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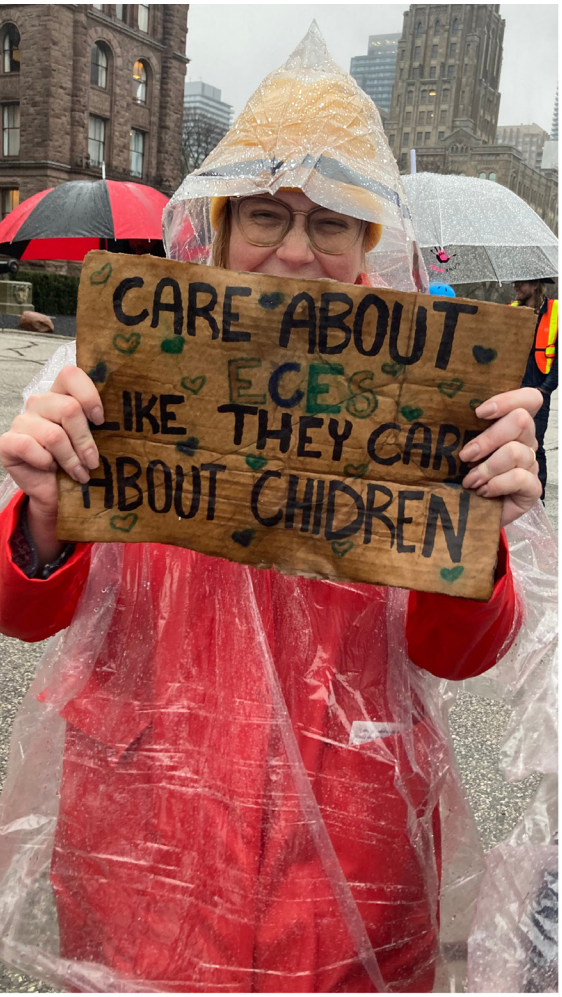
Fall/Winter 2022

Call for Proposals

ECE Voices

The Peer Reviewed Collection



Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario | Canada Post Publication Contract No. 40014752

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Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario

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The eceLINK is a quarterly publication of the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO). Since 1992, the publication has been distributed across Ontario to all our members and affiliate organizations. The eceLINK has a circulation of approximately 3000, reaching Early Childhood Educators working in different early learning and child care settings. They include students, frontline practitioners, administrators & supervisors, trainers and policy makers.
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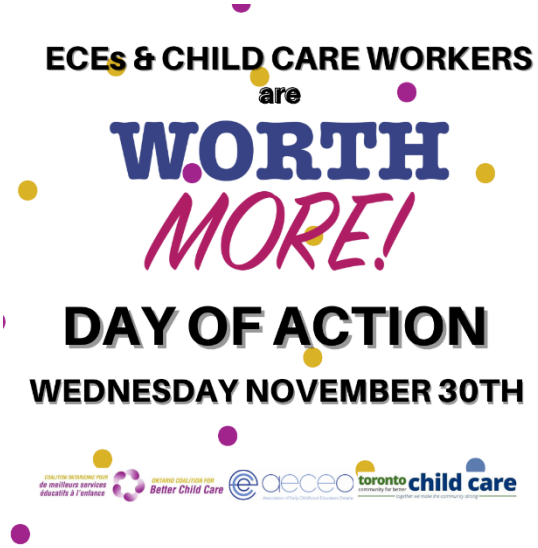

Bad weather was no match for the educators, child care workers, ECE students, families, children and community members who took part in the Day of Action on November 30th! We are in awe of the incredible advocacy in our community – whether through attending the rally at Queen's Park, planning a local action, engaging in meaningful conversations within their community, signing letters and petitions, or sharing about the urgent need for action online - we came together and raised our voices to say that "ECEs and Child Care Workers are Worth More!" The Ontario Day of Action was part of a National Day of Action organized by Child Care Now, and we look forward to our continued advocacy across the country.

Here are just some of the events and activities that took place across Ontario at child care programs and in the community:

Ottawa: Child Care Now Ottawa, Child Care Now and CUPE 2204 hosted a rally at Glebe Parents' Day Care - bringing families and educators together to raise their voices about the importance of the child care workforce.

Peterborough: The local Child Care Action Network held a "Shine A Light On The Child Care Crisis" evening event to call for better wages and benefits to help address the child care workforce crisis.

Waterloo Region: Early Years Coalition Waterloo Region tabled at a region-wide PD event, collected petition signatures, hosted a virtual lunch and learn for families – and got creative with #DotsForSpots activities for kids.

London: London Child Care Network hosted an early years town hall and Early Years Advocates London organized a bus with students, faculty, and community members to join the rally in Toronto

Northwestern Ontario: Families and educators from Superior Children's Centre joined together to host rallies in Wawa, Hornpayne and White River!

Sudbury: Discovery Early Learning staff were interviewed for a CBC news article discussing the child care workforce crisis and outlining what needs to be done.

Hamilton: YWCA Hamilton staff set up a 'WORTH MORE' display that highlighted ECE voices and invited people to sign the Child Care Now petition.

Toronto: A breakfast with MPPs, a Press Conference calling for a provincial Workforce Commission and a Workforce Strategy that focuses on decent work and pay for educators, and a huge rally were held at Queen's Park to say that ECEs & child care workers are #WorthMore.

Province-wide: In the evening a province-wide Phone Zap was held to demand that Ontario invest in its Child Care Workforce to build high-quality, accessible child care for all!

Stay tuned for more activities in the coming months!

AECEO 2022 AGM Results

Thank you to all members who participated in our AGM voting! All AGM motions were approved.

We would also like to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all who stood for nomination for their support for the AECEO through their willingness to stand for election and serve on the Board of Directors.

We bid a fond farewell with gratitude for their service to retiring Board members Maija Clarke, Brooke Richardson and Shannon Sveda.

Please see page 3 for the list of nominees who were elected to serve on the 2022-23 Provincial Board of Directors.

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The AECEO would like to acknowledge & thank the following contributors:

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COVER PHOTO: Photos from Nov 30th Day of Action events at Community of Maple Child Care Services, Peterborough, Queens Park and University of Toronto Early Learning Centre

ABOVE PHOTO: RECEs Sumayya Bobat and Bahareh Shakeri participate in the Nov. 30th Day of Action rally

Photo Credit: Tegan Ngoc Tho Nguyen

ECELINK DESIGN & LAYOUT
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Interview with Lyndsay Macdonald, incoming AECEO Board President

The AECEO is excited to introduce Lyndsay Macdonald as our new Board of Directors President. Many in the AECEO community have already had the pleasure of collaborating and advocating alongside Lyndsay, but we wanted to take this opportunity to introduce her to our members in this new role and get to know a bit more about her and her own ECE story. Lyndsay is a tireless advocate for educators, children and families and has played an instrumental role in developing the vision, strategy and philosophy of the AECEO over the past several years. The AECEO team looks forward to Lyndsay's leadership in this new role, and to working with all members of our newly elected Board of Directors in the year ahead!

~ Rachel Vickerson, Executive Director

What first drew you to becoming involved with the AECEO?

I first became an AECEO member in 2013 when I returned to Canada from my year abroad working as an ECE in Melbourne Australia. At the time, I was completing my Masters of Arts in Early Childhood Studies at Toronto Metropolitan University and working as the part-time National Coordinator for Child Care Now.

In 2014, I had the opportunity to participate in the fourth national child care policy conference, Child Care 2020 in Winnipeg. The conference was a life changing experience as I networked with early childhood educators, child care advocates, policy experts, researchers, economists, and unionists from across Canada.

During the conference, I attended an AECEO meeting and felt empowered to speak my mind. I spoke about how ECEs needed to be much more visible and vocal in the child care advocacy movement and in the messaging. I pointed to our lived experiences working in early learning programs with children and families and how sharing our stories could contribute to the movement's goals outlined in ChildCare2020: A Vision and a Way Forward. I argued that early childhood educators are knowledgeable, passionate, creative, caring and capable advocates and that we should have more opportunities to be heard and to play a role within the child care advocacy movement.

A few weeks later, a colleague suggested that I run for the AECEO Board of Directors and I was elected to the Board until stepping down in 2016 to become the Executive Coordinator of the AECEO.

What is your favourite part of being an ECE?

I am a proud and passionate Early Childhood Educator. My heart will always be with children, families, and ECEs in early learning programs. I am endlessly drawn to the pedagogical work and learning of an ECE, and the opportunities to challenge the status quo with children and families through co-learning.

My favourite thing about being an ECE would have to be our deep ability to care - for children, for families and for our profession. Learning happens through the caring relationships that we establish with children and I want society and governments to value that much more than

they do today. When I enter a zoom meeting with ECEs from across the province, when I attend a workshop with ECEs, when I visit ECEs at the Humber Child Development Centre, I feel that presence of care.

I entered this profession in 2006 because I wanted to work with children every day. After only 8 years in the profession, I moved on to work in policy and advocacy and no longer spent my days learning from and with children and families. Today, I am a professor of Early Childhood Education at Humber College and while my heart lies in early learning programs, I acknowledge that I am not working on the frontline, rather I have a secure and well-paid position as a full-time faculty member. I no longer experience the weight and stress of working full-time as an ECE and then working part-time as a server. As a college professor I have access to the forms of decent work that the majority of ECEs in this province do not have access to. I acknowledge this privilege and reality with great responsibility, and I know that I must continue to advocate for and with all ECEs, no matter where they work. I strive to empower ECEs everywhere to see themselves as powerful advocates who are capable of driving change.

Is there an AECEO project or initiative that holds a special place in your heart? Can you share a little about it?

Hands down the Decent Work Project, funded by the Atkinson Foundation. In 2016, when I stepped into the role of Executive Coordinator at the AECEO, the first chapter of the Decent Work project was passed over to me. It was a huge responsibility. Here was the opportunity to raise the voices of ECEs and to ensure they were heard. This was our opportunity to build our strength as a professional association that stands up for AECEO members and all ECEs in Ontario, no matter where they work.

In the first year of the project, we traveled around Ontario with our project partners, the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care and the Atkinson Centre. We hosted community forums where we listened to the voices of ECEs, child care workers, child care centre supervisors, directors, and center cooks. We visited their programs. We talked openly about the challenges that ECEs in the sector face and how we could advocate together. Their stories were published in the "I'm more than 'just' an ECE" report.

An important takeaway from the first chapter of our work was identifying and naming the ECE Professionalization Gap - heightened responsibilities, professional expectations, qualifications of ECEs, with scant improvements to their wages and working conditions.

In the next stage of the Decent Work project, we set out to build an ECE lead movement for decent work. We worked with the Institute for Change Leaders and our project partners to offer workshops and training to help ECEs advocate and organize across Ontario. We also worked with our Decent Work Taskforce to publish the Decent Work Charter and Workforce Strategy Recommendations.

I knew that we were making a difference when I was at a press conference and heard the executive director of a large charity speak about the importance of decent work for ECEs. Tears rolled and I felt immensely proud of the ECEs who were stepping into their power to have their voices heard.

Today, I am just as excited about the Decent Work Project as I was when we first started. I love to see how it has shaped who we are as the AECEO. The ECE lead movement for decent work is only growing in strength and numbers. To every ECE and ally who is part of the work, thank you, and let's get it done for today's ECEs and our future generations.

What are you most looking forward to in your new role?

That's a big question! I am looking forward to supporting the AECEO staff because they work hard, they care hard and they live the association's mission in everything they do. As I nestle into my role as president, I am committed to listening with an open mind and thinking together with the AECEO staff, board and membership.

I look forward advocating alongside devoted ECEs for what we know would solve the workforce crisis in Ontario - a real salary scale starting at $25 per hour for all child care workers and $30 per hour for Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs); benefits and pensions; paid sick days; professional development time; and paid programming time.

What kind of Ancestor do you hope to be?

Thinking of our roles as early childhood educators, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, despite the many challenges and struggles, how can we connect to our ancestors for knowledge and hope? What will we offer our communities to draw upon in their challenging times as we look to the future?

The AECEO Truth and Reconciliation Guiding Committee Elder Brenda Mason has inspired this conversation to share our stories and reflections about how you/we represent these stories in our lives and ECE practice—connected to ancestral knowledge while supporting young children and families. We would like to share our reflections, and we welcome others who are reading this to share as well. We want to start with Elder Brenda's story.

"As I walk into my office each morning and sit in my chair, my eyes land on the Eagle feather that was gifted to me to hold. I smile in greeting, and I am touched. Today, I am moved to reflect on *who I am, what I am, where do I come from, where has my journey taken me, and where is it leading me today?*

I thought of my Anishinaabe name, and the feeling came over me to dig deeper into how I walk and live my Anishinaabe name. What does it mean, what connection does it bring to me and what do I bring? How did this spirit name influence my life? As I was exploring how my Anishinaabe name has influenced my life and where it has taken me, I realized not only the influence it has but I started thinking about the wording of my Anishinaabe name: Imprint hanging Standing Women. The word I focused on was 'Imprint'.

Imprint made me think about our Ancestors and stories about how they left their footprints for us Indigenous People. Footprints that was full of life teachings and those teachings came alive within us when we listened. All these teachings gave guidance on our life journey. Our traditional way of life was never lost. The teachings, stories and our way of life as Indigenous people were hidden until it was time to come alive and that occurred in many ways. Many of the teachings came alive in our blood and hearts. We thought and believed we didn't know, but the teachings were within us all along. So, I am thinking what kind of imprints am I leaving? What kind of imprints do I want to leave for those that are coming behind me? I am thinking about the youth and children. What imprints am I leaving when I have been with people in a gathering?

It is with hope that I leave imprints of kindness, humility, love, and honesty. It is my hope that I am demonstrating the Seven Grandfather Teachings while being honest when I feel sad, angry, or displeased. It is with hope that I model how I address the difficult emotions with respect and finding a way to let go and continue to live a good life. It is with hope that I am demonstrating Mino-bimaadiziwin (living a good life) as my mom and dad had shown us in the way they lived their lives. I too want to leave imprints that provide guidance to be kind, respectful, honest, humble, brave to take risks, brave to be who we are, strength, demonstrating wisdom, and to love.

I realized I will never stop growing and all that I am is within. Many things that happened in my life woke me up to know what I needed was inside me all along. And it is with hope that I leave this a little bit of an imprint for those that are coming behind me. Meegwetch and I am grateful Creator."

~ Elder Brenda Mason

The Truth and Reconciliation Guiding Committee would like to encourage reflection on Elder Brenda Mason's important questions:

What kind of imprints am I leaving? What kind of footprints do I want to leave for those that are coming behind me? What imprints am I leaving when I have been with people in a *gathering?*

Please send your reflections to info@aeceo.ca, and they will be included in the next issue of eceLINK.

At the intersection of safety, ethics, mental health, and well-being: Disrupting the status quo, regulatory approach in Ontario

Statement prepared by Brooke Richardson, Adam Davies, and Michelle Jones and supported by the AECEO Board of Director and staff

Who are we and how are we evolving as an organization?

One of the AECEO's goals is to build the collective voice of Early Childhood Educators, who we trust to work creatively, collaboratively, and responsively with children, families, and communities. In doing this work, we understand educators, children, families, and communities as inevitably dependent and inextricably interdependent whereby responsive care relations are the foundation of good practice and quality care environments. While our mandate has evolved over time, one focus of our organization today is to critically engage with sociopolitical forces that undermine the work, value, and experiences of ECEs (and allied professionals) and advocate for change at the program, system, and public policy-level. We embrace our work as political, recognizing our responsibility to identify and challenge the chronic undervaluing of ECEs. But we also know we have much to learn. In the past few years, we have prioritized efforts to think with an anti-racist/anti-oppressive lens through ongoing engagement with Black, Indigenous, racialized, and newcomer educators, communities, children, and families. We are also working to establish stronger relationships with LGBTQIA2S communities to ensure we support gender and sexual minority educators, children, and families.

Why this statement?

This statement addresses two concerns. The first is the need to disclose certain mental or physical conditions or disorders on the College of Early Childhood Educator's renewal form, and the second is the recent partnership between the CECE and *People Connect*, an online mental health self-assessment tool aimed at ECE's mental health. We will deal with the first and then move onto the second.

Issue 1: Question 6 on the renewal form

We feel the inclusion of Question 6 on the CECE renewal form has the potential to jeopardize the health of RECEs and perpetuate systemic discrimination against those who are either diagnosed with a physical or mental health condition or perceived to be mentally unwell. Under *Issues Potentially Affecting Practice*, the required question asks:

"Do you have a physical or mental condition or disorder that affects your ability to practice the profession safely? Please only answer "yes" if you have never disclosed this information to the College, or if you have already disclosed it and this information has substantially changed since you did so."

We believe that this question is unclear, specifically, the College's ambiguous use of the word 'safely', which without further clarification inherently associates mental

or physical health with danger, risk, and incompetency, thereby perpetuating ableism and sanism. We take issue with this question because we believe that the diversity of ECEs should match that of the children and families in their care and the mental and physical needs of ECEs should be understood in their relational work as a strength.

Why does the CECE's *Membership Renewal Form* include this question?

As a professional body regulating and governing the profession in the public interest, the College has no responsibility to provide further accommodations to those with disabilities and/or mental illness. Instead, asking individual ECEs if they think they can "practice the professional safely" is a way for the College to mitigate the Ontario government's legal responsibility when incidences occur. If an ECE answers 'yes' to this question and provides the required documentation, they may no longer be in good standing with the College and unable to practice as an ECE in Ontario. However, if they answer 'no' and are found to have a condition or disorder later that the College believes applies, there could also be repercussions or personal liability. While neither answer provides ECEs with accommodation or support, the College is considered to have done their due diligence.

What are our concerns?

We are concerned about how the College's framing of this question individualizes and pathologizes mental and physical health, as well as perpetuates a culture of silencing in ECE. First, while physical and mental conditions or disorders are experienced individually, the systems and structures that ECEs interact with daily also play a role in mental and physical well-being. Along with being emotionally and physically laborious work, RECEs experience persistently low wages and inadequate health benefits, paid sick leave, and accommodations that contribute to both physical and mental conditions and disorders. For example, while an ECE may be feeling anxious individually, it could be because they are unsupported in their program or unable to pay their monthly bills, which is a collective issue caused by the current structure of childcare in Ontario. Through the question, the anxiety caused by a broken childcare system is refocussed as an individual problem and regarded as psychologically abnormal. This question from the College pathologizes the systemic issues in the field and further burdens RECEs with the individual responsibility for physical and mental wellness. Considering how barriers, particularly mental barriers, impact low income and/or women of colour, we worry about the impact this stigmatization of mental health conditions has on the highly gendered and racialized workforce of ECEC in Ontario.

Along with being emotionally and physically laborious work, RECEs experience persistently low wages and inadequate health benefits, paid sick leave, and accommodations that contribute to both physical and mental conditions and disorders.

Liability concerns on the part of the College also has the potential to jeopardize the health and well-being of ECEs because it may deter some ECEs from seeking a diagnosis that is needed to access services, assistive devices, or medications. While purchasing private healthcare services can offer more flexibility and alternative options without a formal diagnosis, the systemic issues in the field mean many ECEs cannot afford private services or do not have adequate employer-funded health benefits. Instead, ECEs may rely on access to publicly funded healthcare services that require a diagnosis from a medical professional. If educators are worried about disclosing a diagnosis and the repercussions that it may have on their registration with the College, they may avoid reaching out for support.

Finally, by not providing an explanation of what they mean by "safely", the College invites speculation about who can "practice the profession safely". This question implies

that if someone is not safe around young children, they are dangerous. This further contributes to a culture of silencing around mental health and perpetuates a widely accepted form of systematic discrimination referred to as *sanism*. *Sanism* "targets individuals who have been diagnosed with or who are believed to have a diagnosis related to madness" (Davies et al, 2022, p.21; LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016; Perlin, 1992). When mental illness (real or perceived) is associated with "danger" or "risk" of harm, sanism is perpetuated. The consequence for individual ECEs is that they are less likely to share any mental health struggles for legitimate fear of repercussions, stigma, or losing their registration with the College. In this way, while Question 6 may protect the CECE from liability concerns, it increases the potential harm to the ECE who may understandably avoid seeking formal medical/social support services. This may also have repercussions for the children/families who rely on that ECE's unwavering, responsive, reflective care. It is unethical to expect ECEs to continue to care *about* and *for* others when public bodies/policies refuse to care *about* and *for* them.

When the College asks ECEs to disclose any diagnosis for safety reasons and goes as far as to provide a self-assessment tool that relies on medicalized, diagnostic categories for mental health (discussed below), they stigmatize physical and mental health and harm ECEs, while doing little to minimize safety issues in the field. Ongoing discussions about the inclusion of this question in the annual renewal form and support for ECEs unsure how to answer this ambiguous but harmful question is needed.

Issue 2: People Connect

The CECE has recently partnered with an online mental health self-assessment tool called People Connect. While we welcome much-needed attention to the well-being/mental health of ECEs, we have some significant concerns about both the rationale and approach of this program (particularly as it pertains to the required disclosure of mental health issues discussed above). The first sentence on the College's new mental health web page reads: "To nurture and care for others, Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECEs) need the opportunity to nurture and care for themselves." While we do theoretically agree with this idea, we find it deeply problematic that this way of thinking, on its own, once again lets programs, systems, and societies off the care hook. ECE's are positioned as needing to care *more* and/or *better* (this time for themselves) rather than demanding that they are cared *about*, *for*, and *with* others. As has always been and continues to be the case, the inevitable human needs of ECEs, that are understandably overwhelmed by meeting the complex needs of children and families in chronically under-resourced environments, are conveniently ignored. *More* is added to their plate rather than redistributing the load. For example, in all outcomes to the self-assessment tool it is advised that: "In general, increasing physical activity, improving sleep, and spending more time with family/friends is beneficial". While we do not refute the truth of this statement, we wish to point out that the structural and material conditions are such that ECEs often do not have more time to sleep, hang out with friends/family, or engage in regular exercise. They are often working several jobs while trying to also care for their own children, parents, or families.

The bottom line is that unsustainable material realities of the ECEs caring about, for, and with others must be addressed at the micro (individual), meso (childcare programs), and macro level (public policy).

The second concern we have about People Connect is the self-assessment tool itself. Thankfully, People Connect is very clear in indicating that the tool is not a replacement for a formal medical diagnosis by a professional. Instead, it is described as "an online mental health self-assessment tool designed to help you understand symptoms of mental health conditions." Yet, it does clearly rely on diagnostic categories (e.g., depression, anxiety, eating disorder, bi-polar disorder) and scales that reflect the medicalization

of symptoms (mild, moderate, severe). It is entirely possible for the tool to indicate that one has **severe** symptoms of **depression** and **moderate** symptoms of **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**. This brings us back to our concerns about Question 6, sanism, and mental health stated above: even if we accept at face value that the information inputted to the tool is confidential and will not be shared with the CECE (despite having to input one's college registration number to registered with the tool), ECEs will likely feel unethical about answering "no" on Question 6 after receiving indications from the tool that they are experiencing mental health.

This tension will likely be compounded by the fact that to proceed with counselling requires resources: a $75/hour fee that may or may not be covered by health benefits (if the ECE has benefits). Beyond an initial no cost session finding the right "fit" with a counsellor, too many ECEs will once again be on their own in finding support, making time, and paying the fee ($75/hour is significant for a workforce that averages less than $25/hour). When finished the self-assessment, ECEs are taken to another online tool, offered by a third-party company, to "match" them with a counsellor. In this way, it is impossible not to wonder if this self-assessment tool is little more than a marketing mechanism for Inkblot, the company recently bought by private insurance company Green Shield Canada, to administrate the service.

Of course, we are in full support of ECEs having access to mental health professionals. What we are not comfortable with is the hyper-individualization of meeting the inevitable human needs of ECEs through the launching and promotion of People Connect.

What could be done to better support ECEs with mental/physical health needs?

The bottom line is that unsustainable material realities of the ECEs caring about, for, and with others must be addressed at the micro (individual), meso (childcare programs), and macro level (public policy). More supports (economic, political, social, relational) are needed in the sector – but not more support from ECEs. Support *about*, *for*, and *with* ECEs.

How do we get closer to this goal?

1. RECEs deserve to have access to the resources/supports necessary, including better health coverage, to engage in their work with children and families "safely" and ethically. For example, if a back injury is a safety concern, adequate access to health benefits that cover physiotherapy or massage, is necessary. If chronic fatigue/exhaustion or perhaps depression is/are a problem, structural issues in the field requiring RECEs to work more than one job or longer hours must be addressed for them to have the time/resources to care for their bodies. Structural issues preventing ECEs from sleeping more or engaging in regular physical activity must be named and addressed. This is on all of us, not the just the individual ECE.

2. ECEs, alongside others, deserve the opportunity to question and/or shift the culture of silence, fear, and shame in ECE. Through safe opportunities to think about sanism and ableism, in relation to physical or mental health, ECEs can acknowledge and celebrate (rather than hide) the spectrum of physical and mental needs represented in the workforce.

3. Programs, tools, and services that are offered in the name of support to ECEs must both grapple with the material realities of ECEs and ensure that ECEs are central to the creation/formation of anything developed to meet their needs. The knowledge and experiences of ECEs matter. ECEs know the issues and ECEs know what will help. ECEs are incredibly resourceful, creative, intelligent, and caring humans who deserve the opportunity to be seen, heard, and materially acknowledged at that micro, meso, and macro level.

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ECE Voices

Educators on the Same Page

By Melissa Comiskey and Stefani Murray

Early childhood educators in school settings are often a group that is overlooked and not recognized, nor valued in the profession of education. There are not many of us in this role and we have to come together to advocate for ourselves. We are educated with a diverse skill set in early childhood development, supporting children and families, and have a deep understanding of children in the early years. This expertise is why the full day kindergarten program was designed – so that teachers and ECEs could work together as a team to create the "ultimate" kindergarten program where all areas of children's learning are equally cared for and cultivated (Pascal, 2009). We collaborate with our colleagues to create engaging environments and experiences and support children through our specialized training, passion for education and our joy of lifelong learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

We are recent graduates of the Early Childhood Studies Bachelor of Arts program at Toronto Metropolitan University. We both have also been working frontline in the school sector as DECEs in the field since the beginning of Full Day Kindergarten. Completing an internship at the AECEO in Spring 2022 was a once in a lifetime opportunity. We were able to see what happens behind the scenes and all of the collaboration between different organizations in the ECE sector.

We came into the AECEO at the perfect time, as the Kindergarten Roundtable was happening in May 2022.The Kindergarten Roundtable was a shared space where ECEs working in the Kindergarten program had the opportunity to use their voice to contribute to what matters.This was an opportunity to listen to testimonials from RECEs and connect with others who work in the Full Day Kindergarten sector. It was a place where these ECEs shared their professional experiences and ways to enhance the program. We were both fortunate enough to attend the roundtable; this was a profound experience for us not only as students but as professionals whose voices matter.

The main concerns that were addressed at the Kindergarten Roundtable were: lack of planning time, inconsistency on the roles of ECEs in the classroom, lack of recognition as a part of the educator team, staff shortages, and burnout. It was through these concerns that we were able to connect to one another and have a true sense of unity. We were able to be seen and heard, and understand that we are not alone in our challenges. We understand that some partnerships work really well together and thrive, and this is the goal, but it is not attainable for all due to lack of consistency across schools. The Roundtable was an opportunity for us as a profession to come together and connect through a safe space where we felt valued and appreciated for who we are and what we stand for.

As graduates and frontline workers, we know firsthand that the changes we want and deserve are not happening, which has resulted in ECEs like ourselves ultimately leaving the field we love. Every educator should feel a sense of belonging as a valuable contributor, and deserves the opportunity to engage in meaningful work in a respectful environment. Unfortunately, schools and school

boards functioning under different sets of standards is only one of the many challenges we face in terms of equitable standards in our workplace.

During our internship, we had the opportunity to take a deep look at all of the concerns discussed during the Roundtable and come up with solutions at a classroom and system level, where:

- respect and appreciation would be at the forefront in all classrooms;
- educators are provided with planning time as a team;
- an acknowledgment of both teachers and DECEs, both school and boardwide;
- more funding would be provided to support curriculum and program planning through the annual budget.

Alongside these solutions, recognition through compensation and equal pay opportunities must be central. This is the change we want to see, so that valuable ECEs will stay in the Kindergarten sector and continue to provide enriched learning experiences. Educators nourish children through play-based learning, exploration and scaffolding an environment that not only leaves our students with self-regulated skills but a joy for learning. We truly only desire to see them thrive as their truest and most authentic selves. This can only happen when their educators are on the same page.

Stefani Murray
DECE since 2007

Melissa Comiskey
DECE since 2007

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An Early Childhood Educator's Poem:

From the Perspective of my Experiences in Full Day Kindergarten

I did it!

I am finally here, in a kindergarten classroom, and I'm about to experience what I envisioned in my dreams.

What do I expect to see?

I see children wondering about the changing leaves on a tree.
I see children asking questions "why is Suzie taller than me?"
I see the beginnings of a beautiful educator-child relationship, creating forever memories.

What do I hear?

I hear the children's infectious laughter swirling in the air, and children playing outside, running free without a care.

What do I feel?

I feel safe
I feel confident
I feel love
I feel excited

But I find myself here
A supposed "safe haven" but I'm drowning in the rules

My expectations are immediately distant and blurry
This isn't what I was promised

I'm alone asking these questions

Why can't he colour his bunny pink?
Why can't she write her name in coloured ink?
Is sitting on their hands going to make them listen better?
Why are the children forced to sit criss-cross applesauce?
What's must they walk in straight line for an entire period?

Who are we here for?
Why is there an emphasis on tracing the alphabet?
Erasing the bits that veer out off the pre-determined path

What if we listened?

We tell them it's Monday and cloudy and 15th of the month
They don't care and neither do I

I love what I do.
I am proud of who I am…of what I am

But I can't remain silent any longer..
I write my goals, feelings, and core values down everyday.
To remind me why I'm still here and why I, and the children, deserve better
Do my words ring true with you?
Will you stand with me?
Can I count on you?

If our children are the future, shouldn't we be rewriting the story?
If we are evolving, we need to stand strong and start by digging deep.
And what about our big questions: "what do I value about my role?" "What do I want to see change?"
We deserve to be trusted in what we do and say
I want to draw outside the lines
With the children
With their families
With my colleagues

I just didn't know, until I got there, that that seems to be too much to expect

~ A hopeful Early Childhood Educator

ECE Voices is an open-ended section featuring contributions from educators and ECE students. We invite anyone who has something to say to send us a submission – it does not have to be a specific number of words or written in a particular style – every style and length is welcome: blog posts, poetry, creative writing, documentation of the amazing work you are doing/seeing in the field etc etc. Feel free to think outside the box! If you are interested in submitting a piece to ECE Voices please email: info@aeceo.ca

Building Leadership & Learning Communities: Project Update

The Building Leadership and Learning Communities project continues on! During the summer months, our small and mighty team worked together to strategize our upcoming year. We worked with presenters to plan professional learning, collaborated with leaders of communities of practice, and worked together to create meaningful leadership opportunities for those across the sector. We look forward to this work coming into the light over the next few months.

Throughout Fall 2022, we have had the immense honor of hosting Dr. Hopi Martin Gichitaawa Oshkaabewis (Ojibwe Sacred Helper, Messenger, Fire Keeper, Lodge Caretaker) and the Learning Enrichment Foundation (LEF) for a four-part series about Listening to Land as Teacher. Each session began with sharing of the Seasonal Pedagogy; discussing Birth with the Summer Solstice in part 1, Movement with the Fall Equinox in part 2, Relationships with the Winter Solstice in part 3, and Passing with the Spring Equinox as the final part. In each session Dr. Hopi Martin shared how each of these are connected to the others, how meaningful each part is, and how we often see stories shared in this way. More information about this pedagogy can be found on Dr. Hopi Martin's website - https://edgeofthebush.ca/. Educators and supervisors from the LEF joined to share their experiences of incorporating the Seasonal Pedagogy into their work and to share their journey of learning from and alongside Dr. Hopi Martin and the children in their care. We are so grateful to LEF for their courage and for choosing the AECEO as the space for this sharing. If you were unable to join us for these sessions, AECEO members can watch a recording of the sessions by logging into their member portal on the AECEO website.

Participants of these sessions shared their sentiments, saying:

~ Absolutely love the virtual webinars you have been offering. They are meaningful and so timely - I love the opportunity to think and reflect with new perspectives.

~ It was wonderful! I was very happy to see diversity in presenters and participants.

~ Thank you for sharing your time and your learning with us in such a meaningful way. Each time I join with this group I feel a sense of calm and peaceful reflection.

~ I truly appreciate this knowledge being shared over multiple sessions. It allows me to go back into my practice, to reflect and come back and learn more with continued commitment.

~ It was a wholesome session and absolutely filled up my bucket.

We have learned a lot over the last year about offering professional learning opportunities for those in the early learning sector. From the beginning, we knew that the professional learning sessions needed to be meaningful, non-traditional, and accessible. We knew that any session offered needed to disrupt the status-quo by intentionally pushing against the dominant discourse, to work to further decolonize our practice, and to provide space for voices not often prioritized in professional learning. The AECEO professional learning sessions lead with compassion and care – they aim to meet educators

where they are, be nurturing rather than extractive, non-prescriptive and ultimately provide ideas for educators to think with and incorporate into their own context. The sessions are meant to be for educators to think about themselves, and to see the connection in how their own thinking, being, and reflecting inevitably influences those in their care.

With these key values in mind, a pathway to planning professional learning was developed. As we meet with folks interested in sharing through the AECEO platform, we ensure that these values are shared and highlighted. We work with presenters to ensure the content they are going to share reflects our community and we discuss the intent of the session. We also work closely with accessibility services to ensure that English ASL Interpretation and live closed captions are always available at every session, and with individual community members to ensure that any other accessibility needs are met so that anyone who wants to participate is able to.

This learning and planning pathway is now being utilized as we work to plan the 2023 Provincial Conference, which will take place from April 27th - 29th. The theme of this conference is *We Raise Each Other Up: ECEs building leadership and learning communities of joy, curiosity, and hope.* In this conference, we strive to reclaim our roles as educators through learning from each other, center the voices of educators through knowledge sharing and learn in community. ECEs will be building leadership and learning communities to create spaces that celebrate educator joy and curiosity and focus on the strengths of each other and our work. It will be an opportunity to share and learn from each other's stories, learn through connection and collaboration, raise each other up, and support each other in exploring ways to re-think, unlearn, and disrupt the status-quo. We are so grateful to the incredible members of the conference committee who are working alongside us to create a conference that is for ECEs, by ECEs. These educators have been meeting every few weeks, and determining the dates, structure and theme of the conference through incredible conversations about the values of professional learning and what is important to educators right now, and so much more.

A GIANT thank you and note of appreciation to our conference committee members:

Adenike O., Anisah R., Ashley G., Carolyn F., Charlotte P., Claudia G., Emma K., Jeanette H., Jenn W., Meike V., Melanie JT., Niluka PJ., Simone H., Sue T.

You can learn about each of the committee members and find out more about the Provincial Conference on our website: www.aeceo.ca/provincial_conference_2023

Alongside the professional learning hosted through the Building Leadership and Learning Communities project, we are also working to support ongoing communities of practice. Most recently, a regional group in the London area has been developed, led by Jessica Phillips. If you are interested in joining this group or learning more, you can check out their instagram account @eyalondon or you can email Jessica at jphillips2@fanshawec.ca. We are also developing another new Community of Practice for this year and are extremely excited to share that this group will be dedicated to pre-service educators. We are currently in conversation regarding the lead position for this group and hope to have more information to share, including contact information, in the next eceLINK issue.

Thank you to everyone who has become a part of this community; those that have joined a Community of Practice and found a space to share your voice and find your people, those that have participated in a professional learning session and reflected on, shared, and implemented your ideas and thoughts, and those that have joined membership meetings, training sessions, and advocacy campaigns. This work is so meaningful and worthwhile because of all of you. We are stronger together and will continue to build our collective voice!

We Raise Each Other Up: ECEs building leadership and learning communities of joy, curiosity and hope

Call for Proposals

Submissions due: Tuesday, January 9, 2023

We are very excited to invite all members of the early years community to submit proposals to present at our 2023 Provincial Conference. In an attempt to step away from a traditional academic gathering, we especially welcome and encourage submissions from early years professionals who haven't traditionally seen themselves as conference presenters. The conference will be held online, and all presentations will be on April 29, 2023.

The theme of our 2023 Provincial Conference is **We Raise Each Other Up: ECEs building leadership and learning communities of joy, curiosity and hope.** In this conference, we strive to reaffirm and reclaim our roles as educators, learn from each other, and center the voices of educators through knowledge sharing and learning. ECEs will build leadership and learning communities to create spaces that celebrate educator joy, curiosity, and focus on finding hope in the strength of each other and our work. It will be an opportunity to share and learn from each other's stories, learn through connection and collaboration, raise each other up, and support each other in exploring ways to re-think, unlearn, and disrupt the status-quo.

The conference aims to enable early years professionals to:

a) present and exchange their knowledges and experiences;

b) foster an emerging community with other early years professionals concerned with social justice issues;

c) take the impassioned early years community and provide the tools to imagine and transform the sector into an active space of resistance to structures of oppression; and

d) to create a space where "We Raise Each Other Up" through centering the voices and stories of early years professionals.

We know we need our community partners to help create a sector that everyone can thrive in - all are welcome to attend the conference.

We are truly excited to welcome you at the conference!

Proposal Submission Guidelines

The conference will provide a space for presentations, workshops, panel discussions, artistic performances, and/or creative projects. Holistic presentations are also welcome, because ECEs sometimes know a little bit of everything. You may submit a proposal for any of the following formats: presentation, workshop, panel, salon, and gallery. Please see format descriptions below for more information. Honorariums are available to support presenters who may benefit from financial aid to be able to present at the conference. More information on honorariums will be communicated after acceptance.

We encourage submissions from all early years professionals. Remember the conference will strive to be a safe space to share ideas and exchange knowledges.

i. **Formal Presentation submission:** An individual presentation with one to four co-presenters. Presentations will be approximately 50-minutes

in length, followed by a 25-minute discussion/ question period.

ii. **Workshop submission:** A workshop is a session that has more "doing" rather than "listening" compared to a formal presentation. The key difference between a workshop and a presentation is the hands-on element. In addition to discussions, workshops may involve group exercises, activities, and the practical applications of concepts learned. Presenters will facilitate a 75 minute workshop, inviting attendees to practice their skills or learn new ones. The facilitator(s) will facilitate the participation in their workshop.

iii. **Themed Panel submission:** A panel submission is a self-organized group of three to four presenters under a common theme. Panels will be approximately 50 minutes in length, followed by a 25 minute discussion/question period. A presenter will moderate the panel.

iv. **Salon submission:** A salon is held by an inspiring host(s), where people are invited to gather together to think, converse and share ideas around a particular topic. Salons are a place for exchanging ideas, receiving and giving feedback, and sharing intellectual, interdisciplinary work. Presenters will host a 75 minute salon, inviting attendees to engage in conversation and discussion around a guiding topic, subject, or questions. As the emphasis is on interaction and collaboration, there will be no formal presentation, but the host may choose to display brief information via PowerPoint or similar to initiate and guide the discussion. The host(s) will facilitate the participation and discussion in their salon room.

v. **Gallery submission:** We invite digital, poster and/or creative submissions (artworks, videos, multimedia, etc.) exploring the conference theme. These works will be curated into a digital gallery. The digital gallery permits presenters to include accompanying videos, sounds, texts, and narrations. Conference participants can engage with your work virtually, offering comments, questions, and feedback throughout the 3-day conference. Presenters will respond to participants asynchronously. Please indicate the format of your work: digital, poster, canvas, etc.

vi. The Call for Proposals is on the AECEO website. **The deadline for all submissions is January 9, 2023.** Proposals can only be submitted to the online portal: **https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdZHWGI_A5Q-yvxatkX6kkXm0Ca_CgseUx01OjxegUPE5VpDQ/viewform**

Submissions will be anonymized by AECEO Professional Learning Coordinator, Safra Najeemudeen, and provided to the Conference Committee for blind review. Proposals will be reviewed and selected based on creativity of approach and responsivity to the conference theme. You will be notified of the outcome of your proposal for presentations no later than March 1, 2023.

If you have any questions/concerns or require further information, please contact

AECEO Professional Learning Coordinator,
Safra Najeemudeen: snajeemudeen@aeceo.ca

Exploring Histories of ECEC to Reconceptualize "Normalcy" through Mad Studies: A Critical Proposition for Early Childhood Education and Care Post-Secondary Programs

Davies, A.W., Watson, D., Armstrong, B., Spring, L., Brewer, K.C., Shay, B., Purnell, A., & Adam, S.

Abstract

This article engages with the dominance of developmentalism within Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)—including its ongoing emphasis in post-secondary ECEC programs—in Ontario and Canada. We describe the potentials and possibilities for new directions for post-secondary ECEC curricula through Mad Studies investigations and inquiries. By describing Mad Studies, Fricker's (2007) theorization of epistemic injustice, and the relevance of encouraging post-secondary ECEC students to engage with intellectual questioning and curiosity, we – the authors – argue that post-secondary ECEC students' relationships with knowledge can provide new opportunities to disrupt developmentalism, normalcy, and encourage critical inquiry.

Key words

mad studies; post-secondary education; pre-service ECEC; developmentalism; madness

Author Biographies

Author 1: Dr. Adam Davies (they/them), Assistant Professor, Family Relations Relations and Human Development, University of Guelph

Dr. Adam W.J. Davies (they/them), PhD, RECE, OCT is an Assistant Professor of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition at the University of Guelph in Guelph, Ontario. Adam's research interests are critical disability studies, mad studies, queer theory, and poststructural feminism in Early Childhood Education and Care. Adam's SSHRC-funded research includes: an investigation of men and masculinities in Early Childhood Education and Care in Ontario, Canada; issues of gay, bisexual, and queer men, masculinities, body image, and nutritional supplement uptake; and, mental health and illness and professional identity in pre-service Early Childhood Education and Care. Adam holds a PhD in Curriculum Studies and Teacher Development, Sexual Diversity Studies and Women and Gender Studies from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario.

Author 2: Drew Watson (she/her), BASc, Child, Youth, and Family Student, University of Guelph

Drew Watson (she/her) is a fifth-year undergraduate Bachelor of Applied Science student at the University of Guelph studying child, youth, and family, with an interest and a minor in psychology. Drew is passionate about working with children and hopes to complete future graduate studies with a focus on child development, family relationships, and education.

Author 3: Ben Armstrong (he/him), Psychology BAH student, University of Guelph

Ben Armstrong (he/him) is a Bachelor of Arts student at the University of Guelph studying Psychology. Ben is on track to continue his education with a Masters of Arts in Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology. He looks forward to being able to help children and their families better understand mental health and reducing the stigma behind it.

Author 4: Lauren Spring, Teaching and Learning Consultant, Conestoga College

Dr. Lauren Spring is a Teaching and Learning Consultant with Conestoga College. She holds a PhD in Adult Education from the University of Toronto, and an MA in International Development and has been teaching for more than 15 years in Adult Education, Global Studies, Sociology, Gender Studies, Equity Studies, and with the School of the Environment and the Interdisciplinary Centre for Health and Society at the University of Toronto. Her primary research interests include arts-based approaches to adult education and community-building, trauma, critical disability and mad studies, research-based theatre, museum studies, unpaid care feminist pedagogies and ethics of care. Lauren has also worked as an Art Educator with diverse adult populations at the Art Gallery of Ontario since 2009.

Author 5: Bronte Shay (she/her), BASc, Couple and Family Therapy MSc Student, University of Guelph

Bronte Shay (she/her) is a Master of Science student at the University of Guelph studying Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, with a specialization in Couple and Family Therapy. Bronte looks forward to practicing in Ontario as a registered psychotherapist and anticipates focusing on the impacts of mental health stigma in Canada's Healthcare system. She plans to help address the major implications of such stigmas and the effects on those experiencing mental health crisis.

Author 6: Kailyn C. Brewer (she/her), Undergraduate Psychology Student, University of Guelph

Kailyn Chelsea Brewer is a recent Psychology graduate with her Honours Bachelor of Arts in both Psychology and Family Relations and Applied Nutrition (FRAN) at the University of Guelph. She is pursuing a MSc in Family Relations and Human Development to further her studies in clinical psychology, family relations, and human development. She is interested in romantic and family relationships through the lens of Queer Studies, and Mad Studies.

Author 7: Alexander Purnell, Undergraduate BASc student, University of Guelph

Alexander Purnell is an undergraduate student going into his final year at the University of Guelph. He is completing his degree in the Adult Development program with a minor in Psychology. He currently works as a Direct Support Worker with Community Living Guelph Wellington, which is an organization that supports over 500 adults living with developmental disabilities. As a mixed-race male, he is passionate about researching and dismantling social structures that oppress marginalized groups of people. Purnell's current research interests are focused on Mad Studies and its implications for early childhood education.

Author 8: Simon Adam, Associate Professor, York University

Simon Adam is a social scientist in nursing. His program of scholarship focuses on the mental health industry, its various institutional and discursive dimensions, the consumer/survivor/mad experience, and alternative and counter-hegemonic ways of conceptualizing human illness, suffering, and crisis. His work considers what is currently termed 'mental illness' as largely a product of social, economic, and political apparatuses, while examining how education, professionalization, and pop culture reproduce a medicalized way of understanding what is otherwise a normal human condition. Simon works with various communities, including psychiatric survivors and psychiatric consumers, mad people, neurodivergent people, and people who use drugs.

Exploring Histories of ECEC to Reconceptualize "Normalcy" through Mad Studies: A Critical Proposition for Early Childhood Education and Care Post-Secondary Programs

At this moment of "post" COVID-19 pandemic discourses, the continued devaluation of Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) and the field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) can be considered representative of the greater societal disregard towards care work, relationality, and feminine labour (Davies & Hoskin, 2021, 2022; Davies et al., 2022). Accordingly, we -the authors- turn to the crucial importance of post-secondary ECEC programs at both the college and university levels as sites for critical analysis. Such programs and spaces need to encourage critical questioning, inquiry, and engagement with both the histories of ECEC (Davies, 2022b) and new potentialities as we work against calls to "return to normal" (Karmiris, 2022). We argue that the pre-pandemic "normal" is not sustainable and is informed by violent histories and knowledges that continue within ECEC today, in particular, the ideology of developmentalism. As such, it becomes necessary to examine how norms and orientations toward developmentalism have been produced in post-secondary ECEC programs. This examination necessitates critical ruptures with past practices and knowledges (Souto-Manning, 2021), which we propose through Mad Studies (Davies, 2022a; LeFrançois et al., 2013) and new ways of imagining *the relationships* between post-secondary ECEC students, knowledge, children, education, and care, during "post" pandemic times.

We argue that it is crucial to bring critical questions and conversations regarding *epistemology* into post-secondary ECEC classrooms so that students can question what they know and how and why they know such "truths." Epistemology, broadly defined as the study of knowledge, "truth," and how individuals acquire knowledge (Osborne, 2001), is an important realm of reflection for post-secondary ECEC students. Specifically, we advocate bringing questions of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) and critical frameworks, such as Mad Studies (LeFrançois, 2013), into the post-secondary ECEC classroom (Davies et al., 2022). Such critically important but under-discussed frameworks have the potential to instigate classroom conversations about knowledge, reality, and different ways of knowing. Critical conversations offer students an opportunity to reconsider the taken-for-granted and unearth the relationship between hegemonic forms of knowledge—such as developmentalism—and structures of white supremacy and cis-heteropatriarchy (Burman, 2016; Cannella, 2005; Kessler & Swadener, 1992). We believe that social justice work in post-secondary ECEC involves cultivating opportunities for students to challenge ideas of normalcy and think critically about *the relationships* between knowledge production, history, and ECEC in the present.

In this article, we will explicate some of the histories behind both the foundation of ECEC in a Canadian context and post-secondary ECEC programs, including how historical ideas regarding children and development from the 18th–20th centuries have informed current emphasis on developmentalism in post-secondary ECEC. We acknowledge that this history is extensive and multifaceted in its scope; however, we bring together diverse sources to map out some of the foundations of ECEC in Canada. While doing this work, we describe how both the historical founding of developmental psychology and child studies in Canada informed the creation of nursery schools and eventually ECEC in Ontario. We then define *epistemic injustice* (Fricker, 2007) and elaborate on how it is embedded within post-

secondary ECEC in current times (through normative constructions of children and development) to make an argument for an increased focus on questions of epistemology in post-secondary ECEC. We draw attention to refocusing on Mad Studies and critical frameworks in post-secondary ECEC education to address epistemic injustice and issues of normalization in ECEC.

The Foundations of ECEC in Canada: Situating the Field

The history of ECEC in Canada is rooted in the philosophies of eighteenth-century Europe, specifically the writings of German pedagogue Frederich Froebel and Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Bertrand & Gestwicki, 2015; Bertrand, 2022). Developmentalism, defined as the scientific study of human development over the lifespan, focuses on normative development (Ali 2020), which "assumes that in their lifetime, an individual body will reproduce the same developmental stages as the development of the species body—what is known as cultural recapitulation" (Mills, 2020, p. 605). Developmentalism is highly informed by Enlightenment philosophies that emphasized children's unknowingness and pathway towards independence in adulthood through growth and maturation, ideas that impacted later developmental theorists, such as Jean Piaget (Epp & Brennan, 2018).

Though developmentalism has often been presented uncritically in ECEC research and teaching—as noted by reconceptualist critiques of developmentalism in ECEC (Cannella, 2005; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; see also Grieshaber & Blaise, 2019; Berman & Abawi, 2019)—it has been widely established by critical scholarship within and outside of psychology that developmentalism is entrenched in White cis-heteropatriarchal knowledge formations (Burman, 2016; Gill-Peterson, 2018; Mills, 2020; Varga, 2020). The theories of Froebel and Rousseau, as well as other Enlightenment philosophers and thinkers of the 18th–19th centuries, heavily influenced developmental psychology and theories on childhood, particularly notions that children were nature-like, innocent, and unfinished (Garnier, 2020; Hilgard, 1996). Enlightenment philosophical constructions of children, while still heavily deployed in developmental psychology and ECEC, have been critiqued for centralizing the subjectivities of White able-bodied heterosexual cisgender middle-class constructions of children (Burman, 2016; Varga, 2020). Correspondingly, it is important to note how such Euro-centric ideas of children that infiltrated the philosophies of the Enlightenment went on to inform child development theories and ECEC.

The first infant school in Europe was established by John Frederic Oberlin in France in 1770 to establish "good habits" in young children as a form of early intervention (Prochner, 2000). At this time, other infant school programs were almost non-existent until a refuge for infants was established in Paris in 1800 by Adelaide de Pastoret to assist working-class mothers. Both these programs were designed to aid the socioeconomically disadvantaged and to teach practices related to basic human hygiene, social manners, and practical skills (Prochner, 2000). Nineteenth-century public health developments emphasized moral interventions in the lives of the poor—in particular, poor mothers and children—through discourses that focused on the "moral deviancy" of the lower classes and the potential for socioeconomically disadvantaged children to become "criminals" (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006a). The first infant school in Canada was opened in Montreal, in 1828 (Prochner, 2000). In a similar fashion to European infant schools, Canadian infant schools offered care to socially disadvantaged children with the hope of providing quality living conditions and a moralizing education (Johnston et al., 2020; Prochner & Howe, 2000; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006a, 2006b). This history is important for contextualizing how education and care in the early years evolved throughout the 19th century as a means of social conditioning and intervention.

Infant schools were required to act as a "replacement home" by providing love to children and replicating mother–child dynamics to ensure children's ultimate

obedience and social conditioning (Prochner, 2009). An 1834 report in Montreal described infant schools using ideas of love and affection: "Inasmuch as the fundamental principle of the Infant School system is love, it should be the constant endeavour of the Teacher to win the affection of the children, and then cause them to feel pleasure in submission to his will" (British and Canadian Infant School Society 1834, p. 4, as cited in Prochner, 2009, p. 27). As Richardson (1989) explained, shaping children's moral development was a primary focus through the 19th century as children were not thought to have the capacity to be "mad." Towards the turn of the century, however, the focus shifted toward medicalizing childhood, developmental psychology, and child psychiatry (Richardson, 1989). Throughout both the 19th and 20th centuries, "good habits" were fostered in children by observation and by creating ideal social conditions for their development; this ensured that children's development could be fashioned, and ideal citizens could be produced (Prochner, 2009; Richardson, 1989). As will be noted, such interventions prescribed in the child studies and mental hygiene movements were targeted towards both socioeconomically disadvantaged mothers, who were considered in need of assistance to ensure they developed feminine and nurturing qualities, and their children, who were positioned as "at risk" due to their mother's societal standing (Gleason, 1999; Richardson, 1989). Moreover, discourses relating to developmentalism and adultist heroic approaches that intervene in children's behaviours and moral character speak less of children's need for "development" and intervention and more of an ontological[i] hierarchy, generated to situate adults as the ultimate arbiters of knowledge and conveyors of purported beneficial interventions onto the not-yet-fully-human[ii] child.

The Child Study Movement: Normalizing the Child

Interest in the development of children and the subsequent child study movement was initiated by American psychologist, G. Stanley Hall (Bradbury, 1937). In 1904, Hall published a book about his research into how (White middle-class) children develop (Varga, 2020), combining his interest in the study of children and the Mental Hygiene Movement and influencing later research in child development (Bradbury, 1937; Wright, 2000). Notably, the child study movement informed the foundations of day nurseries across Canada, particularly in Ontario, and post-secondary ECEC training programs' emphasis on developmental psychology (Varga, 1997, 2000). Despite developmentalism's roots in eugenics, exemplified in Hall's theorizing that child development replicates the development of the "human race" (Varga, 2020), many post-secondary ECEC programs still teach developmentalist theories informed by Hall without contextualizing their highly problematic and often violent histories (Davies, 2022a, 2022b; Davies et al., 2022).

The Mental Hygiene Movement also became influential in early twentieth-century Canada (Wright, 2000), with the Canadian National Committee for Mental Hygiene (CNCMH) established on January 26th, 1918, by Clifford W. Beers and C.M. Hincks (Richardson, 1989). Wright (2000) shows how the Mental Hygiene Movement provided the rationale for the University of Toronto and McGill University to open nursery schools to study children, with the goal of learning how to prevent adult mental illness. These two movements created the need to train teachers "properly" to be prepared to meet the needs of every child (Varga, 2000). As such, "Normal Schools," which were institutes for training future educators as well as women in the domestic sciences, were established to fill this need (Weigley, 1974).

Before the establishment of Normal Schools, very few credentials were needed to teach children (Varga, 2000). The goal of the Normal Schools was to cultivate idealized future teachers in terms of self-presentation, personality, and attire to ensure all future educators of children were "normalized" or standardized (Varga, 2000, p. 68). A notable Normal School was the Macdonald Institute at the University of Guelph, established in 1903; the Institute also housed domestic science programs for women in the 20th century (Falconer, 2016; Wilson, 2009).

The two main course offerings within the Institute were domestic science teaching and professional housekeeping (Wilson, 2009). These courses were designed for women and were structured to teach them to act and adhere to gender roles, including domestic caretaking, cooking, and eventually childrearing (Snell, 2003).

Essentially, these courses taught women how to be domestic figures and caretakers (Varga, 2000). The belief was that schools could be sites for intervention for socioeconomically disadvantaged children and their families (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006a). By training future educators, society would provide what was believed to be the best care for children (Prochner & Howe, 2000). More troubling, these courses included material that supported the eugenics movement and taught women extreme views on controlling reproduction to eliminate the "feebleminded," deemed ontologically inferior, and not-fully-human (Kelly et al., 2021, p. 18). Researchers have investigated classes taught at the Macdonald Institute to uncover significant histories of eugenics content and discovered the institute historically taught material about classifying "fit" and "unfit" societal groups, including those with disabilities and Indigenous children (Stonefish et al., 2019, p. 13).

The Mental Hygiene Movement was inspired by the general mistreatment of those classified as mentally ill; Clifford Whittingham Beers, himself a victim of the treatments of the day during a stay at an asylum, attempted to improve mental health care by calling for a health agency devoted to mental hygiene (Žalnora & Miežutavičiūtė, 2016). The Mental Hygiene Movement spurred a shift in viewpoints on treating mental health—from treatment and prevention to the "promotion of robust mental health" (Wright, 2000, p. 96), leading the charge for what is now known as developmental psychology (Wright, 2000). The Mental Hygiene Movement looked at how one can help mental health through societal factors (Žalnora & Miežutavičiūtė, 2016). In contrast, eugenicists believed that the only way to cure mental illness was to eliminate "bad genes" by sterilizing those deemed "unfit" for reproduction.

G. Stanley Hall's (1904) theorizing in child studies forwarded recapitulationist rhetoric (i.e., that individual development repeated the development of the race) that drew from eugenicist thinker Ernst Haeckel (Varga, 2020). According to Varga (2020), the early foundations of the child study movement and developmental psychology forwarded beliefs in an "animal–racial evolutionary interpretation of behaviour" (p. 3) that posited that the habituation of the normative development of the White child was a way to promote the "betterment" of the White race (p. 3). This line of thought linked animality to other-than-White races, equating racialized subjectivities to barbarism and a marginality whose historical strands remain tightly woven within the ECEC discipline today. Such racist and eugenicist teachings were entrenched in the child studies movement of the early twentieth century (see Kelly et al., 2021; Varga, 2020). Hall's student, Arnold Gesell, influenced the common "ages and stages" approach to developmental psychology and theorized "a timetable of normative chronological development of children's emotional, social, physical, and mental abilities" (Varga, 2011, p. 144). Gesell reportedly believed that White upper-middle class values were to be encouraged in children's development—even choosing to only research this demographic himself—and saw the reproduction of such values as a component of "racial betterment" (Varga, 1997, 2011). Gill-Peterson (2018) describes how "Hall saw the science of Child Study as leading directly to the practice of cultivating children and adolescents into normative adults, for nature alone was insufficient to the project of evolution" (p. 48). These discourses fueled ideas of proper mothering and idealized images of ECEs.

What's Harmful about Developmentalism?

Developmentalism and theories of child development superimpose a certain idea of "normalcy" and place children in the position of aspiring to be "normal" (LeFrançois, 2020). The developmentalist and dualistic logic of viewing children as "normal" or "abnormal" in post-secondary education means ECEs

entering the field are contributing to the normalist culture whereby children are compared to White upper-middle class cis-heterosexual children (given psychiatry's roots). Post-secondary students—especially Mad post-secondary ECE students—experience epistemic injustice due to a lack of alternative theories to developmentalism.

A critique of developmentalism is its utilization of normative developmental stages in childhood, which marginalizes children who do not follow these stages, reinforcing positivism's reign on post-secondary ECEC programs (Ali, 2020; Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Lubeck, 1998). Another criticism of developmentalism is that it views children according to their future activities and value as an adult, in particular assessing children in relationship with seemingly universalized standards that are heteronormative, ableist, and ethnocentric (Burman, 2016; Johnston et al., 2020; Lubeck, 1994). Specifically, children are understood as being in a critical period of development in which they must achieve developmental milestones to become productive and skilled adults within a neoliberal capitalist economic system that reproduces societal inequities (Johnston et al., 2020; Lubeck, 1994). Again, what is demonstrated here is evidence of the generation of a certain ontological stratification, where the child, as an "incomplete adult," must conform to specific and rigid developmental stages in order to develop into the adult possessing a fully human status. Developmentalism has also been critiqued since the research in the field has been based on Westernized North American and European populations, leaving out vast cultural and societal sectors (Cannella, 2005; Ali, 2020; Lubeck, 1994). Moreover, developmental studies, particularly those from a positivist framework, lack a focus on understanding children's development from the perspectives of children (Ali, 2020).

Another concern early childhood researchers have raised about developmentalism is a minimal interest in alternative perspectives to the psychological sciences (Kessler & Swadener, 1992; Lubeck, 1994, 1998; Zaman & Anderson-Nathe, 2021). For example, Piaget's cognitive developmental theory is still being taught to post-secondary ECEC and elementary education students and is favoured in early childhood education, with the history of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in ECEC curricula being informed by Piaget's cognitive and stage-based ideas (Cannella, 2005; Steele & Nicholson, 2019; Zaman & Anderson-Nathe, 2021). Such notions are particularly harmful towards queer and transgender children, who are considered to be "too young" to know their own gender or sexual identity. This advances the construction of children as "innocent" and unable to comprehend content on queer and trans identities and families, for example (Davies et al., 2021; Steele & Nicholson, 2019).

Epistemic Injustice: Considering Mad Knowledges to Disrupt Developmentalism

Despite significant critiques of developmentalism (e.g., Burman, 2016; Cannella, 1997, 2005), it remains the dominant epistemology within post-secondary ECEC programs and training worldwide (Davies, 2022a; Krieg, 2010; Wong, 2022). Knowledge frameworks that critique developmentalism, particularly frameworks informed by critical theory or cultural studies, are not often deemed relevant for post-secondary ECEC students. For example, Mad Studies, or critiques of the social stigmatization, psychiatrization, and devaluation of individuals who are deemed Mad, identify as Mad[iii], or who have experienced psychiatrization and sanist discrimination (Beresford & Russo, 2021; LeFrançois, 2013; Reaume, 2021) are not frameworks taught in post-secondary ECEC coursework (Davies, 2022a, 2022b; Davies et al., 2022). Moreover, Mad Studies specifically critiques how psychologized, psychiatric, and scientized conceptions of children reinforce "normalcy" by attempting to enforce pre-determined ideas of development that are taught as unquestionable, universal truths (LeFrançois, 2020) and denying Mad children, youth, and adults' understandings and interpretations of their distress (Golightley, 2020; Procknow, 2019). Post-secondary ECEC students are generally not provided with

opportunities to reflect on the knowledge they learn, its history, or who is silenced or ignored by dominant frameworks. Within the field of ECEC, post-secondary ECEC students, educators, and children face *epistemic injustic*e (Fricker, 2007) through the denial of different ways of knowing and through accreditation standards that present developmentalism as the most important form of knowledge for post-secondary ECE students' professional practices and learnings (Davies, 2022a). Specifically, for Mad post-secondary students, the lack of alternative frameworks being taught prevents students from accessing Mad Studies and knowledge to help them understand their own mental and psychological experiences outside of pathology.

This contemporary epistemic problem, having been influenced and regulated by the problematic discourses we discuss here, is contingent on a certain ontological structuring of the child in relation to the adult and the racialized child in relation to the White child. Given our contention of the framing of children as ontologically inferior and "incomplete" humans, the epistemic issue becomes entangled with the issue of ontology, and both epistemic and ontological injustices surface. Thus, while we refer to epistemic injustice in this paper, we likewise understand that this extends to ontology and combines as onto epistemic marginality[iv].

Sanism, or the systemic discrimination against and dismissal of those diagnosed with a mental illness or perceived to be mentally ill (LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016; Perlin, 1992), is a form of social oppression that is interconnected with other inequalities, such as sexism, classism, and racism and is based on the unjust negative stereotyping of Mad individuals and madness (Gosselin, 2022). LeBlanc and Kinsella (2016) articulate how sanism produces forms of *epistemic injustice* that Mad individuals experience. Epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007) is the systematic neglect, dismissal, and discreditation of groups based on negative stereotypes and stigmas based on the ascription of infrahuman status to those who identify as Mad (LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016). As explained by Mills and LeFrançois (2018), "the infantilization of colonized, mad and 'crip' subjects has over time become enshrined within Western legal doctrines and legislation, all the while reproducing the notion that children themselves are naturally incompetent" (p. 517). This further enhances the idea of normalcy, and places children, especially mentally ill children, as unequal citizens who cannot access understandings or share their experiences in ways that could assist them in making sense of their world. Mills and LeFrançois (2018) note how the discrediting of children's lived experiences and those deemed "mentally ill" is propagated through developmentalist ideas that construct children and those with mental illness as inferior, incomplete, and irrational. Hence, mad children are doubly ontologically marginalized, first in relation to adults, given their "incomplete" humanity, and second, in relation to other children deemed "mentally intact."

Listening to children and honouring their voices and experiences are central tenets of ECEC (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Despite increased conversations regarding children's rights in ECEC, dominant developmentalist knowledge frameworks in the field position children's understandings of their experiences as incomplete in comparison with biomedical and developmental knowledges from adult "expert figures" (Abawi & Berman, 2019; Davies, Simone-Balter, & van Rhijn, 2021; Langford, 2020; Steele & Nicholson, 2019). Questioning and challenging children's understandings of the world and imposing developmentalist and interventionist frameworks as interpretations of children's behaviours can be considered a form of epistemic injustice (Steele & Nicholson, 2019).

Epistemic Injustice: Testimonial and Hermeneutic

Fricker (2007) describes epistemic injustice in two forms—testimonial injustice and hermeneutic injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when an individual's voice and opinions are not heard or listened to due to systemic discrimination, stigmatization, or discreditation that prejudices the listener's perspective (LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016). LeBlanc and Kinsella (2016) relate this to how sanist ideologies actively discredit Mad individuals

as speakers and knowledge holders of their own experiences. Such discrimination against Mad people hinders academic scholarship by maintaining psychiatric hegemony through the dominance of the psychological and psychiatric disciplines and ignoring critiques of medical institutions such as psychiatry or medicine (Newbigging & Ridley, 2018). The hegemony of psychiatry and psychology within helping professions such as ECEC can be seen through the incorporation of special education into post-secondary ECEC without consideration of the voices of disabled individuals.

Hermeneutic injustice is defined as the mis-interpretation and silencing of one's perspectives and perceptions (Fricker, 2007). This misinterpretation and silencing is due to distorted and discriminatory views that exclude specific identity groups and communities from creating and producing their own knowledge and understandings of the world (LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016). Hermeneutic injustice presents itself through individuals being denied the resources or knowledge to make sense of or interpret their own lived experiences, indicating a prohibition on the ability to express oneself (LeBlanc & Kinsella, 2016). Citing Fricker (2007), Leblanc and Kinsella (2016) describe how not providing a plethora of perspectives and frameworks to understand Mad people's experiences can reify their subjugation under biomedical conceptions of madness and pathology. For example, though "mental health/illness" has received much attention in recent years, and corporate-sponsored "de-stigmatization" campaigns are ubiquitous, most often the stories that are shared follow a similar, straightforward narrative that focuses on *recovery* instead of *resistance*. Costa et al. (2012) call attention to how mental health organizations often co-opt consumer/survivor narratives to serve their interests (primarily economic). In their article, Costa et al. (2012) offer suggestions for mad-identified folks to ensure their "whole" story is told on their terms, and not commodified by external forces in ways that uphold existing narratives that pathologize and individualize what Burstow (2014) would refer to as "problems in living" (p. 83). Personal narratives are one very powerful tool to disrupt social and epistemic injustice.

Another example of hermeneutic injustice is reflected in LeFrançois's (2020) work as they describe how children and young people diagnosed with mental illnesses "are not seen as knowledge holders because of their status as 'mentally ill' and they are seen as lacking insight because their understandings are not consistent with biomedical explanations" (p. 182). Such forms of epistemic injustice enact what Mills and LeFrançois (2018) describe as "a dual epistemic injustice, whereby those deemed childlike and actual children are seen as cognitively subpar, while at the same time other/ed ways of knowing children are actively denigrated by Western models—destroying epistemological diversity in relation to children" (p. 518). It is necessary to examine how such forms of epistemic injustice and violence are embedded in singular stories (Adichie, 2009) of children and educators that proliferate within post-secondary ECEC training programs by centralizing developmentalist and psychological narratives and theories. While post-secondary ECEC programs train future practitioners in the various diagnostic categories of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), post-secondary faculty and instructors do not often discuss the increasing psychiatrization of society through ever-expanding diagnostic labels, nor are the instructors trained in Mad Studies or critical approaches to diagnostic categories (Davies, 2022a; Davies et al., 2022).

Epistemic Injustice and the Psychiatric Apparatus

Whether or not one supports current psychiatric approaches to understanding and assisting people in distress, it is indisputable that psychiatric diagnoses are historically and culturally contingent and are discriminatory (Davies, 2022a; Metzl, 2011). Diagnoses that once were commonplace (e.g., "homosexuality" or "hysteria") have since been removed from the manual as society has evolved and prejudices have been acknowledged. As Kingma (2013) reminds us: "the concept of mental illness relies on norms or values which define disorders as bad or undesirable and which are sometimes even understood as socially or historically constructed" (p. 365, as cited in Jelscha, 2017, p. 486).

A social model, as opposed to a medical model, looks beyond the individual to the structures and systems in which they struggle. In the case of an ECEC classroom, for example, rather than focus solely on a child's behaviour or development, a social model would instead consider the classroom environment. For example, what should the educator–student ratio be? If childcare centres are underfunded/understaffed, what does this say about society's overall values? What do educators truly want children to learn while interacting with peers at a young age? Or consider if social structures may be contributing to an unstable home life for the child. Do both parents need to work long hours and therefore have less time to read to their child? Is the child from a community that has been collectively traumatized? Is the child's household able to afford nutritious food?

One might think it suspect that the first edition of the DSM contained 128 diagnoses and in the most recent fifth edition (DSM-5) there are more than 300 (Coppock, 2020). This proliferation of diagnostic categories has been critiqued by psychiatrists, such as Dr. Allen Frances (2014), who have been involved in task forces for various editions of the DSM. The American Psychiatric Association (2013) has published materials explaining their process for updating or creating new disorders in the DSM, including establishing a working group and evaluating the intended usage and uniqueness of the proposed diagnostic category. However, LeFrançois and Diamond (2014) articulate how the marginalization of children diagnosed with mental illnesses begins at the diagnosis itself when psychiatrized children are provided pharmaceuticals. Moreover, children's own interpretations of their experiences with mental distress are ignored—thereby perpetuating epistemic injustice—as psychiatrists often only consult with adults (usually parents). Thus, a child's diagnosis is commonly based on the adult's/parents' interpretations of their experiences with the child, but not the experiences of the child themselves (LeFrançois & Diamond, 2014). Addressing the ontological privileging of adults' voices over those of children and epistemic injustice in post-secondary ECEC involves teaching students about different knowledge frameworks and epistemology. This can allow pre-service ECEC students to make their own decisions about the forms of knowledge they use within their professional practices.

Post-secondary Early Childhood Teacher Education in Canada

Post-secondary education for future ECEs began in an Ontario context after the emergence of the child study movement. The first training institute for future daycare workers was opened in October 1942 in Toronto, entitled the Provincial Day Nursey Training Centre (PDNTC). As Varga (2000) described, the PDNTC was heavily influenced by the Institute for Child Study at the University of Toronto and was run by numerous graduates of the Institute. The principles of child studies and developmental psychology continued to be influential within post-secondary ECEC training programs as college and university programs began to appear throughout the second half of the twentieth century in Canada at institutions such as Ryerson Polytechnic (now Toronto Metropolitan University) and Seneca College (Varga, 2000). Throughout the twentieth century, the development of ECEC occurred within the context of the medicalization and psychologization of children and youth, meaning that the early years became intertwined with public health, psychiatry, medical sciences, nursing, and other interventionist professions (Richardson, 1989). The "Normal Schools" for ECEC educators post-secondary programs ensured that ECEC practitioners "demonstrate[d] the personality and behavioural characteristics of the 'good' teacher, as defined by the normal school" (Varga, 2000, p. 70). As described, such personality and behavioural characteristics, particularly for women who worked with young children, involved highly feminized attributes that expressed motherly ideals that were emphasized through Early Years theorists, such as Frederich Froebel (Ailwood, 2007).

Post-secondary ECEC programs in Ontario, Canada —at both the college and university levels—trained future educators to observe young children and

scaffold development based on child development theories (Bertrand & Gestwicki, 2015; Land & Frankowski, 2022; Richardson & Langford, 2022). While early developmental psychology theories emphasized educators' role in drawing out developmental outcomes that were genetically coded, later theories provided more agency to adult figures in the development of children, focusing on processes of socialization (Wright, 2010). Such theories emphasized how children's environment and interactions with others equally impact their development.

After the establishment of the Day Nurseries Act in 1946, which was informed by the philosophies and principles of the child study movement and the Institute of Child Study (Richardson, 1989; Wright, 2010), ECEC in Ontario became more regulated and emphasized child-centred and mental hygiene principles (Gleason, 1999; Varga, 1997). Four-year university degrees, two-year college diplomas, and other post-secondary programs emerged and standardized the baseline knowledge taught in post-secondary ECEC programs (Varga, 2000). For example, in 1993, the Government of Ontario created standardized program criteria for all post-secondary ECEC programs that stipulated both the required knowledge of children's development and the pedagogy, as well as the expectations for graduates who completed post-secondary ECEC programs (Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities, 2018).

With the entanglement of the founding of day nurseries in the twentieth century, the Mental Hygiene Movement, and developmental psychology, ECEC has historically held—and continues to hold—a scientized idea of "the child," based on developmental norms and intervention (Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2006a, 2006b; Richardson, 1989; Varga, 1997, 2000). The establishment of developmental psychology in the early twentieth century as a field unique from philosophy (Richardson, 1989) is connected to normative constructions of children within early to mid-twentieth century day nurseries, which centralized a preventative approach to ensure the development of "healthy" habits (Varga, 2000; Richardson, 1989). However, what was left unquestioned was which behaviours and habits were considered "healthy" and how such preventative approaches focused upon reinforcing normalcy (Richardson, 1989). ECEC still reflects how such ideas are entrenched in interventionist logics, such as Applied Behavioural Analysis, which has been critiqued by autistic communities as being traumatic and focused on discouraging visible autistic traits such as stimming (Adams & Liang, 2020; *see also* Davies, 2022a). Post-secondary ECEC programs often have courses on behavioural management or strategies for intervention, which hold a behaviourist lens in their focus on normalizing and intervening in behaviours deemed different or "abnormal" (Davies, 2022a).

Post-secondary ECEC Professional Identity: Connected with Developmentalism

Post-secondary ECEC students share a common belief in the importance of children's well-being and a motivation to make a difference (Osborne et al., 2018). Students describe understanding their professional identity in relation to concepts such as pedagogy, collaborations with families and communities, philosophical ideas, ethical guidelines, rules and regulations, and gender and cultural norms (Keary et al., 2020). Moreover, students acknowledge how their professional identity is intertwined with the values and roles of maternalism and motherhood, as both mothers and ECEs are seen as responsible for children's development (Ailwood, 2007).

Professional early childhood educator identity encompasses many concepts of developmental psychology. Using child development theories and developmentally appropriate practices are aspects of being a "good" educator (Langford, 2007), which connects child development with ECE professional identity (Davies, 2022a, 2022b; Davies et al., 2022; Gibson, 2013; Langford, 2007). That said, educators cannot act according to developmental psychology alone if they hope to bring about change in the

field (Gibson, 2013). Moss (2010) describes being a professional as a means of constructing knowledge from diverse sources. However, educational policies and practices have very little diversity since the narrow perspectives involved in education due to developmental psychology limit ECEs in their knowledge and teaching practices (Moss, 2010).

There is also a dissonance in ECE professional identity when ideas of positivity and the love of children have deep ties to developmental psychology (Davies, 2022a, 2022b; Davies et al., 2022). To see the child as a site of intervention following universalizing developmental approaches is apparent in child-focused development initiatives (Mills & LeFrançois, 2018), which are not congruent with loving children without desiring to intervene or alter their development. This is evident in Johnston's (2019) experience, in which their positive relationships with their students were viewed as invalid due to a lack of written records connecting their experiences to developmental theories. It is fair to question how developmentalism presents itself as an "expert knowledge" on children and educators in post-secondary ECEC and seeks to interrogate its dominance by calling for critical conversations to take place regarding epistemology in post-secondary ECEC education.

The Relevance of Epistemology for Post-Secondary ECEC

Epistemologies are individual beliefs regarding the nature of knowing and knowledge (Brownlee et al., 2011). Making space in the classroom to invite post-secondary students to evaluate their own epistemological beliefs is a key component of providing the highest quality of care. It also allows students to question when theories and "best practices" being taught in their training do not reflect the lived realities of, or most appropriate approaches to helping, children and families (Brownlee et al., 2008; Davies, 2021). When post-secondary students are encouraged to reflect on different practices and perspectives, they can come to view knowledge as evolving and tentative (Brownlee et al., 2008). A study by Brownlee and Berthelsen (2006) found that childcare workers with relativistic personal epistemological beliefs—or more flexible ideas of children and development—are more inclined to form collaborative, relational, and active relationships with children. In contrast, childcare workers who view knowledge as certain and unchanging and those who privilege adult knowledge over that of the child are less likely to participate in new learning opportunities or reflective practices (Brownlee & Berthelsen, 2006).

With developmental psychology being the primary source of knowledge in post-secondary ECEC, alternate ways of knowing, such as cultural studies and Mad Studies, are foreclosed. Cultural studies encompass a variety of critical theoretical frameworks to provide an alternative method for understanding the relationship between individual experiences and cultural and societal structures (Gaztambide-Fernández & Cairns, 2010). Cultural studies and critical frameworks are often not taught in post-secondary ECE because this knowledge challenges dominant ways of knowing in education (Davies, 2022b). Specifically, cultural studies conceptualizes education as an institution where cultural norms are created, produced, and sustained through inequalities and power dynamics (Gaztambide-Fernández & Cairns, 2010). Thus, cultural studies and critical theories consider children and youth's behaviours as a response to their social environment and structural inequalities instead of as a cognitive, individualized phenomenon (Gaztambide-Fernández & Cairns, 2010). Such studies would encourage post-secondary students to engage in further inquiry instead of being provided with answers on how to observe and assess behaviours through biopsychosocial approaches entrenched within developmentalism.

Reconceptualizing Relationships with Knowledge: Provoking Further Inquiry in Post-secondary ECEC

In Davies' writing (2022a), Mad Studies is introduced as a methodological framework to be used in post-secondary ECEC education to encourage students to challenge developmentalism, disrupt normalcy, and enhance critical thinking and curiosity. Incorporating Mad Studies into post-secondary ECEC education allows students to consider and reflect on their own narratives, subjectivities, experiences, and identities while integrating them into others' theoretical frameworks (Davies, 2022b). When students reflect, re-think, and critically question the knowledges that they have been trained in, they are encouraged to create new perspectives on caring for children, likely ones without a focus on child development (Davies et al., 2022).

School environments are dominated by biomedical models (Batstra et al., 2021), and the psychiatrization of students is readily occurring as mental illness is diagnosed more frequently in school-age patients. Additionally, students become biomedical patients who are screened for non-specific symptoms, creating comparisons of "normalcy" and leading students to take on the sick role (Gojmerac, 2022). Maiese (2022) suggests that the neoliberal practices and proposals in schools, which are based on developmentalist ideologies, negatively affect students' mental health by enhancing competitiveness and favouring individualism over collectivity, performance pressures, emphasis on individual resilience, and excessive testing. Such logics are ingrained in the developmentalist course materials to which post-secondary ECEC students are exposed, favouring ideas of outcomes, standardization, assessment, and constant enhancement of children's growth.

In order for post-secondary ECEC students to thrive, it is key that they develop the critical thinking skills that allow them to question dominant forms of knowledge that are often taught in their institutions. Giving these students spaces to challenge dominant discourses through Mad Studies and other critical frameworks can enhance their professional practices as future educators. As well, critically examining the histories behind ECEC and how developmentalism and interventionism came to be dominant in post-secondary ECEC education—as well as the normativity entrenched within such notions—is an important exercise for students to begin to consider their own relationship with knowledge. This is an especially important task given this current moment when calls for "returning to normal" echo as the COVID-19 pandemic continues (Karmiris, 2022).

COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Reconceptualizing ECEC

The disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic have created an opportunity to think critically about the future of ECEC. As described by Souto-Manning (2021), there is now space to acknowledge "the potentiality of the pandemic as a transformative rupture" (p. 9), particularly in regard to the disruption of normalcy. Van Groll and Kummen (2021), both educators of post-secondary ECEC students, explain that the systemic failure to acknowledge the relationships that they, as faculty, have formed with COVID-19 may have led their students to view their quick responses to pandemic times as a method to maintain normalcy. Since our society privileges that which is within the realm of normalcy, it is not surprising that the initial post-COVID societal focus is on returning to pre-COVID "normal" rather than critically examining the pandemic's disruption of common tropes of ECEC.

Our collective concept of "normal" was fundamentally fractured by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Things we as a society once thought were essential, were proven to be luxuries (e.g., working in an office instead of telecommuting). Simultaneously, we saw care-centered professions such as nursing, education, and childcare finally societally recognized as essential to the functioning of families and society as a whole. The pandemic's disruption of "normal" has cast a spotlight on women-led fields that were

once dismissed as merely "woman's work". This spotlight has allowed the general public to see the issues caring professionals face in their industries (e.g., CUPE strikes surrounding issues of Educational Assistants' (EA) and Early Childhood Educators' (ECE) wages, workplace safety, and lack of funding that would allow for hiring more EAs and ECEs). Our collective pause on "normal" has given us, the authors, the opportunity to evaluate if pre-COVID "normal" is something worth returning to.

Although developmentalism still strongly influences post-secondary ECEC programs epistemologically and ontologically, critiques of developmentalism and calls for reconceptualization are not new. The reconceptualist movement in ECEC has critiqued the dominance of developmentalism and how developmentalism shapes the subjectivities of children and educators in ECEC while reinforcing hierarchies of oppression and normativities such as heterosexism, cisnormativity, and racism (Cannella, 1997, 2005; Silin, 1995). Debates surrounding pedagogical approaches and curriculum content in ECEC have a long history. ECEC educators have been debating the goals and aims of the early years, including debates about constructivism and children's ability to make meaning of their realities (Katz, 1999). Bloch (1992) noted how ECEC scholars who are constructivists, critical theorists, or post-modernist are often marginalized by an emphasis on positivist ideas of child development. Such positivist theories of child development have been connected to ideas of normalcy, which reconceptualist scholars have noted is a central focus of developmentalism and its historical foundations in Enlightenment ideas of rationality and science (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005). Such ideas of normalcy still influence the ideas of children and educators in ECEC. Mad Studies scholarship is a continuation of critiques of developmentalism in ECEC with an explicit emphasis on decentering normalcy and critiquing the dominance of biomedical, psychiatric, and psychological frameworks.

As Ann Wilke (2021) has described, the desire to return to "normal" post-pandemic conditions is easier than embracing the uncertainty sparked by the pandemic. According to Wilke (2021), the uncertainty, curiosity, and wonder of the COVID-19 pandemic asks educators to think pedagogically with uniqueness and vulnerability, qualities important in ECEC. The COVID-19 pandemic can be viewed as an opportunity to sit with discomfort and respond in pedagogical ways. This can encourage change in ECEC as educators reach for new and reconceptualized practices to enhance learning (Delgado et al., 2020; Early Childhood Pedagogies Observatory, 2020; Wilke, 2021). Van Groll and Kummen (2021) position the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity for pausing, acknowledging, responding, and critically examining the conditions in the field. In other words, thinking critically about ECEC's relationship with the pandemic will allow educators to reconfigure practices and meet new demands properly. When considering the loss of certain practices due to the pandemic, educators are given an opportunity to examine what pedagogical practices are important for successful outcomes (Van Groll & Kummen, 2021). This further allows educators to decide what relationships and practices can be left behind (Van Groll & Kummen, 2021). How will educators move forward during "post" pandemic times and what practices from the history of ECEC can or will be left behind? Karmiris (2022) describes, in her critique of calls to return to "normal" in education, how:

> the role of modern schooling practices in sustaining the conditions where measuring who counts as normal remains integral to the process of consistently keeping disability and other markers of difference such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation at a physical and social distance (Karmiris, 2022, p. 11).

Notably, instead of returning to normal in ECEC, educators have an opportunity to refuse calls to return to normal—the kind of normalcy founded on legacies of observing, assessing, and standardizing children through developmentalist knowledges as well as the "normalcy" of being devalued as care workers. Following Karmiris (2022), it must be asked how children, and more specifically, which kinds of children are always excluded in ECEC based on societal hierarchies. Reversing the erasure of

Mad knowledges—and other forms of subjugated knowledges—in post-secondary ECEC can assist students in learning new ways of imagining education, educators, and children in their care. Will the ECEC that follows COVID-19 still emphasize "child development"? Developmental and clinical ideas of children pathologize children and young people through medicalizing personalities that are deemed "immature" or "childish"—notions that are entrenched in the DSM (Mills & LeFrançois, 2018). We think that Mad Studies can evoke moments of reconsideration and reconceptualization so that educators can think before "applying" knowledge—ultimately challenging their initial thoughts or interpretations about who or what is conceptualized as a "problem" in their professional practices and who is "normal." In other words, being critical of relationships to and with normalcy in response to the uncertainties of the pandemic could lead to new practices in the field of ECEC. Such a rupture in ECEC is crucial and needed (Davies, 2022a; Souto-Manning, 2021). If the COVID-19 pandemic is viewed as an opportunity to reconceptualize, we can consider our relationships with knowledge and knowing as having the ability to adapt and flourish within the unknowns of human life (LeFrançois, 2013; Moss, 2010).

Conclusion

In this paper, we outlined some historical connections between the past and present in ECEC education to argue for a "rupture between our past and future" (Souto-Manning, 2021, p. 4), or a reconceptualization of post-secondary ECEC students' relationships with developmental knowledges and conceptualizations of educators, children, and care.

With developmentalism at the centre of the education taught to post-secondary ECEC students, future educators are limited in their knowledge of the children in their care and deprived of opportunities to critically understand alternative viewpoints. This leaves both ECEs and children facing epistemic injustice as the current Westernized, neoliberal society posits developmentalism as the universal and sole viewpoint. Developmentalism, including theories by mainly White cisgender heterosexual philosophers, is still dominant and is at the root of viewing children as "normal" or "not normal." The trouble with the concept of normalcy, favoured in developmentalism, is the sanism directed towards children and educators who do not fit within normative constructs propagated by Enlightenment ideas. When it comes to the professional identities of post-secondary ECEC students, they are formed through developmentalist notions of maternalism as an important component of ECEC (Davies et al., 2022). This article aims to highlight the importance of providing post-secondary ECEC students with spaces to question the hegemony of developmentalism and be exposed to alternative frameworks of knowledge.

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i. Ontology refers to the line of philosophical thinking that studies reality, nature, and being, which are essentially questions of existence and the order of reality (Osborne, 2001).

ii. Here, we are making note of how socio-culturally and ontologically, children are considered less-than-human, or not fully a human being. This idea is often promoted by developmentalism, which forwards that children grow in stages towards the fully human adult.

iii. Mad refers to an identity that represents those who have encountered psychiatric violence and classification. While not all who experience such violence identify as Mad, Mad can be used as an umbrella term, although not all who employ Mad Studies identify as "mad" (Beresford, 2020).

iv. Essentially, we are arguing that both the knowledges (epistemology) and the reality (ontology) of children in ECEC are informed by developmentalism structures and hierarchies of inequalities.

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OFFICIAL LIST OF AECEO CERTIFIED MEMBERS

The names listed are those who have successfully completed the AECEO Certification Process and hold current AECEO membership. They are entitled to use the AECEO.C designation to denote their achievement.

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Amarpreet Anand AECEO.C.
Carol Ankenmann AECEO.C.
Bonnie Arthur AECEO.C.
Michelle Arvelin AECEO.C.
Delia Avarell AECEO.C.
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Shirley Bainbridge AECEO.C.
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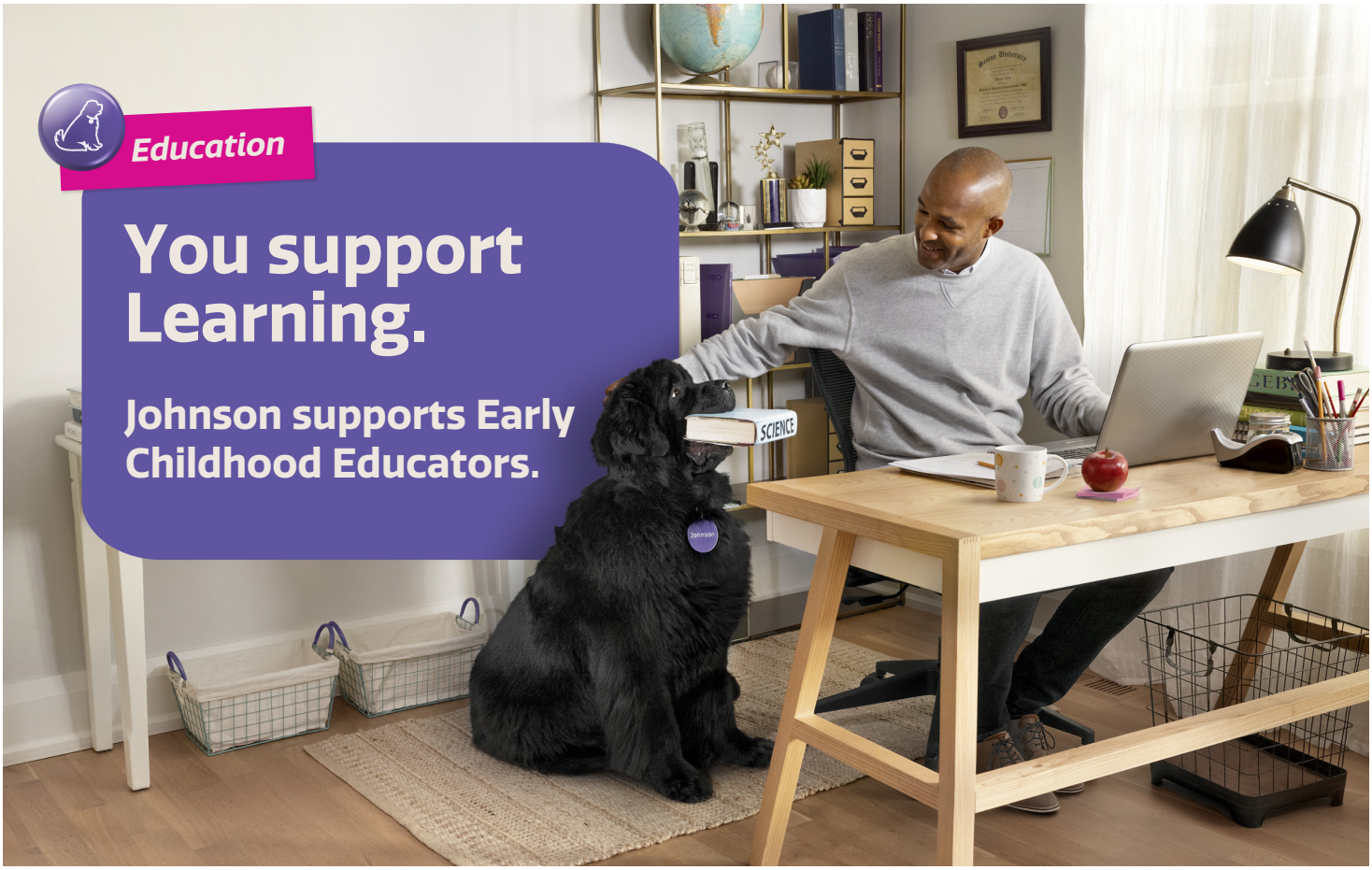

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