

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.



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DECE since 2007



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References

Pascal, C. (2009). With our best future in mind: Implementing early learning in Ontario. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2014). How does learning happen? Ontario's pedagogy for the early years: A resource about learning through relationships for those who work with young children and their families. Toronto: Author.

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

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