibit higher efficacy in their teaching (Knobloch & Whittington, 2003). Some
individuals choose their careers as teachers, based on the conceptualization that serving others is an avenue of fulfilling their lives goals (Fischman, Schutte, Solomon, & Lam, 2001). Research that first deepens our understanding of what these attitudes and perceptions are, such as the current thesis, and then assesses how and why these attitudes are constructed can aid in making amendments to the field that could lead to a stronger child care workforce.

A comprehensive understanding of the field of Early Childhood Education and Care, professionalism, and the ongoing development of professional identities of ECEs and of pre-service ECE degree students’ education within the Ontario context is needed. A better understanding of pre-service Early Childhood Educators' commitment to the field and efficacy can help the profession develop and support other pre-service ECECs who would like to enter the field but cannot due to the current sustainability of this career choice (Knobloch & Whittington, 2003). The following sections of this literature review discuss the following: an overview of Early Childhood Education and Care in Ontario, professionalism and professional identities of Early Childhood Educators, pre-service Early Childhood Educators enrolled in degree programs, and a rationale for why pre-service Early Childhood Educators should be studied.

**Early Childhood Education and Care in Ontario**

Early Childhood Education legislation and regulations are different in every country, and even differ between provinces within Canada (e.g., Pasolli & Young, 2012). For example, funding allocation frameworks, training and certification requirements of the workforce, and the curriculums implemented in training programs vary from place to place. Also within Canada, funding models differ in term of direct funding, subsidy, and maximum fees, due to the fact that these policy decisions are made at the provincial level. A variety of terms are used to describe
the child care and education of children from birth through eight years of age (Gibson, 2013a). For the purposes of this paper, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) and child care will be used to describe the work that Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) do. This project focuses on ECEs in Ontario. The College of Early Childhood Educators (2017) explains the duties of an Early Childhood Educator are as follows:

- Assessing children’s developmental needs and stages in all developmental domains;
- Designing curriculum to address children’s identified needs, stages of development and interests;
- Planning programs and environments for play and activities that help children make developmental progress;
- Maintaining healthy emotional and social learning context for children; and
- Reporting to parents and supervisors on children’s developmental progress within healthy, safe, nurturing and challenging play environments

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education explains that ECEs have a postsecondary education, are employed in a variety of settings (child care centres, private home child care agencies, Ontario Early Years Centres), and are required to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) (Ministry of Education, 2017). This requirement for certification is a unique characteristic of the professional landscape of ECEC in Ontario. ECEs are required to pay an annual fee to continue practicing as registered ECEs (RECE) and to adhere to the Colleges’ standards of practice and code of ethics. Individuals cannot practice or call themselves ECEs in Ontario unless they register with the College of Early Childhood Educators. Therefore, pre-service ECEs in Ontario include those who are enrolled in a degree or diploma programs that are eligible to apply for membership to the CECE upon completion of their degree.
Shifting language for the field. Child care can be defined as: “the care of children especially while parents are working” (Merriam-Webster, 2017). Child care, as mentioned above, has been made available in different shapes and forms for the past two centuries in Ontario. Forms of child care have included babysitting services, nannies, licensed and unlicensed care, centre care, home child care, and most recently full day kindergarten (FDK). Accordingly, the language used to refer to the care of young children is not consistent. ECEs are labelled differently depending on an individual's exposure to the field, their beliefs about the importance of children's early years, and their perceptions about the ECE workforce. Referring to the care of young children as “babysitting”, child care, or early childhood education and care may have different connotations associated with each of the labels. These connotations may be reflective of societies’ perceptions of ECE's as professionals and also may play a role in perpetuating negative or positive perceptions as ECEs as a professional workforce. Many ECEs have advocated for the fact that they are more than babysitters or day care workers, pointing to their professional skills and education (Association of Early Childhood Educators, 2016). As stated previously, within the field child care and ECEC are used interchangeably; therefore, this paper will do so as well. The limitations of these inconsistencies in language will be discussed in the discussion section.

History of the field in Ontario. In Ontario, child care and formal education have been developed and treated as separate systems in terms of governance and funding (Friendly, 2008). Organized child care began to emerge in the 1800's in major cities such as Toronto (Friendly, 2008). Following the introduction of formal child care, Ontario was the sole province to introduce kindergarten for four year olds in the 1950s. However, major distinctions between care and education existed; and some of those differences still exist today. For example, differences included the responsible parties, operational control, program intentions, staffing and
qualifications, financing and parental contributions (Friendly, 2008). Prior to 2012, education was governed by the Ontario Ministry of Education and child care was governed by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services. In 2009 the Pascal Report (a special advisory on early learning) recommended that, "the province create a continuum of early learning, child care, and family supports from the prenatal period through to adolescence, under the leadership of the Minister of Education" (Pascal, 2009, p. 14). Friendly (2008) mentions several challenges in merging care and education, including merging a public system (education) with a market-driven mixed economy model (care), financing, maintaining stability in child care programs, human resources and phasing in full day kindergarten. For the purposes of this research, the focus will be the challenge of human resources.

As per Pascal's recommendation, in 2012 the Ministry of Education took over the governance of care in hopes of eliminating some of the extreme differences between Education and Care and creating a more seamless system for Ontario families. Both child care and kindergarten continue to serve as child care options for Ontario families. However, although the division of care and education today does not differ based on leadership and funding sources several challenges still exist. One of the major one being the perceptions of the ECE workforce.

Similar to the challenges addressed by Friendly in 2008, educational requirements, wages and working conditions for educators and those caring for young children in Ontario differ between kindergarten and child care programs. Almost ten years ago Friendly (2008), in her paper, *Building a strong and equal partnership between childcare and Early Childhood Education in Canada* addresses the instability of the child care workforce due to low wages and poor employment opportunities (Best Start Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources, 2007). The same human resource issues can still be seen in the field of Early Childhood
Education and Care today (e.g., Mojtehedzadeh, 2015; Warren, 2016) 24% of ECEs working in licensed child care in Ontario earn less than $15 per hour and 45% of ECEs earn between $15-$20 per an hour (Association of Early Childhood Educators, 2017). Early Childhood Educators are earning approximately $25,000 to $37,000 dollars per year (Bouw, 2013). In comparison, elementary teachers in Toronto who have average salaries of approximately $82,000 per year (Richarz, 2015). It is difficult to attract degree qualified ECEs to the field when human resource divisions still exist between education and care.

**Current context in Ontario.** Recently, policy makers have created policy reforms that aim to lessen the differences between education and child care recognizing that learning can take place across a variety of contexts and not just within schools (White, 2002). Such reforms aim to combat the inequities discussed above such as pay, and educational level of the workforce that can be seen between the field of child care and education (Friendly, 2008). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development emphasized the need for a “systematic and integrated approach to early childhood care and education policy and a strong and equal partnership with the education system as key elements of successful ECEC policy” (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006, p. 3). This shift has occurred in Ontario in recent years largely due to the implementation of full day kindergarten (FDK), which requires both a teacher and an ECE to be present in the classroom. This shift allows for ECEs and teachers to bring together their skill sets and each have their own responsibilities to jointly create a play-based learning environment (Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). Teachers roles include but are not limited to: being responsible for student learning, formative assessment formal reporting and communication to parents (Government of Ontario, n.d.). The ECEs roles include, but are not
limited to: age appropriate planning, contributing to formative assessment, and having knowledge of early childhood development (Government of Ontario, n.d.).

In order to address the many issues around professionalization of the field of ECE, the current and historical issues of the two-tiered system of child care and education must be addressed (Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). Child care is often viewed as a precursor or support for public education and much of its purpose lies in readying children for school (Moss, 2013). If Ontario desires to meet the goals of both the 2001 and 2006 OECD reports, “equity of relationship and strong continuity between early childhood provision and the education system” (OECD, 2001, p. 58), both macro systems (attitudes, ideologies of the culture) and micro systems (school, peers, families) must make a shift in their conceptualization of the ECE workforce (Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). Early Childhood Education and Care must be conceptualized as a right for all children and seen as a public good rather than an unnecessary cost. Furthermore, the view that child care is less important than education must be eliminated if the government wishes to see partnerships between education and care continue to grow. These changes in ideology can only be made if the conceptualization of child care is changed at both the macro and micro levels.

These shifts in regulations and legislation have already begun to reshape what ECEC looks like in Ontario. While the changes have been beneficial for the most part, for example, higher wages for ECE’s working within the school board, the impact on licensed child care centres has been harsh (Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, 2015). In many situations the change in funding formulas after the introduction of full day kindergarten made it difficult for centres to continue being viable as they could not compete with the wages being offered by the school boards (Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, 2015). While FDK is helpful to parents
who have children aged four to five, many parents who have younger children, require before
and after school care or summer care still struggle to find quality child care. Currently there are
only spaces for 17.7% of children aged 0-12 in Ontario, and, although the rate is growing, it is
growing at a tremendously slow pace. By 2065 – in fifty years – it is projected that there will be
regulated spaces for 50% of children in Ontario based on the current rate of growth (Ontario
Coalition for Better Child Care, 2015). Addressing these issues is particularly important in the
Canadian context as Canada as a whole has high rates of mothers participating in the workforce,
a culturally diverse population, and a high rate of child poverty (Friendly, 2008).

In addition to a lack of availability of licensed child care, the implementation of the
policy recommendations in How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early
Years has heightened the expectations for ECEs pedagogical practice, yet wages have not
changed (Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, 2015). The average hourly rate of pay for
ECEs across the sector is $17.47, with only 59% having access to extended medical benefits, and
only 46.6% having access to a workplace pension (OCBCC, 2015). Indeed, the Ontario Coalition
for Better Child Care (2015) states that:

Ontario must be ready to join the threads together, to set forth a coherent child care
policy aimed at building a real system based on principles of universality, quality, and
comprehensiveness. We need a system that addresses both affordability for parents and
decent wages for staff, that increased both access to spaces and quality of programs, and
that supports both expansion of new centres and sustainability of existing programs. (p.
2).

As the field of ECE continues to change in Ontario, it is important to address issues such as
workforce wages, benefits, and recognition to ensure that the province does not further deplete
the number of available child care spots and supports the professionalization of the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

**Professionalism and Professional Identities of Early Childhood Educators**

Professionalization refers to the degree to which an occupation meets the criteria of a profession, including: credentials and licensure, mentoring of new entrants’ professional development, specialization, authority, and prestige (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008). Cherrington included four cornerstones of ECE professionalism, “professionalism of interpersonal actions, having and acting upon a professional knowledge base, acting in the child’s best interest, and taking professional responsibility for the actions of one colleagues” (as cited in Dalli, 2008, p. 174). However, there is widespread support for the benefits of the professionalization of the field of ECE, both for the educators as well as the children and families they serve (Osgood, 2006). To add to the complexity of the professionalization of the ECE workforce, little agreement can be found within the literature defining what the skills and professional practices of a professional ECE (Martin, Meyer, Jones, Nelson, & Ting, 2010). This lack of clarity may be one of the factors is hindering Early Childhood Education from receiving recognition as a profession.

Within Ontario, this lack of clarity is less of a problem as the CECE has provided consistency regarding which skills ECEs are required to have; however, this is not the case in all provinces. There is extensive documentation of the devaluing of teachers and Early Childhood Educators (Bourgeault & Khokher, 2006; Fuller & Strath, 2001; Macdonald & Merrill, 2002). The support for professionalization of the field paired with devaluing of the workforce has resulted in increased education, training, and skills; however, the low wages and poor working condition remain the same (Boyd, 2013; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This discrepancy has resulted in workforce retention and
attrition issues in the ECEC field (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2009). It can also be hypothesized that these discrepancies serve as a barrier to entering the field in the first place. In other professions, such as nursing, it has been found that there can still be issues with recognition as a profession even though the career meets all the criteria of being a profession (Willetts & Clarke, 2014). Similar issues seen in the ECE sector in Ontario could be connected to the fact that ECEs are still undervalued and underfunded, and the perceptions about importance of professionalization of Early Childhood Educators are underdeveloped (Tukonic & Harwood, 2015).

An overarching barrier to professionalization of the field of Early Childhood Education and Care may be the fact that the workforce is primarily made up of individuals who identify as female. In 2016, 98% of individuals registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators identified as female. There are longstanding issues around gender wage gaps and the perceptions surrounding caring professions, such as child care and nursing, which appear to be a barrier to further advancement of the professionalization of these fields. Literature supports that there is a correlation between the achievement of professional status and gender (Adams, 2003). Male dominated professions have historically been more successful at attaining professional status (Adams, 2003). These beliefs are reflected in historical research, for example, Etzioni et al. stated that female-dominated professions were "semi-professions" and could not possess the traits that define male professions, such as autonomy and commitment to career (as cited in Adams, 2003, p. 270). Furthermore, men who choose to work in female-dominated professions have been found to still earn more (Muench, Sindelar, Busch, & Buerhaus, 2015). Muench and colleagues (2015) found that in a sample of 87,903 nurses, male nurses consistently made approximately $5,100 per year than female nurses. Statistics Canada reported that in 469
occupational categories out of 500 women were paid less than men (as cited in McInturff, 2016). Although beyond the scope of this project, further investigation of the impacts of being a female-dominated profession would contribute to a better understanding of the current perceptions of the ECE workforce.

In their research with ECEs working in child care settings and kindergarten classrooms in Ontario, Tukonic and Harwood (2015) found that four themes emerged from their participants’ qualitative responses when asked to discuss challenges they had experienced in association with professionalism and identity construction. The four themes were: internal perceptions (i.e. perceptions of ECE themselves) that devalue the role of the Early Childhood Educator, external perceptions (i.e. public perceptions) that devalue the role of an early years’ educator, compatibility of the relationship between ECEs and teachers, and level of education and years of service. The researchers felt that these four themes related to one another and impacted the “glass ceiling” effect on professional identity construction of their participants. In terms of internal devaluing of ECEs, the participants expressed lack of opportunity for paid professional development, and teachers’ and principals’ negative perceptions of their ECE role as a barrier to professionalism (Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). External devaluing included parental and public perceptions of the role of an ECE, and the researchers suggested that these perceptions related to societal misunderstandings of the profession. Pay differentials, ill-defined roles and the need for joint planning and prep time between teachers and ECEs were included as concerns in regards to compatibility of the relationship between ECE and teachers. Lastly, in terms of level of experience and years of experience, participants expressed a need for compensation reflective of their experience and responsibilities (Tukonic & Harwood, 2015).

Further examination of 1) training experiences and 2) conceptions and perceptions about
ECE professionalism is needed to unpack the societal misunderstandings of ECEs’ roles in the Ontario education system. The post-secondary training required to become an Early Childhood Educator may in fact be contributing to the perceptions around professionalization of the field of ECEs. The researchers explain, “The current environment in Ontario fosters a glass ceiling effect for the professionalism and professional identity construction (i.e., perceived differences of professionalism) that may inadvertently add to the fragmentation and marginalization of the early years sector” (Tukonic & Harwood, 2015, p. 52). In some countries, early childhood educators and teachers are trained together, earning the same degree (Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). There are pros, such as giving early years’ professionals (teachers and ECEs specifically) the opportunity to co-construct their identities, and cons, such as loss of curriculum focused on certain age groups if the programs were combined, to this training framework; however, it may be a training strategy worth considering as it could possibly eliminate some of separation between care and education. Some considerations that would need to be taken into account include: primary education certification takes longer to achieve and focuses on different areas, and that combining these programs could cause the loss of a profession. Although combining the training of ECEs and teachers may be too advanced for the current structural governance of Early Childhood Education and Care, the principles of integrated approaches and constructed identities could potentially be mirrored.

**Pre-Service Early Childhood Educators in Degree Programs**

There has been growing momentum to increase the qualifications of the ECE workforce (Ailwood & Boyd, 2006; Gibson, 2015). In other countries, such as Australia, the inclusion of degree-qualified ECEs is viewed as central to improving quality and outcomes of child care (Gibson, 2015). In a sample of 238 classrooms Pianta and colleagues (2013) found that degree-
qualified staff is rated as creating more positive emotional climates and providing more quality activities in child care settings in comparison to those without formal training. Quality of the Early Childhood Education environment was assessed using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS), the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), and the Emerging Academics Snapshot (Pianta et al., 2005). Unfortunately, current research (Gibson, 2015; Thorpe et al., 2012) emphasizes degree students’ reluctance to participate in the child care workforce, suggesting that a policy requiring ECEs to have degrees may not have the intended impact. The Queensland University of Technology (2011; as cited in Gibson, 2013a) found that 60% of employed graduates were working in primary schools, 5% in kindergarten, and approximately 13% were working in child care after completing their degrees in Australia. These findings indicate that further examination of ECE degree programs is needed and could be beneficial to better understand why these students display a reluctance to enter the child care field and choose to pursue other professions. Assessing ECE degree programs is important as Early Childhood Education programs have been found to strongly influence the way that future ECEs impact the nature of and quality of young children’s experiences in childhood settings (Ackerman, 2005).

The curriculum of Early Childhood Education programs may also be a factor influencing students’ choices to work in the field (Gibson, 2015). Pre-service student learning concerning child care is often isolated from other subjects, such as pedagogy and curriculum, which are often linked with teaching older age groups of children (Garvis, Lemon, Pendergast, & Yim, 2013). Research suggests that many students transferring to a four-year degree program from a two-year diploma view their degree as an exit pathway from the field of ECE (Watson, 2006). Historically, degrees have been found to be linked with working with older children, typically in a public school setting (Gibson, 2013a). It is hypothesized that this is largely to do with the
differences in salary between public school teachers and Early Childhood Educators (Gibson, 2015). Although not discussed in this study, working conditions and social status also likely plays a role in desires to work with older children.

**Why Study Pre-Service Early Childhood Educators**

There is very little literature regarding the formation of the professional identity of pre-service ECEs. The literature on pre-service teachers’ identities demonstrates that, “clear self-image and ownership of an emerging professional identity” have been found to help pre-service teachers to apply knowledge in workplace situations in the future (Bennett, 2012, p. 55). Their emerging identities are shaped by personal and contextual factors, which then interact in a reciprocal way, reshaping identity over the life of the individual (Beltman, Glass, Dinham, Chalk, & Nguyen, 2015). By studying pre-service ECEs, unique insights can be gained concerning the implications of the lack of commitment to forming a professional identity as an ECE within the field of ECEC. Investigating this population allows us to understand the impact that professionalization could have on the future workforce.

**Contributions**

Most of the existent literature on pre-service Early Childhood Educators is from an Australian context (e.g., Gibson, 2013a; Thorpe, Boyd, Ailwood, & Brownlee, 2011; Thorpe, Millear, & Petriwskyj, 2012). This study aims to add to the dearth of research regarding Ontario pre-service, degree-qualified ECEs. Similar bodies of literature regarding professional identity development and individuals’ levels of commitment to the field can be found in the fields of teaching (e.g., Hong, 2010; Lindqvist, Weurlander, Wenerson, & Thornberg, 2017; Sutherland, Howard, & Markauskaite, 2010) and nursing (Willets & Clarke, 2014); however, little is known about degree-qualified ECEs. The literature that does exist in the field of Early Childhood
Education and Care often utilizes samples consisting of students completing diploma programs (e.g., Doan, 2016; Langford, 2008). Understanding barriers and incentives may ultimately allow for barriers to be addressed. This information could lead to increasing the pool of degree qualified ECEs who will work in the field. Increasing understanding of pre-service ECEs conceptions of professional ECE identity may contribute to efforts to change conceptions and discourses around ECEs in Ontario.

This is especially pertinent information for Ontario as it is the only province that requires ECEs to register with a regulatory body, the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) before practicing. Professionalization can be defined as, “The process by which the members of an occupation collectively strive to achieve the recognition and status that is accorded to the established profession by emulating or adopting the defining characteristics of these established professions” (Balthazard, 2016, p. 10). Regulatory bodies, such as the College of Early Childhood Educators, establish standards of qualifications, competence, ethics, and professional practice. The regulatory body can ensure a standard is maintained and reserves the right to require its members to uphold set expectations (Balthazard, 2016). The creation of the CECE speaks to Ontario’s attempts to professionalize the field of ECEC. As stated above, the CECE is relatively new in Ontario and prior to this regulatory body being created Early Childhood Education and Care in Ontario did not meet the criteria for a profession (Association of Early Childhood Educators, 2011). Further knowledge about potential members of this regulatory body and their career intentions may help advocates make changes that will further the professionalization of the field. Further professionalization of the field is thought to have impacts that lead to higher quality care, which results in better service for families (Feeney, 2012).
Research Objective and Questions

This project aims to address the gaps in the literature in regards to Ontario pre-service, degree-qualified ECEs’ intentions to enter the child care workforce, and uses professional identity as a context to examine the meaning making pre-service ECEs associate with working in the field. The research objective was to gain an understanding about this population’s intentions following the completion of their degrees in order to better inform policy decisions, both at the institutional (University and/or College) and Government levels, that impact pre-service Early Childhood Education students’ intentions and desires to enter the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. Three specific research questions were identified for this project:

1) Who is studying for a degree in Early Childhood Education and what are their motives?

2) What proportion of students intend to register with the CECE? Of that proportion how many intend to practice as ECEs? And why?

3) What structural factors (e.g., pay, working conditions, status recognition) are the most salient in preventing or encouraging willingness to consider participation in the child care workforce?

Analytical methods utilized for each question are provided in Table 1.
Table 1.

Research Questions and Method of Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Method of Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Who is studying for a degree in Early Childhood Education and what are their motives?</td>
<td>Quantitative – Descriptive Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What proportion of students intends to register with the college of ECE? Of that proportion how many intend to practice as ECEs? And Why?</td>
<td>Quantitative – Descriptive Statistics, Qualitative – Thematic Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What structural factors are the most salient in preventing or encouraging willingness to consider participation in the child care workforce?</td>
<td>Quantitative – Descriptive Statistics, Qualitative – Thematic Analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods

Participants

Participants were recruited from nine post-secondary institutions in Ontario. Participants were students who were or are in the progress of completing degrees in Early Childhood Education and Care. Diploma students from the eight intuitions that offer degree programs were also recruited to serve as a comparison group. However, a comparison between degree and diploma students could not be made as there were not enough diploma students recruited. Participants’ ages and sexes were not restricted in order to recruit a diverse sample; however, demographic questions were included to aid in describing this population. The students had to be currently enrolled in a program that allows them to register with the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators upon the completion of their education. The nine institutions included are as follows: Ryerson University, University of Guelph, Fanshawe College, George Brown College, Seneca College, Sheridan College, Algonquin College, and Conestoga College, and
Guelph-Humber University. Students attending the University of Guelph needed to be completing or interested in completing the child stream courses in order to participate. The degree program in Child, Youth and Family at the University of Guelph is unique in that students have the choice whether to focus their studies in the areas of children or youth. Those who choose to pursue the youth stream are not eligible to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators upon the completion of their degree as their program of study does not allow them to receive the credits required to register with the College. No other inclusion or exclusion criteria were included for the questionnaire.

**Participant Selection**

Participants were recruited online, using post-secondary institutions’ student list serves and Facebook groups, and all recruitment materials can be seen in Appendix A. Institutions that had degree programs that were approved by the College of Early Childhood Educators were selected for recruitment. There were nine institutions total that had degree programs. Each of these institutions, excluding Ryerson University and University of Guelph, had diploma programs as well. Students from both the diploma and degree programs were recruited. Program counselors were contacted at each institution in order to assess interest in participating in the study. The initial e-mail to program counselors can be found in Appendix B. It was explained to each program counselors that their involvement would include forwarding an e-mail to students that contained a link to the questionnaire (Appendix A). A positive response was received from each institution; however, due to time constraints I was unable to receive ethics clearance from Conestoga College because of their policies and procedures for external ethics applications. Therefore, participants from Conestoga College were exclusively recruited from Facebook pages. Ethics applications were submitted at each of the institutions that agreed to forward the
survey to their students, as well as the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board. Potential participants were provided a link to an online questionnaire via e-mail or online forum; the questionnaire included qualitative and quantitative questions (Appendix C). The survey was designed using Qualtrics. A disclaimer and was provided with the questionnaire detailing that the research project had no affiliation with their institution, would have no impact on grades, and that no data would be shared directly with their institutions.

**Procedures**

Ethics approval for completing research with human subjects was obtained at all institutions that agreed to circulate the questionnaire to their students, including the University of Guelph. The certificate of approval from the University of Guelph can be found in Appendix D. Following approval from all of the research ethics committees, recruitment began in November of 2016 and lasted for three weeks. A link to the online questionnaire was provided via list serve and/or social media and students who were interested in participating in the study gave implied consent when they submitted their questionnaire, the consent form provided can be found in Appendix E. Upon completion of the survey participants were automatically re-directed to an incentive survey. Participants were asked to answer a skill testing question and enter their e-mail address for a one-in-five chance of winning a fifty-dollar cash prize. Reminder e-mails were sent at two weeks, and two days before the questionnaire was set to close, when possible. The data from these questionnaires was then transferred onto an encrypted laptop to ensure confidentiality while using SPSS for the data clean-up and analysis. Once the survey had officially been closed a computer program was used to randomly draw five e-mail addresses and these participants were notified that they had been chosen to receive one of the five fifty-dollar incentives.
At the beginning of the survey students were advised that the data collected from this study may be used to publish reports. Participants were also reminded of the research teams’ contact information, and told to contact the researchers if they wished to address any concerns or had any questions.

**Measures**

The questionnaire was compromised of a combination of items informed by the research literature and researcher-created items. A total of 50 items were included in the final questionnaire, which can be found in Appendix C. The 50 items included: 9 demographic questions, 19 open-ended questions (open text responses), and 22 closed-ended questions. The majority of the items that were informed by research literature came from studies conducted by Thorpe, Boyd, Ailwood and Brownlee (2011) and Zhang, Hawk, Zhang and Zhao (2016). Using these two studies as the foundation for items for this questionnaire, a variety of researcher-created questions were then added to address the research questions not covered by the Thorpe et al. (2011) and Zhang et al. (2016) measures. The remaining literature informed questions came from various sources that can be seen in the survey guide in Appendix C.

Thorpe and colleagues (2011) were interested in examining students’ willingness to work in child care while identifying barriers and incentives for doing so. This study was conducted in Australia. The researchers developed the measure utilized in this study specifically for their research. Currently, information about the validity and reliability of the measure is not available\(^1\). This is due to the fact that the constructs being measured both in their study, as well as the current study, have not been discussed in any depth in previous research in the field of Early Childhood Education. Much of the current literature focuses on in-service ECEs. Four items

\(^1\)Authors were contacted regarding validity and reliability evidence for scale; however, a response was not received.
relating to personal information and barriers and incentives to entering the field were utilized in
the study. These items were chosen for the current study as they are closely related to the
research questions currently being asked.

Zhang et al. (2016) utilized a previously validated scale in their study to measure
teachers’ professional identity. The scale consists of 15 items and responses are rated on a four
point Likert scale (Zhang et al., 2016). The 15 items from three subscales that include intrinsic
value identity, extrinsic value identity, and volitional behaviour identity (Zhang et al., 2016). The
overall measure has been found to have an acceptable reliability (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.78$) (Zhang et
al., 2016). Also, the subscales respectively had acceptable reliability (Cronbach $\alpha = 0.88$, 0.78,
and 0.75) (Zhang, et al., 2016). This scale was adapted for the current study to measure Early
Childhood Educators’ professional identity instead of teachers. This measure was selected as it
provides quantitative information about pre-service Early Childhood Educators’ professional
identities and their professional identity formation.

In order to elicit the information required to answer the research questions listed above,
32 researcher-created items were also included in the questionnaire. Examples of questions asked
to make conclusions about the research question, “What structural factors are the most salient in
preventing or encouraging willingness to consider participation in the child care workforce?” are
open-ended questions asking “What is your rationale for not wanting to work in child care?” and
“What is your rationale for wanting to work in child care?” The other researcher-created
questions addressed topics such as: demographics (e.g., “What year of study are you currently
enrolled in?”), rationale for intending or not intending to enter the field, professional identity
formation, and students’ perceptions of characteristics of professional Early Childhood
Educators and challenges they may face in the field (e.g., “What challenges do you think individuals might face as Early Childhood Educators?”).

**Ethical Considerations**

The purpose of the study was made clear to all participants during recruitment (Appendix A). The purpose of the study was also made clear within the informed consent form provided at the beginning of the questionnaire (Appendix C). Participants were informed that, if they felt uncomfortable answering questions on the questionnaire or did not wish to disclose, they were in no way required to answer all questions. Participants had to be made aware of this due to the anonymity of this questionnaire once the data were entered (i.e., by clicking ‘submit’); once their survey was submitted, the research team was not able to locate or remove a particular participant’s data from the study.

The questionnaire data was stored on a password-protected, encrypted website (Qualtrics). Upon the completion of this project all data will be kept in the University of Guelph data repository. Through consultation with the University of Guelph library proper ethical procedures will be adhered to in order to properly store and archive the data. Throughout the duration of this study the data collected remained on the Qualtrics platform and downloaded data were stored on a password-protected computer with full disk encryption, only accessible to the research team.

**Data Analysis**

**Concurrent strategy.** Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this study and a mixed methods approach was used to analyze the data. The quantitative data told us “if” and “who”, and the quantitative data told us “how or why” (Terrell, 2012). For the purposes of this study, the quantitative data were used to aid in profiling the population, pre-service degree
students, and to measure what proportion of students are choosing to enter the field of ECE, and/or join the College of ECE. The qualitative data were used to aid in reaching conclusions about why participants are or are not choosing to enter the field, as well as how they are constructing their professional identities. The use of a concurrent strategy allowed for qualitative and quantitative data to be collected simultaneously during the study (Terrell, 2012). For this study, the primary data collection approach was quantitative, with less emphasis placed on the qualitative data (Terrell, 2012). The utilization of this strategy allowed for the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods to be present in the study (Terrell, 2012).

As with all research methods, using mixed methods presents both strengths and limitations. Mixed methods research allowed for text responses to add meaning to numerical responses, the ability to answer a broader research question, and the strengths of one method can be used to overpower the weaknesses of another method (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The most important strength of mixed methods research for this project is the fact that it allowed for more complete knowledge which is necessary to inform theory and practice (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004); this is especially important since there is very little literature available regarding pre-service ECEs and that there are demonstrated recruitment and retention issues for the ECE workforce.

**Quantitative.** Descriptive statistics were used to answer the first two research questions. Proportions for each variable were included in order to determine what category participants fall into (e.g. intending to enter the field or not intending to enter the field). Independent t-tests were used to investigate research question number three and compare the two groups of students: those intending to enter the field of ECE and those not intending to enter the field of ECE. The following hypotheses guided these analyses:
H₀: There will be no significant differences between the perceived barriers and incentives of those intending to enter the field and those not intending to enter the field.

H₁: There will be significant differences between the perceived barriers and incentives of those intending to enter the field and those not intending to enter the field.

**Qualitative.** The qualitative questionnaire items were analyzed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss the six phases of thematic analysis: familiarize yourself with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes, and produce a report. Following these procedures, I first familiarized myself with the qualitative data by reading through participants’ responses multiple times in order to gain a general understanding of how participants were feeling. The main focus of the initial stage was to understand the breadth and content of the data that had been collected. Next, initial codes were generated. The thematic analysis for this project was data driven. This allowed for a variety of codes to be constructed from the data. I worked systematically through each participant ensuring that attention was paid to all participants’ responses. Next, the data set analysis was focused on broader themes, rather than codes as per Braun and Clarke (2006). The initial codes resulted in themes such as: negative feelings about field, positive feelings about field, barrier to entering the field, incentive to entering the field. The themes were then reviewed and themes that did not have enough data to support them were eliminated. For example, I had initially created a code for financial stability for ones’ family; this code was eliminated as it was not supported by the data set as a whole. After this stage, a better understanding of how the themes fit together was arrived at by the researcher; there were clear connections between those expressing barriers and not intending to enter the field and the same with incentives and entering the field. However, another group emerged that had not been thought of, those who perceive barriers but are still intending to
enter the field. During the fifth stage, defining and naming themes, I was able to select the final themes and analyze the data within them again. The broader story of the study became clear: there are many individuals completing ECE training programs who do not intend to enter the field. I was able to use the concurrent nested strategy at this point to inform my qualitative analysis. In order to ensure the trustworthiness of the themes and codes they were discussed with other members of the research team, primarily the primary investigator. The last phase, producing the report, the results section was used to demonstrate the merit and validity of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Data Cleaning Process

The data collected via the Qualtrics survey was downloaded into IBM’s Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data from 290 participants were collected and downloaded. Data cleaning commenced with the exclusion of participants based on lack of consent and missing data (Table 2). First, participants who did not consent to participating in the study were removed \((n = 1)\). When participants indicated that they did not consent, they were automatically directed to the end of the survey and given the option to complete the incentive information. Next, participants who did not complete the demographic questions were removed as one of the objectives of this study was to analyze the characteristics of degree Early Childhood Educations students \((n = 1)\); without participants’ demographic information it could not be confirmed that they were pre-service Early Childhood Educators. Then, participants who did not complete the intention to enter the field \((n = 19)\) were removed. These participants were removed as intention to enter the field (yes or no) was the variable that acted as a criterion for group membership. Data were also reviewed for missing data on questions related to barriers and
incentives to entering the field and professional identity; however, all participants had complete data on these questions so no further sample exclusions were required. Finally, data was reviewed to be certain all University of Guelph students had indicated that they were completing the child stream courses. This was the case, so no further exclusions were required. The final sample consisted of 269 participants.

Table 2.

*Excluded Cases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Reason for Exclusion</th>
<th>Number of Excluded Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Removed from survey because they did not consent to participation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Removed from survey as participant did not report demographic information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Removed from survey as participant did not report intentions to enter the field</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Removed from survey as participant did not report barriers and incentives</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Removed from survey as participant did not report about their professional identity</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Removed from survey as participant did not or does not intend to complete child stream courses (only applicable to University of Guelph students)</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final Sample  *N*=269

**Sample**

Two-hundred and eighty-nine individuals consented to participate in the current study. The final sample included 269 participants after missing cases were excluded (see rationale for exclusions under data cleaning). Characteristics of the final sample are provided in Table 3, demonstrating that 97.8% of the population identified as female, 1.5% identified as male, and 0.7% selected the option that stated, “you don’t have an option that applies to me. I identify as (please specify):”; this participant identified as a transwoman. Participants on average were 22 years of age, ranging from 17 to 24. 215 participants (79.9%) reported that they were currently
completing a degree in Early Childhood Education and 54 participants (20.1%) reported that they were completing a diploma program.

Table 3.

**Characteristics of Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Degree Students</th>
<th>Diploma Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>Mean/%</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td>268</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>97.8</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td>269</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year of Study</strong></td>
<td>267</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Year</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Year</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Year</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Year and above</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Characteristics of Students Enrolled in Degree Programs**

As shown in Table 3, 97.7% of degree students identified as female, 1.9% identified as male, and 0.5% identified as another gender (transwoman). Participants enrolled in degree programs attended seven different institutions within Ontario (see Table 4). 31.8% of students studying for a degree reported that they had completed other post-secondary schooling prior to their current degree. 61.2% of participants reported that a degree in Early Childhood Education was their first choice. Students who did not indicate an ECE program as their first choice (38.8%), most commonly included: social work, child development, concurrent education, psychology, and nursing as their first choice of program.
Table 4.

Institutions Attended by Degree Early Childhood Education Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Degree Students (n=214)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Guelph</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryerson University</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Guelph-Humber</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seneca College</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheridan College</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algonquin College</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanshawe College</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ Intentions to Register as ECEs and Practice in the Field

Frequency statistics were used to determine if degree Early Childhood Education students intended to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators (Table 5). Frequencies were also used to determine whether participants were planning to practice in the field of ECEC. 83.1% of students explained that they intended to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators upon the completion of their degree. These participants provided the following reasons for registering with the College: the intention to work as an ECE, having a back-up plan, professional development, increased wages, and enjoying children. The 29 (16.9%) students who reported not intending to register with the College listed a variety of reasons for not registering, including continuing their education, not wanting to work as an ECE, being unsure of their career path, and never having heard about the College.

Of those 143 students who indicated that they intend to register with the college, 33 (23.1%) shared that they would definitely like to practice as ECEs. 110 (76.9%) students intending to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators do not intend to practice as ECEs. Students who intend to register but not practice shared that they are registering for a variety of reasons such as resume building, for additional qualifications for other employment, a
backup plan in case they cannot find other employment, and as a strategy to get accepted into further schooling programs, such as Bachelor of Education programs.

Table 5.

Proportion of Degree Students Intending to Register with the College of Early Childhood Educators and Practice as an Early Childhood Educator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Degree Students (n=211)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentions of Registering with the College of Early Childhood Educators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intentions to practice as an Early Childhood Educator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were asked, “What is your rationale for wanting to work in child care?”

Common responses to this question included a love for children, that there are no jobs as teachers, and wishing to open a home child care centre. Participants who did not want to work in child care overwhelmingly indicated that they do not want to work in child care due to working conditions such as pay, recognition, benefits, and hours. Participant #262 stated, “Becoming an Early Childhood Educator scares me for many reasons. The first reason is financial. I don't think Early Childhood Educators make enough money. I want to have a family someday and put my children in college/ university when they are older.” Participant #189 in regards to working in the field of ECEC stated, “Pay is not enough for a career to support my future family; Unless I'm marrying someone rich of course.” Multiple participants also indicated wanting to work with older children in a school setting, working one-on-one with children, and pursuing graduate studies to obtain employment as speech language pathologists, occupational therapists, and child life specialists. Participant #40 shared, “I want to practice as an ECE, but not for the rest of my
life, I would like to do it when I am trying to earn money to go back to a Master’s program for a
career I am truly passionate about.” Those who indicated that they do not intend to practice as
Early Childhood Educators were asked what profession they were considering pursuing at this
time. Participants #79 indicated that she wanted to work in government and policy development,
she explained, “I want to make a change in the sector [Early Childhood Education and Care].
The only way to do that is to move up into government.” Students who did not intend to practice
shared that they aspired to have careers in related fields such as teaching, occupational therapy,
speech therapy, child life, and social work (Table 6).

Table 6.

| Alternative Career Paths Being Considered by Degree Students (if not pursuing ECE) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| Career                          | Degree Students ($n = 157$) |
|                                 | $n$    | %               |
| Teaching                        | 76     | 48.4            |
| Other                           | 21     | 13.4            |
| Social Work                     | 14     | 8.9             |
| Child Life Specialist           | 13     | 8.3             |
| Speech Language pathology       | 13     | 8.3             |
| Occupational Therapy            | 12     | 7.6             |
| Research Based Masters          | 8      | 5.1             |

Salient Structural Factors Impacting Willingness to Consider Participation in the Field

Participants described their rationale for pursuing Early Childhood Education programs in
a variety of ways. Reasons for enrolling in ECE programs include: wanting to work with
children, requiring a Bachelor’s degree to get into Bachelor of Education programs, opportunities
for hands-on learning, and proximity to their homes. Participant #87 stated, “I chose this
program because it gives me the opportunity to pursue the career of teaching, but if I change my
mind over the years it also has different career options like ECE.” Participants were asked,
“Would you want to work in child care after you complete your post-secondary program.” The
response options were as follows: no, preferably not, unsure, possibly, and yes. In order to investigate research questions number two and three, the variable was recoded; participants who answered no, preferably not, unsure, and possibly were scored as not intending to work in the field and those answering yes were scored as yes, definitely intending to work in the field of ECEC. This resulted in a binomial variable that allowed for comparisons between those who are fully committed to pursuing a long-term career in ECEC to those who are not or likely not intending to practice as Early Childhood Educators.

Students were asked to indicate how level of pay, work conditions, opportunity for leadership, status, and children’s well-being affected their intentions of working in child care. Response options included a five-point scale (1 = strong barrier, 2 = barrier, 3 = unsure, 4 = incentive, and 5 = strong incentive. Initially a binomial logistic regression was run to understand whether intention to enter the field could be predicted based on students reporting of barriers and incentives. The results, however, were not found to be significant. This finding will be discussed further in the discussion section.

Due to the lack of significant findings in the regression analysis, an independent samples t-test was conducted in order to determine whether there was statistical evidence that differentiated the means of those intending to enter the field and those not intending to enter the field. There were outliers in the data, assessed by inspecting a boxplot, furthermore homogeneity of variances was violated as assessed by Levene’s test for equality of variances (p = .001), therefore findings must be interpreted with caution. Those not intending to enter the field indicated more barriers (M = 16.43, SD = 4.35) than those intending to enter the field (M = 18.36, SD = 3.25); this difference was statistically significant, M= -1.93 (95% CI, -2.87 to -.98), t (210.28) = -4.028, p = .001.
In their open-ended responses, participants indicated most commonly that pay was a barrier to entering the field. Participant #8 indicated:

The job is amazing I love it but we are paid so little for what we do. I can make more money with a high school education working at a call centre (TD Bank Call Centre my last place of employment prior to coming to school $19.80/hr).

The most common incentive to entering the field was children's well-being, as Participant #212 stated:

I decided to enter the field of ECE because I love to work with children and I want to help them reach their full potential and see themselves as competent and capable. ECE's can have a huge impact on a child's well-being and overall development.

Differences could be seen between variance of certain variables, for example, pay had a much smaller range of proportions than children's well-being. It was hypothesized that this could be due to the intrinsic values of student studying to become ECE's. Students who intend not to enter the field may perceive a higher number of barriers, but still have values that make them indicate variables such as, child well-being are still an incentive.
Table 7.

Barriers and Incentives to Entering the Field of ECEC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intentions to Work in the Field</th>
<th>Pay</th>
<th>Children Well-Being</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Opportunity for Leadership</th>
<th>Working Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yes (n = 84)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Barrier</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Incentive</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>77.4%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No (n = 184)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Barrier</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>19.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>38.0%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Incentive</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall (n = 269)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Barrier</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrier</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong Incentive</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants were also asked, “If I choose to be an Early Childhood Educator in the future, I will choose to work as an Early Childhood Educator for an extended period of time.”

Response options included: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree.

Independent samples t-test were again used to compare responses of those intending to enter the field and those not intending to enter the field. Outliers were assessed using a boxplot, and it was found that the data did contain some outliers; therefore, the results must be interpreted with some caution. Scores for each level of agreement to the above statement were normally distributed, as assessed by Shapiro-Wilk’s test ($p = .05$). There was a homogeneity of variances, as assessed by Levene’s test for equality of variances ($p = .633$). Participants not intending to enter the field indicated that, if they did enter the field, they would not choose to stay in the field for an
extended period of time (M = 2.43, SD = .841) in comparison to those who indicated they do
intend to enter the field (M = 3.27, SD = 8.12); this was a statistically significant difference, M =
-0.85 (95% CI, -1.063 to -0.632), t (265) = -7.729, p = .001.

Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intentions to Work in the Field</th>
<th>If I choose to be an Early Childhood Educator in the future, I will choose to work as an Early Childhood Educator for an extended period of time.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes (n = 84)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No (n = 183)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>31.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall (n = 268)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Summary of Findings

This study explored pre-service Early Childhood Education students’ intentions to enter
the field of Early Childhood Education and Care using online questionnaires. 269 participants
enrolled in post-secondary Early Childhood Education programs participated in an anonymous
online survey to share their intentions, beliefs, and opinions relating to the field of Early
Childhood Education and Care. Independent samples t-test and thematic analysis were utilized to
address the research objective, and more specifically the three research questions.
Participants identified several goals after the completion of their Early Childhood Education program, such as continuing education and/or intending to pursue related careers such as teaching. The data suggests that further efforts need to be made in order to recruit and retain high quality Early Childhood Educators to the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

The sample focused on degree students, with the large majority identifying as female (97.7%). This statistic is not surprising as Early Childhood Education and Care has been dominated by a female workforce for many years (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2016a). In 2016, approximately 900 individuals registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators identified as male, representing approximately 2% of Registered Early Childhood Educators in Ontario (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2016b). Issues relating to gender equality, specifically pay, are often linked to the poor working conditions and wages of Early Childhood Educators (Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, n.d.). The perceptions that caring (be it for the elderly, the sick, or children) is a "women’s job" persist in today’s society (Hegewisch, Liepmann, Hayes & Hartmann, 2010; McInturff, 2016; Ministry of Labour, 2016). Child care in particular is thought to be one of the most gender segregated professions (Jensen, 1995). Not only do more individuals who have completed Early Childhood Education and Care programs need to be recruited to the field, but more males need to be trained in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. More males entering the field may lead to changed perceptions about care as a "women’s job", and could lessen some of the negative perceptions associated with female-dominated careers such as ECEC; however, more males simply entering the field will not be enough to change these perceptions. As males entering female-dominated field face challenges of their own (Hoing, 2008; Kokoros, 2012). For example, Kokoros (2012) explains that he experienced ridicule when telling his other male peers that he wanted to pursue a
career in ECE. Challenges such as these reinforce that there are issues beyond gender in the professionalization of the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. Due to the low numbers of degree-trained ECE’s entering the field of Early Childhood Education and Care, further information is needed about their intentions after training and the barriers they are perceiving to enter the field (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2011).

This study had to consider the unique existence of the College of Early Childhood Educators when assessing pre-service ECE’s intentions to enter the field. Along with assessing whether individuals intended to enter the field, this study also investigated whether individuals intended to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators, as registration is a requirement for those intending to practice. This study revealed that the majority of degree students (83.1%) are intending to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators after the completion of their degree; however, of that 83.1%, only 23.1% intended to practice. There are currently 49,708 Early Childhood Educators registered in good standing with the College of Early Childhood Educators (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2016b); however, the College of Early Childhood Educators does not have record of how many registered Early Childhood Educators are practicing within the field. As stated in the results, students intending to register with the CECE but not practice were planning to pursue careers in fields such as teaching, social work, child life, speech language pathology, occupational therapy, and research. Similarly, the CECE (2015) found that in a survey of 752 individuals who had registered with the college in the past year: 27% were seeking employment in a school setting, 19% wanted to work in an ECE setting, 18% planned to pursue further schooling, 4% were planning for a new career, and 8% responded “other”. It should be noted that the CECE had a response rate of 33%
for English speaking registrants, and 50% for French speaking registrants, meaning these findings may not be representative of RECE’s who did not respond.

Students in the current study indicated that they were registering with the CECE for reasons such as resume building, having a “backup” job, and to earn an additional qualification for other employment. Participant #109 stated, “I would rather be a teacher. I will work in child care until I get a teaching position if I have to.” It can be hypothesized that some individuals are registering with the College in order to demonstrate their membership in a recognized group that has registration requirements. These requirements include, but are not limited to, acquiring education in certain curriculum areas and spending the required hours in placements that strengthen pre-service Early Childhood Education students understanding of the early years. This communicates to employers in closely related fields that an individual is competent in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. The previous findings are very interesting, as it demonstrates that individuals are choosing to loosely identify with their professional membership to the CECE as an ECE, but are not fully engaging and practicing within the field.

Lastly, the study assessed Early Childhood Education students’ reasons for pursuing this degree, and the incentives and barriers to entering the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. A binomial logistic regression was initially run in order to understand whether intention to enter the field of Early Childhood Education and Care could be predicted by participants’ perceptions of barriers and incentives to enter the field. The results of this statistical analysis were insignificant. The reasons for these insignificant results could be attributed to the fact that some individuals have associated so strongly with their career choice to be an Early Childhood Educator that they are willing to overcome barriers to enter the field (Globe & Mail, 2013). Some participants who indicated that they want to pursue lifelong careers in the field of Early
Childhood Education and Care also reported wages and status as being *strong barriers* to entering the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

**Strengths**

Thus study has a number of strengths. The first, and most notable, strength is the population that this study accessed. There is very limited research regarding the pre-service Early Childhood Educators. The majority of the literature focuses on in-service ECEs or those who have left service. Accessing information regarding this population of up and coming ECEs can help us to shape and change policies so that they attract talented, passionate, and qualified professionals to the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. This is especially crucial due to the Ontario Provincial government’s commitment to 100,000 new child care spaces in the next five years (Ferns, 2016).

Secondly, using an online survey as the method of data collection for this study proved to be a strength. Collecting the data online allowed for participants to be recruited from a large geographical area (across Ontario), without incurring costly expenses. Recruitment from multiple institutions also provided a more representative sample of the population. These data were collected over a relatively short period of time (three weeks). Quantitative questions were mostly presented as multiple choice questions and drop down menus, while qualitative responses ranged from single word answers to multiple paragraphs. It was also sensitive to students’ busy schedules and allowed them to access the survey at a time that was convenient to them. Use of the Qualtrics software also allowed the survey could also be completed in multiple sittings if necessary.
Limitations

While the data collected from the pre-service Early Childhood Educators who opted to participate in this study was very informative, there were a number of limitations in this study. One of the major limitations of the study was the inability to recruit enough diploma students to create a comparison group; however, the response rates from degree students were sufficient to answer the research questions. This being said, selection-bias may also contribute to some of the study’s findings as those who participated where self-selected. Due to the recruitment strategies used for this study, self-selection bias was unavoidable. Self-selection bias may result in the absence of other perspectives that those who elected not to participate in the study hold. It is hypothesized that those who are definitely not intending to enter the field of Early Childhood Education and Care may choose not to participate in research which investigates and promotes entering the field of ECEC. This study may very well be a better representation of those students who are highly engaged pre-service Early Childhood Educators.

Due the inconsistencies in language when referring to a person who cares for children discussed at the beginning of the paper, for example, babysitter, Early Childhood Educator, Registered Early Childhood Educator, individuals participating in the study may define each of these terms in their own way. The majority of the questions asked about working in child care versus Early Childhood Education and Care, for example, “Would you want to work in child care after the completion of your post-secondary program?” It cannot be determined whether this had an impact on how participants answered. For example, maybe more participants would have indicated that they wish to work in the field if the questions had asked, “Would you want to work in Early Childhood Education and Care after the completion of your post-secondary program?” Further research regarding language and the impact that it has on students' seeing themselves as
ECE professionals would need to be conducted in order to determine how large of a limitation this was.

This study can only be generalized to pre-service Early Childhood Educators within Ontario. A unique practice in Ontario is the requirement that all practicing Early Childhood Educators must register with the College of Early Childhood Educators. Therefore, only programs that were approved by the College were included in the study. Pre-service Early Childhood Education students from Ontario may hold different views about the profession of Early Childhood Education and Care than others in Canada and people around the world due to the existence of the College of Early Childhood Educators. Registration fees may also act a deterrent from practicing within the field in Ontario; there were a few participants’ responses which included resistance to registering with the CECE due to fees. Participant #70 stated “...fees to be a RECE need to be less. We don't get paid as much...”.

Lastly, it should be noted that this study explored students’ intentions and beliefs regarding what they will do in the future. Circumstances such as not getting accepted into further schooling or inability to meet the program requirements to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators may affect their career outcomes. Therefore, individuals who indicated they will not work as an Early Childhood Educator may end up employed in the field after all, if other career intentions are not successful, and those who indicated they do want to work in the field may choose to do something else after completion of their degree.

**Future Directions**

In order to address the issues of generalizability to pre-service Early Childhood Educators outside of Ontario. Participants from other provinces could contribute different perspectives and would have varying experiences due to the lack of a formal regulatory body like the College of
Early Childhood Educators. Also, in Canada many provinces are seeing increases in spending spent on child care and increased media attention about child care accessibility and quality, this could have a large impact on students’ perceptions of the field of ECEC. Comparisons between countries around the world could also inform best practices, countries with students indicating they plan to enter the field could be used as case studies to inform best practices. These recruitment efforts should include students enrolled in diploma and degree programs.

Secondly, the depth of the research could be enhanced by including interviews or surveys to capture post-secondary instructors’ (including placement supervisors) views of students’ intentions. Key informant interviews can be used to collect information about how Early Childhood Education and Care is being talked about in the classrooms, gain insight about what post-secondary instructors are hearing from their students, as well as serve as a way to gather information from a diverse population of instructors. The data collected from instructors could allow us to get a better picture of the perceptions that post-secondary instructors have about the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. If instructors hold negative views about the value of Early Childhood Education and Care, this could explain some of the findings of the current study. This data could also be analyzed in comparison to student data in order to get an understanding of whether students are interpreting the Early Childhood Education and Care curriculum the way programs are intending for it to be interpreted. Being informed about both professors and students goals and conceptions about the field can help institutions to make more informed choices regarding curriculum, discourses of care, assignments, and placements. Examining the curriculum, what is being taught, and whether changes to curriculum may enhance students’ perceptions of the field would be beneficial.
Further application of gender theory and analysis must be applied now that a better understanding of the current population has been gained. Questions regarding whether individuals are choosing not to pursue female-dominated fields due to wage gaps and societal conceptions could greatly impact this field by allowing us to understanding another aspect of the multi-faceted recruitment and retention issues that the field of Early Childhood Education and Care faces. Feminist theories could aid in explaining many of the current issues with the recruiting and retaining of the degree qualified ECE workforce (Khoreva, 2002). Research completed by Behrend, Thompson, and Meade (2007) found that gender did play a role in career decision making processes in medical students and their methodology could be extended into other female-dominated fields such as ECEC. Understanding the role that gender plays in intention to enter a field or not enter a field could provide a large contribution to the field.

Lastly, future studies should aim to further investigate the negative attitudes that Early Childhood Education students express about working or intending to work in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. Many participants in this study expressed a passion for working with children, their motivation to make a difference, yet resonated with the barriers presented in the questionnaire. More research about how pre-service Early Childhood Educators build and commit to their professional identity as an Early Childhood Educator could help policy makers make changes that would attract young, qualified professionals to the field. Longitudinal research which follows pre-service Early Childhood Educators into their careers would also be beneficial as conclusions about trends in career trajectories could be made. It also may be beneficial to invest in research and changes that make the field more attractive. Several international examples of making education a highly respected, high paying career and the positive impacts that these attempts have had in terms of professionalization and student
outcomes can be found (e.g., Ingersoll & Perda; 2008 MacBeath, 2008). An example of these attempts to better the field include treating teaching like a clinical job such as nursing and requiring students to complete a residency, increasing entrance requirements to post-secondary programs, and advocating for better pay and working conditions. Also, New and Cochran (2007; as cited in Tukonic & Harwood, 2015) explained that, in France, all educators working with children 2 to 11 years of age receive the same degree and job title. This training model allows for teachers and ECEs to co-construct their professional identities (Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). Research that guides Ontario towards better training models that help to professionalize the field of ECEC would be very valuable.

Implications for Practice

This study adds to the extant literature about Early Childhood Education students in Canada, specifically Ontario. The findings of this study could be used by several key stakeholders including post-secondary instructors of Early Childhood Education programs, Early Childhood Education advocates, and the College of Early Childhood Educators. The information gained from this study provides further understanding of Early Childhood Education students’ perceptions of the field of Early Childhood Education, their goals after graduation, and the future of the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

The information can be used by all three key stakeholders named above to inform their practices. Post-secondary programs may gain a better picture of who their students are and what their goals are in turn allowing them to teach to their students’ needs and desires, for example creating experiential learning opportunities in the fields that students are interested in. Given the issues with recruiting and retaining qualified ECEs perhaps there is a need to re-examine the process for ECE recruitment for ECEC post-secondary programs. Better understanding of
students’ goals, intentions, and beliefs about the field of Early Childhood Education and Care can help post-secondary program instructors to make informed decisions about their teaching practices. Post-secondary instructors will have a better understanding of the levels of engagement that may be present in their classroom as well as the alternate career trajectories students may be pursuing (Watt & Richardson, 2008).

Child care advocates can use this information to help policy makers see the implications of not focusing on the workforce when trying to deliver quality child care. For example, the Government of Ontario has recently announced that over the next five years they will add 100,000 child care spaces (Government of Ontario, 2016). It has been estimated that it will take approximately 20,000 new Early Childhood Educators to staff these spaces (Ferns, 2016). If there is a lack of trained students willing to or wanting to enter the child care workforce, the government will struggle to add these additional spaces. Although wages, working conditions, and recognition have been longstanding issues within the field of Early Childhood Education and Care, it is clear that these perceptions are affecting those training to become Early Childhood Educators resulting in these individuals pursuing related, but different long-term career paths.

Finally, the College of Early Childhood Educators may be interested to know the number of individuals intending to register with the College as an Early Childhood Educator, but not intending to work within the field of Early Childhood Education and Care. These findings may inspire research that looks at profiling those registered with the College of Early Childhood Educators. Similar to this study, a report completed by the College of Early Childhood Educators (2011) stated their goals were to: 1) understand and better serve the membership of the profession and the public, 2) gain insight into the perceptions and challenges related to College registration, obtaining employment in the field of ECEC, and levels of professional confidence
and satisfaction, 3) and elicit an image of the future career aspirations of a cohort of recent graduate of Ontario’s approved ECE programs. However, no similar studies have been completed since, therefore this research could add to the research already completed. The research completed by the CECE only recruited individuals currently registered; this study accessed individuals who are choosing not to register as well. Lastly, the College of Early Childhood Educators has already begun to discuss the approval requirements for programs to allow students to be able to register directly with the College upon graduation (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2017). It is hypothesized that degree programs may be required to set stronger program outcomes, similar to Ontario colleges in order to better help students identify with their professional identity as an Early Childhood Educator. Ontario diploma Early Childhood Education programs all have the same vocational learning outcomes set by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2012), as follows:

1. Design, implement and evaluate inclusive and play-based early learning curriculum and programs that support children’s holistic development and are responsive to individual children’s and groups of children’s observed abilities, interests and ideas.

2. Establish and maintain inclusive early learning environments that support diverse, equitable and accessible developmental and learning opportunities for all children and their families.

3. Select and use a variety of screening tools, observation and documentation strategies to review, support and promote children’s learning across the continuum of early childhood development.

4. Establish and maintain responsive relationships with individual children, groups of children and families.
5. Assess, develop and maintain safe, healthy and quality early learning environments which meet the requirements of current legislation, agency policies and evidence-based practices in early learning.

6. Prepare and use professional written, verbal, nonverbal and electronic communications when working with children, families, colleagues, employers, and community partners.

7. Identify, select and apply relevant legislation, regulations, College of Early Childhood Educators Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics, policies and evidence-based practice guidelines, and interpret their impact on a variety of early learning environments.

8. Apply a developing personal philosophy of early learning in accordance with ethical and professional standards of Early Childhood Education practice.

9. Advocate for quality early learning environments and collaborate with members of the early learning team, families and community partners to establish and promote such settings.

10. Engage in reflective practice, develop learning goals and maintain an ongoing professional development plan in accordance with evidence-based practices in early learning and related fields.

11. Plan, implement and evaluate Aboriginal early learning curriculum, programs and environments that promote children’s, families and communities’ knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal peoples and their cultures.

It is quite possible that many degree programs that are approved to register with the CECE are already meeting these program outcomes, however more explicit expectations and programming to meet these goals may help students to feel more confident in their career choice to be ECEs. If the CECE requires stronger program outcomes, that are more closely aligned with the College of
Early Childhood Educators goals and policies, an increase in students willing to work in the field of ECEC may be noticed.

**Conclusion**

This study serves as a valuable contribution to knowledge and understanding of an understudied population, pre-service Early Childhood Educators enrolled in degree programs. The results suggest that many students enrolled in degree programs that allow them to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators upon their graduation are either choosing not to or choosing to registering but not practice. This study places a strong emphasis on the need for continued commitment from both the Provincial and Federal government to make provisions that make the field of Early Childhood Education and Care a more desirable career choice. While this study has deepened our understanding of who degree Early Childhood Education students are and their intentions after graduation, further investigation is needed into their lack of confidence that Early Childhood Education is a viable life-long career.

Research involving participants who are in-service and those who have left service is mirrored in the findings of this study. Pre-service ECEs like those already in the field, are primarily concerned about wages, working conditions, and the lack of respect and recognition that the profession receives. These concerns have implications for the development of professional identity. If the concerns of the workforce are not addressed, shortages in those wanting to enter the field may continue, resulting in further child care accessibility and availability issues for Ontario families. While the attention being paid to Early Childhood Education and Care is welcome it is crucial that the needs of the workforce are thought about to ensure quality for Ontario and Canada’s children and families.
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Ferns, C. (2016, October 27). Early Childhood Educators call on Wynne Government to commit to equal pay and decent work - The Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. Retrieved from
http://www.childcareontario.org/early_childhood_educators_call_on_wynne_government_to_commit_to_equal_pay_and_decent_work


doi:10.2304/ciec.2006.7.1.5


Appendices

Appendix A - Recruitment Materials

E-mail sent via list serve:

Dear Early Childhood Education Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study that will explore ECE students’ intentions to enter the field of Early Childhood Education as well as how pre-service ECEs form and define their professional identities. Dr. Tricia van Rhijn and Caitlyn Osborne at the University of Guelph are conducting this research and the data will be used for Caitlyn’s Master’s thesis project. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board.

Should you decide to participate in this study, you will have the opportunity to enter a draw for one of five $50 cash prizes (odds of winning approximately 1 in 50). The draw will take place immediately following the survey close and email notifications will be sent to all of the winners!

Full consent information and details regarding the study are available when you visit the survey web page. The survey is now available and you may complete it at your convenience. The survey will remain open until December 9th, 2016. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The survey url can be accessed at the following url: [URL]

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact either of the researchers (contact information follows):

- Dr. Tricia van Rhijn – 519-824-4120 ext. 52412 or tvanrhij@uoguelph.ca
- Caitlyn Osborne – 519-270-1023 or osbornec@uoguelph.ca

Note: Information sent to University of Guelph students will be addressed:

Dear CYF Student (child stream),

The letter will also include information clarifying what is meant by “child stream”

Students entering the child stream (meaning you are intending to take the courses to register as a qualified ECE upon the completion of your degree) of CYF are invited to participate…

Post made to program Facebook pages:

Early Childhood Education Students you are invited to participate in a research study that will explore ECE students’ intentions to enter the field of Early Childhood Education as well as how pre-service ECEs form and define their professional identities. Dr. Tricia van Rhijn and Caitlyn
Osborne at the University of Guelph are conducting this research and the data will be used for Caitlyn’s Master’s thesis project. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board.

Should you decide to participate in this study, you will have the opportunity to enter a draw for one of five $50 cash prizes (odds of winning approximately 1 in 50). The draw will take place immediately following the survey close and email notifications will be sent to all of the winners!

Full consent information and details regarding the study are available when you visit the survey web page. The survey is now available and you may complete it at your convenience. The survey will remain open until December 9th, 2016. It will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. The survey url can be accessed at the following url: URL

Poster attached to Facebook posts:
Appendix B - Initial Contact with Program E-mail

Hello ______,

My name is Caitlyn Osborne. I am a Master of Science student at the University of Guelph in the Department of Family Relations and Human Development. My research interests are related to Early Childhood Education and Care, specifically if students who complete recognized university degrees and diplomas choose to register with the Ontario College of Early Childhood Educators, as well as if they plan to practice as an Early Childhood Educator following completion of their studies.

I am contacting you to see if you would be willing to circulate my questionnaire to Early Childhood Education Students attending ________.

Should you be willing to circulate the questionnaire I will apply for ethics clearance at ________ and provide you with a copy of the ethics certificate. Please let me know if you are willing to circulate.

Also, feel free to contact me with any further questions you may have at osbornec@uoguelph.ca

Thank-you,
Caitlyn Osborne
MSc. Candidate
University of Guelph
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Response Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Consent                       |                                                                           | 1. Yes  
2. No                                                    |
| Researcher Created            | What is your current age?                                                 | Drop down Menu (17-100)                                    |
| Researcher Created            | What is your gender?                                                     | 1. Female  
2. Male  
3. You don’t have an option that applied to me. I identify as:  
   ____  
4. I choose not to answer      |
| Thorpe et al., 2011           | Did you complete any post-secondary education prior to your current program? | 1. Yes  
2. No  
3. I choose not to answer                                     |
| Researcher Created            | Was a program with an Early Childhood Education focus your first choice?  | 1. Yes  
2. No                                                    |
| Thorpe et al., 2011           | What was your first choice of program?                                   | Open text response                                         |
| Researcher Created            | Are you currently a registered member of the College of Early Childhood Educators? | 1. Yes  
2. No                                                    |
| Researcher Created            | What year of study are you currently enrolled in?                        | 1. First Year  
2. Second Year  
3. Third Year  
4. Fourth Year  
5. Fifth Year and/ or above                                     |
| Researcher Created            | Are you currently enrolled in a degree or diploma program?               | 1. Degree  
2. Diploma                                              |
| Researcher Created            | Which degree are you currently enrolled in and at what institution?      | 1. Bachelor of Applied Science in Child, Youth and Family Studies: Child Stream, University of Guelph  
2. Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Studies, Ryerson University  
3. Bachelor of Early Childhood Leadership, Fanshawe College  
4. Bachelor of Early Childhood Leadership, Conestoga College  
5. Bachelor of Child Development, George Brown  
6. Bachelor of Child Development Seneca  
7. Bachelor of Early Learning and Community Development, Algonquin  
8. Bachelor of Early Childhood Leadership, Sheridan |
| Researcher Created | Are you planning to or did you take the child stream courses required to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators upon the completion of your program? | 1. Yes  
2. No  
3. Maybe |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Researcher created | Which diploma program are you currently enrolled in and at what institution? | 1. Early Childhood Education Diploma, Fanshawe  
2. Early Childhood Education Diploma, Conestoga  
3. Early Childhood Education Diploma, Sheridan  
4. Early Childhood Education Diploma, Seneca  
5. Early Childhood Education Diploma, George Brown  
6. Early Childhood Education Diploma, Algonquin |
| Researcher Created | Do you plan to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators upon the completion of your program? | 1. Yes  
2. No |
| Researcher Created | What is your reasoning for not registering with the College of Early Childhood Educators? | Open text response |
| Researcher Created | What is your reasoning for registering with the College of Early Childhood Educators? | Open text response |
| Thorpe et al., 2011 | Would you want to work in child care after you complete your post-secondary program? | 1. No  
2. Preferably not  
3. Unsure  
4. Possible  
5. Yes |
| Researcher Created | What is your rationale for wanting to work in child care? | Open text response |
| Researcher Created | What is your rationale for not wanting to work in child care? | Open text response |
| Researcher Created | Why are you unsure about a career in Early Childhood Education? | Open text response |
| Researcher Created | You indicated that you wish to register with the College of Early Childhood Educators, but do not wish to practice (or are unsure about practicing), please further explain your rationale for registering but not practicing. | Open text response |
| Researcher Created | If you do not intend to practice as an ECE, what career path do you intend to pursue? | 1. Teaching  
2. Occupational therapy  
3. Speech language pathology  
4. Research based Master’s program  
5. Child life specialist |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher Created</th>
<th>Why are you considering pursuing a career in ${q://QID18/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoices}$</th>
<th>Open text response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sermon, 2014</td>
<td>Tell me about why you chose the Early Childhood Education program that you are currently enrolled in.</td>
<td>Open text response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorpe et al., 2011</td>
<td>Tell me about the pros and cons you think about when considering a career in Early Childhood Education and Care?</td>
<td>Open text response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorpe et al., 2011</td>
<td>Please indicate how each of the following factors affect your intentions about working in child care?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Level of Pay</td>
<td>1. Strong Barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work Conditions</td>
<td>2. Barrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity for Leadership</td>
<td>3. Unsure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>4. Incentive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Children’s Well Being</td>
<td>5. Strong Incentive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>How has your program of study impacted your view about working with young children?</td>
<td>Open text response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>What is your current Grade Point Average (GPA) rounded to the nearest percentage? (e.g. 78)</td>
<td>Open text response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>At this time have you completed a practicum and/ or placement?</td>
<td>1. Yes 2. No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>Would you describe your placement and/or practicum experience (in an Early Childhood Education environment) as positive? Please explain why or why not.</td>
<td>1. Yes _________ 2. No _________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>Do you think you have begun to develop a professional identity as an Early Childhood Educator?</td>
<td>1. Yes 2. No 3. I choose not to answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>Has anyone played a significant role in influencing your professional identity development?</td>
<td>Open text response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>What experiences have been influential in the formation of your professional identity?</td>
<td>Open text response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>How has your post-secondary program influenced your thinking about child care?</td>
<td>Open text response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>What is your image of people who work in child care?</td>
<td>Open text response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Created</td>
<td>Do you believe that Early Childhood Educators are seen as playing an important role in society? (For example, in comparison to teachers)</td>
<td>Open text response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, &amp; Zhao, 2016)</td>
<td>I think Early Childhood Education is a rewarding profession.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, &amp; Zhao, 2016)</td>
<td>I like Early Childhood Education.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, &amp; Zhao, 2016)</td>
<td>I admire the way that Early Childhood Educators live and work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, &amp; Zhao, 2016)</td>
<td>I think an Early Childhood Educators’ work is very interesting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| (Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, & Zhao, 2016) | I think being an Early Childhood Educator is fulfilling/ brings a sense of achievement. | 1. Strongly Disagree  
2. Disagree  
3. Agree  
4. Strongly Agree |
| (Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, & Zhao, 2016) | I frequently pay attention to information about the Early Childhood Education profession. |  
| (Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, & Zhao, 2016) | I often participate in training and lectures for Early Childhood Educators and Early Childhood Education promotion. |  
| (Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, & Zhao, 2016) | I often read literature related to Early Childhood Education. |  
| (Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, & Zhao, 2016) | If I choose to be an Early Childhood Educator in the future, I will choose to work as an Early Childhood Educator for an extended period of time. |  
| (Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, & Zhao, 2016) | I think the work environment for Early Childhood Educators is great. |  
| (Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, & Zhao, 2016) | I think the social status of Early Childhood Educators is high. |  
| (Zhang, Hawk, Zhang, & Zhao, 2016) | I think an Early Childhood Educator is a highly respected occupation. |  
| Researcher Created | What challenges do you think individuals might face as Early Childhood Educators? | Open text response |
| Researcher Created | List the qualities you would expect to find in an Early Childhood Educator that you would describe as professional. | Open text response |
| Researcher Created | If you have any additional comments or feedback that you would like to provide about training or pre-service Early Childhood Educators’ intentions to enter the field, please type them below. | Open text response |
Appendix D – Ethics Certificate

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

APPROVAL PERIOD: October 20, 2016
EXPIRY DATE: October 20, 2017
REB: G
REB NUMBER: 16SE026
TYPE OF REVIEW: Delegated Type 1
PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: van Rhijn, Tricia (tvanrhijn@uoguelph.ca)
DEPARTMENT: Family Relations & Applied Nutrition
SPONSOR(S): N/A
TITLE OF PROJECT: Pre-service early childhood educators career aspirations: A comparative analysis of diploma and degree students’ professional identity formation and intention to enter the field of early childhood education and care

The members of the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board have examined the protocol which describes the participation of the human participants in the above-named research project and considers the procedures, as described by the applicant, to conform to the University’s ethical standards and the Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2nd Edition.

The REB requires that researchers:
• Adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB.
• Receive approval from the REB for any modifications before they can be implemented.
• Report any change in the source of funding.
• Report unexpected events or incidental findings to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants, and the continuation of the protocol.
• Are responsible for ascertaining and complying with all applicable legal and regulatory requirements with respect to consent and the protection of privacy of participants in the jurisdiction of the research project.

The Principal Investigator must:
• Ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of facilities or institutions involved in the research are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.
• Submit a Status Report to the REB upon completion of the project. If the research is a multi-year project, a status report must be submitted annually prior to the expiry date. Failure to submit an annual status report will lead to your study being suspended and potentially terminated.

The approval for this protocol terminates on the EXPIRY DATE, or the term of your appointment or employment at the University of Guelph whichever comes first.

Signature: ___________________________ Date: October 20, 2016

Stephen P. Lewis
Chair, Research Ethics Board-General

Page 1 of 1
SURVEY TITLE
Pre-service Early Childhood Educators career aspirations: A comparative analysis of diploma and degree students’ professional identity formation and intention to enter the field of Early Childhood Education and Care.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE
My name is Caitlyn Osborne. I am a graduate student at University of Guelph, working with my faculty supervisor, Professor van Rhijn in the School/Department of Family Relations and Human Development. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study, which concerns exploring pre-service Early Childhood Educators (ECE) (a) intention to enter the field; (b) perceived barriers to entering the field of ECE; and (c) professional identity formation.

WHAT YOU ARE BEING ASKED TO DO
You are being asked to voluntarily complete this on-line survey. It involves questions about your professional identity and intention to enter the field of Early Childhood Education and Care and should take about 30 minutes to complete. In order for all of your answers to be collected you must go to the end of the survey and click ‘submit survey’. This will demonstrate your full consent to participation.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS
There is no direct benefit to you for taking part in this study. However, we believe you will find the experience beneficial in terms of sharing your attitudes, beliefs, and professional intentions while contributing to research that can guide policy for ECEs in Ontario.

WHAT ARE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU
Some of the survey questions may make you uncomfortable or upset or you may simply wish not to answer some questions. You are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or stop participating at any time by closing your browser. If you close your browser before getting to the end of the survey and do not confirm your consent to participate at the end of the survey by clicking the ‘submit’ button your information collected up to that point will not be used.

YOUR IDENTITY WILL BE PROTECTED
The survey is anonymous and as such will not be collecting information that will easily identify you, like your name or other unique identifiers. Although your Internet Protocol (IP) address can be tracked through the survey platform, the researcher/s will not be collecting this information. Your IP address may be observed only to ensure that one individual is not completing the survey multiple times.

HOW YOUR INFORMATION WILL BE PROTECTED AND STORED
This survey uses Qualtrics™, which is a United States of American (USA) company. Consequently, USA authorities under the provisions of the Patriot Act may access the survey data. If you would rather participate with an email or paper-based survey please contact the researchers. Please note email or paper-based surveys may allow your identity to be known to the researcher/s but if you select this option your information will be kept confidential.

To further protect your information, data stored by the researcher will be password protected and/or encrypted. Only the researcher/s named in this study will have access to the data as collected. Any future publications will include collective information (i.e., aggregate data). Your individual responses (i.e. raw data) will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

When the research is completed, the data will be stored in the University of Guelph Research Data Repository. Data stored in the repository is housed at Scholars Portal at the University of Toronto, and mounted using Dataverse platform. The primary investigator Dr. van Rhijn will be charged with stewardship of the data.

**INCENTIVES FOR PARTICPATION**
As a thank you for your time, you can enter a draw for a chance to win one of five $50 cash prizes. We estimate that 250 individuals will respond to the survey; this places the odds of winning at approximately 1 in 50. After submitting your responses, you will be asked if you would like to enter your email into the prize draw. Information to draw for the draw ill not be linked to the study data in any way; this identifying information will be stored separately and then destroyed after the draw has been made. The amount received is taxable. It is your responsibility to report the amount received for income tax purposes. Winners will be notified by email to arrange for delivery via electronic transfer of funds. Records of e-transfers will be provided to University of Guelph Financial Services.

**YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**
Participation in research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw your consent at any point up to clicking the submit button at the end of the survey. However, because the survey is anonymous, once you click the submit button at the end of the survey the researchers will not be able to determine which survey answers belong to you so your information cannot be withdrawn after that point.

Please note, that by clicking submit at the end of the study you are providing your consent for participation. By consenting to participate you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant.

**QUESTIONS**
If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact the researcher/s.

**Principal Investigator:**
Dr. Tricia van Rhijn, Assistant Professor, Family Relations and Applied Nutrition (FRAN), University of Guelph, 519-824-4120 ext. 52412 or tvanrhij@uoguelph.ca

**Co-Investigator:**
Caitlyn Osborne, MSc. Candidate, Family Relations and Applied Nutrition (FRAN), University of Guelph, 519-270-1023 or osbornec@uoguelph.ca

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board at rebchair@ryerson.ca (416) 979-5042.

Please print a copy of this page for your future reference.

START SURVEY < start survey button>

[SURVEY QUESTIONS]

[At the end of the survey include a SUBMIT button or check box stating] By clicking SUBMIT I am consenting to participate in this study.