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From the Editors' Desk

Rachel Langford, Jane Hewes, Sonya Hooper, and Monica Lysack

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From the Editors' Desk

by Rachel Langford, Jane Hewes, Sonya Harper, and Monica Lysack

This special issue of *Canadian Children* focuses on professionalism in early childhood education and care (ECEC). The genesis was a presentation organized by guest editors Rachel Langford (Ontario), Jane Hewes (Alberta), Sonya Hooper (Prince Edward Island), and Monica Lysack (then Saskatchewan) for the International Innovations in ECE conference in Victoria, BC, in 2012. As we collaborated on our presentation “Constructing Professionalism in Four Canadian Provinces,” we discovered a rich variety of innovations and developments, some systemic, others pilots, some common among provinces, others unique. This discovery led us to wonder about other provinces, other innovations, and the status of ECEC as an emerging profession in Canada.

The call for papers on the topic of professionalism yielded submissions that are as diverse as Canada. The articles raise more questions than they answer about evolving constructs of professionalism in ECEC as the reader is presented with multiple perspectives, philosophies, contradictions, and conundrums.

The evolution of professionalism in Canadian ECEC is directly related to how a system for ECEC is developing—or not—in Canada. ECEC is a provincial responsibility with a sporadic yet influential history of federal leadership and involvement. Responding to a decade of decline in federal leadership and funding for ECEC, provinces have chosen not to take up the slack, and development in almost all provinces has been minimal. An important reality we face in Canada is that ECEC is a disjointed patchwork across the country. Sadly, the only consistent factor among provinces is the inadequate access (number of regulated spaces) and varying quality, which are the direct result of severe underresourcing by governments at all levels. It is old news that Canada remains last when compared to ECEC systems in other OECD countries. UNICEF, too, in its report

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card on ECEC, shows Canada ranking last, with our only point coming from a generous interpretation of preservice professional preparation specific to ECEC. Thus postsecondary institutions, along with professional associations, have served as the foundation for ideas of ECEC professionalism in Canada and its further development.

The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) that operated from 2003 until it closed its doors as a result of federal cuts in 2013 did groundbreaking work identifying and defining the sector. The CCHRSC provided a national framework and a body of research and knowledge about the sector and our emerging profession. Its demise means the loss of the only national body positioned to coordinate and disseminate information related to the development of the profession.

Provincially, the establishment of the College of Early Childhood Educators in Ontario, the only one of its kind in North America, is a significant milestone for at least one province in Canada and a development in which some other provinces have expressed interest. But as the multiple perspectives in the articles urge new uncertainties, what are the implications of a professional regulatory body to the profession? Moreover, in what ways have recent initiatives by the sector and government, such as early learning curriculum frameworks, more ECE degree programs, and increasing professional development, contributed to understandings of professionalism? Drawing on the concept of a competent system in ECEC proposed by Urban, Vandenbroeck, Van Laere, Lazzari, and Peeters (2012) this issue reveals how professionalism unfolds at the individual, institutional and team, interinstitutional, and governance levels and is negotiated and constructed in and through an interplay of these multiple levels.

The disjointed patchwork approach to ECEC mirrors Canada's approach to developing professionalism, and the contributions to this journal are representative, in the opinions of the editors, of that diverse and uneven Canadian context. Despite a broad call for submissions to the journal to a national audience, the submissions received were limited in representation of Canada's provinces and diverse cultural, political, and ethnic voices. Yet the articles do represent a valuable range of perspectives, from the philosophical to the technical and much in between. What are different constructs of professionalism? How are processes of regulation, professional autonomy, and judgment played out in these constructs? In what ways, if at all, do the perspectives presented in the articles represent a particular Canadian approach for understanding ECEC professionalism?

Randa Khattar and Karyn Callaghan set the stage for this issue with big ideas and questions. They note in "Beyond Professionalism: Interrogating the Idea and Ideals" that "a conversation is burgeoning in local and international settings that questions narrow views of professionalism. This conversation, timely in the Canadian context, provokes us to think beyond technical, instrumental views of the early childhood educator." Khattar

and Callaghan ask: “Which competing ideas, values, and tools shape understandings of professionalism in early childhood? Which appear to narrow and which expand definitions of professionalism? Which seek to go ‘beyond professionalism’?”

In “Negotiating Status: The Impact of Union Contracts on the Professional Role of RECEs in Ontario’s Full-Day Kindergarten Programs,” Romona Gananathan notes that “the professional role of RECEs is evolving through the integration of care and education through FDK programs across Canada. While unions have historically played an integral role in improving the wages and working conditions of RECEs in the childcare sector, integration of early learning in the education sector presents a new opportunity to raise the professional profile and working conditions of RECEs.”

“The Glass Ceiling Effect: Mediating Influences on Early Years Educators’ Sense of Professionalism” by Stephanie Tukonic and Debra Harwood also uses Ontario’s full-day kindergarten as a lens through which to explore perceived limitations of professionalism and the factors that mediate and influence professional identity for early childhood educators compared to teachers. The authors urge consideration of new models of training/education and pathways for the co-construction of professional identities for teachers and educators.

In “Enhancing Professionalism and Quality Through Director Training and Collegial Mentoring,” Glory Ressler, Gillian Doherty, Tammy McCormick Ferguson, and Jonathan Lomotey report on the evaluation findings and lessons learned from a training program, Mentoring Pairs for Child Care (MPCC). MPCC combined a formal curriculum to enhance administrative and leadership knowledge and skills, a collegial learning and mentoring process, and activities related to professionalism. The findings suggest that the program was effective and provide some insight into policy and professional learning.

Drawing on an ethnographic study, Christine Massing explores how immigrant and refugee women enrolled in a postsecondary ECE program author their own professional identities. Massing describes how these identities are constructed from knowledge gained in a professional preparation program and from personal and cultural knowledges and beliefs.

In “ECEs as Childcare Advocates,” Lyndsay Macdonald, Brooke Richards, and Rachel Langford examine the commonly held notion that early childhood educators (ECEs) don’t make good advocates. Unfortunately, being an “advocate” and being an ECE “professional” are often viewed as contradictory, rather than complementary, roles. The authors examine whether ECEs can be advocates from the perspective of childcare movement actors in Manitoba and Ontario.

“From Child-Minders to Professionals: Insights From an Action Research Project on Prince Edward Island” is authored by the research team of Anna Baldacchino, Ray Doiron, Martha Gabriel, Alaina Roach O’Keefe, and Jessica McKenna, who have recently completed a project to facilitate action research initiatives developed and implemented by early childhood educators in early years centres on Prince Edward Island. The project describes how ECEs developed leadership skills and their sense of belonging to a community of learners.

In “Thinking in Moments of Not Knowing,” Iris Berger draws us full circle as she illuminates “the potentiality of the practice of pedagogical narration to orient educators toward complexity and thinking that is triggered by encounters with unexpected pedagogical situations. Such encounters have the potential to initiate educational judgment that is inspired by events and not by following known rules and standards. They invite thinking beyond generalizations and clichés and they orient future (more) responsive and ethically rich pedagogical ventures in ECE contexts.”

This dialogue of professionalism is happening all around us, yet it is clear that there is no cohesiveness, no system, and no clear path. We—all of us—are the co-constructors of professionalism. The articles in this issue provide a series of snapshots of perspectives, initiatives, and research that collectively provide an important, but only partial, view of the complex dynamics unfolding in the emerging profession of early childhood education and care in Canada. We trust that this is only the beginning of our journey of broadening and deepening our understandings of professionalism.

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