

Graduate Student SYMPOSIUM

Selected Papers*

Vol. 12 2017-2018

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(pp. 69-90)

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***From the 2017 Rosa Bruno-Jofré Symposium in Education (RBJSE)**

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The experiences and perceived differences in working conditions among early childhood educators who have worked in both for-profit and non-profit childcare centres

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Abstract: *One benefit to joining a professional association is the monitored adherence to quality. Thus, it is expected that members from a professional association adhere to higher quality standards. One indicator of quality in any environment is the working conditions offered to employees. Being members of the college of Early Childhood Educators (ECE) the working conditions of ECEs exemplify professionalism associated with the professional association through the working conditions they are provided. Unfortunately, however, the working conditions offered to ECEs vary in quality. This study examined ECEs' perceptions of the differences in working conditions between for profit and non-profit childcare centres in the Greater Toronto Area. Interviews were conducted with four ECEs who have worked in both for-profit and non-profit childcare centres. The findings of this study discovered that non-profit childcare centres provide higher quality working conditions than for-profit childcare centres, demonstrating the value and support which an auspice has towards professionalism.*

Keywords: childcare, commercial, early childhood educators, early childhood education and care, for-profit, non-profit, not-for-profit, private, working condition

Since early childhood education and care (ECEC) is currently a topic of discussion at the forefront of political agendas (Moss, 2006; OECD, 2006), so too should be the needs of its workforce. According to the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC), early childhood educators (ECEs) are the single largest group in the ECEC sector with 170,340 ECEs and early childhood assistants (ECAs) in 2006. Only five years before, in 2001, there were 137,000 early childhood educators and assistants (ECEs/ECAs) working in both the regulated and unregulated childcare sector. With the number of births rising 23% between 2000 and 2012 and the participation rate of women in the labour force with

children under the age of 6 increasing more than 160% (Service Canada, 2013). Service Canada (2013) predicts a significant increase in the number of early childhood educators in 2012 to 2016.

Clearly, ECEC is a growing field. Unfortunately, in spite of this growth, ECEs remain at the bottom of the labour force hierarchy because they are accorded very little respect (CUPE, 2000). ECEs play a vital role in the field of ECEC. However, professionalizing the field of childcare, as well as its practitioners, is considered a recent initiative. Many still do not consider the service as a profession (Martin, Meyer, Jones, Nelson, & Ting, 2010). Despite the abundance of studies emerging over the past few years regarding the importance of children's early years and the work that ECEs do, Canadians, policy makers, and politicians continue to "pay lip service only to the value of the work – working conditions and pay levels remain at very low levels" (CUPE, 2000, p.1). The work that ECEs do as professionals continues to be undervalued across Canada.

The working conditions of ECEs, such as employee wages and benefits, are factors which contribute to the professional state of the ECEC field, as well as to the quality of service provided in childcare centres (Mullis, Cornille, Mullis, & Taliano, 2003). Barnett (2004) highlights the following items as areas to focus on when policymakers and educators consider early childhood professionalization: "teacher qualifications, professional development, certification regulation, wages, and benefits, and teacher preparatory programs" (p. 342). Moriarty (2000) describes professionalism as a method of improving the status, salary, and conditions of the occupational group, in this case ECEs. These all can be identified, also, as indicators for the quality of ECEs' working conditions.

A childcare centre's auspice, or a centre's ownership, and related financial decisions about funding structures and budgeting, are major distinguishing factors between for-profit and non-profit childcare centres (Friendly & Prentice, 2009). The financial decisions a centre makes when allocating funds demonstrates the areas in which they place the most value. Full-time ECEs experience firsthand the impact of administrative financial decisions; it is paramount, then, to listen to ECEs who have had experience in both for-profit and non-profit sectors, and to better understand the perceived differences between these sectors.

Does a funding structure of a childcare centre and its auspice have an effect on the professional state of its ECEs? In other words, in what auspice does professionalism flourish and why? This is analyzed through the lens of the working conditions provided to ECEs. The purpose of this research is to examine ECEs' perceptions of differences in working conditions between for-profit and non-profit sectors (excluding the municipal sector) in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Literature Review

Different Ways in Which Childcare is Funded

Variations in childcare centre's auspice are reflected in the differences with funding sources and governing structures (Sosinsky, Lord, & Zigler, 2007). Non-profit childcare centres are funded by multiple sources: parent fees, donations, and the varying forms of provincial/territorial financial assistance (i.e. grants, subsidies, etc.). In contrast, the majority of funds in for-profit childcare centres come from parent fees. Although some for-profit centres receive provincial-territorial assistance, it is a smaller percentage of their revenue. In addition, for-profit centers cannot accept charitable contributions (Helburn, 1995). Helburn (1995) found that the ownership structure of a childcare centre, or its auspice, is an important factor that can have an effect on the organization's resource allocation. Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange, and Tougas (2000) found that in Canada, non-profit and for-profit centres allocated different proportions of their budget to different expenditures.

Childcare corporatization refers to a rapid expansion and an escalation in market share of childcare services owned and/or operated for profit by public companies, many of which are listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange (TSX) (CUPE, 2012). Childcare corporations have a duty to generate financial returns to shareholders, and in so doing must comply with additional financial constraints, which can be seen in the allocation of childcare centres' budgets (Sumsion, 2006). Reaping a profit must be a motive for for-profit administrators to make their business beneficial for both investors and owners.

Moss (2011) has explained that childcare is changing from being viewed as a service to a commodity from which to profit. Non-profit childcare centres, in contrast, do not view childcare as a commodity. Non-profit organizations cannot reap a benefit or distribute profits from their organizations to stakeholders or owners. Therefore, researchers found that non-profit childcare centres are less likely to cut costs because they lack the profit motive (Cleveland & Krashinky, 2004). Helburn's (1995) study revealed that, as opposed to for-profit centres, non-profit centers with extra resources used these resources to improve quality. When considering Helburn's findings, one might assume that a portion of these extra resources could be put toward improving the quality of ECEs' working conditions, through increased wages, benefits, and compensated professional development opportunities.

Differences in Working Conditions in For-profit and Non-profit Childcare Centres

When it comes to working conditions, very few research studies differentiate between the for-profit sectors and non-profit and even fewer studies ask about ECEs'

personal experiences. Therefore, using the key findings from studies which evaluated the quality of working conditions identified in Doherty et al.'s (2000) Canadian 'You Bet I Care' study, a list was compiled of key indicators which will be used in this study to evaluate ECEs' perceptions of the quality of working conditions in a childcare centre. Thus, this study defines working conditions based on the following indicators: staff qualifications, professional development opportunities, wages, benefits, and turnover. Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips' (1990) also define 'adult work environments' as factors which include aspects of a childcare center's operation that impinge directly on the quality of the day-to-day demands of working in the center. This definition has been helpful in identifying other indicators that impact on ECEs day-to-day experiences.

Researchers have suggested that elements such as a centre's auspice, variations in clientele, funding sources, regulatory accountability, governing, and administrative structures may have an effect on working conditions (Kagan, Sobol, & Quarnstrom, 1987; Morris & Helburn, 2000). With that said Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin, and Vanderlee (2013) note that, along with clear divisions between ownership, a resulting divide exists between the corresponding policies, educators' qualifications, trainings, equity and quality, and conceptualizations of professionalism.

Studies that compare the quality of working conditions between for-profit and non-profit centres provide insight into the value an auspice places on professionalizing the field of ECEC, which, in turn, is demonstrated by the dynamics of a childcare centers' funding structure. Most studies have found that non-profit centres provide higher wages, better benefits, more professional development opportunities, which has shown to result in lower turnover (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2004; Mullis et al., 2003; Sosinsky et al., 2007).

Doherty's et al. 2000 study is one of the few Canadian studies. The present study will investigate whether improvements in working conditions have been made since 2000. Moreover, ECEs' perspectives and experiences of the working conditions between sectors is a view often neglected in the debate between for-profit and non-profit childcare centres. Highlighting ECEs' perceptions may produce data that is unique, based on the participants' personal experiences, while validating ECEs as experts and professionals within the field.

Methodology

Sample

The criteria for participants in this study were determined by the research question (Marshall, 1996). Participants were selected based on the following criteria. They must: a) have graduated and obtained an ECE diploma, b) have worked as an ECE in both for-profit and non-profit childcare centres in the GTA, and c) have access to a personal e-mail account,

since communication between the participant and the principal investigator included this method. Four participants were selected who met the above criteria.

Recruitment

All participants were purposely targeted based on their knowledge and prior experiences. A convenience sampling method was used to select my first participant. This participant was selected based on my knowledge of her past work in the early childhood field. The other participants were recruited through a snowball sampling strategy (Neuman & Robson, 2012).

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview guide was used as the data collection tool in this study. As the researcher, I facilitated a conversation style interview with full-time ECEs in an effort to achieve a degree of partnership and to create an open atmosphere where interviewees feel comfortable talking. The interview guide was designed to uncover individual experiences and draw out the ECEs' perceptions of their working conditions.

According to Neuman and Robson (2008) reliability can be improved by using a pilot version of an interview guide; therefore, a pilot test was implemented to address potential limitations. Developing more than one version of my interview guide and trying it out before applying the final version took more time and effort but also sifted out errors or unclear questions (Neuman and Robson, 2008). In an effort to minimize limitations in my data collection tool I had other researchers read my interview guide, critique it, and make suggestions.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was guided by its theoretical framework, democratic participation (Jacelon & O'Dell, 2005). To analyse the data collected from the interviews with my participants, I chose to follow Neuman and Robson's (2012) three phases to qualitatively analyzing data. Neuman and Robson's three phases allowed me to discover common themes among these four ECEs' diverse experiences in both for-profit and non-profit childcare centres. As a result, I was able to begin the process of discovering a collective standpoint between my participants in regards to their individual perceptions of the difference between working conditions in each sector

Phase one—open coding. Data were first organized by arranging the raw data and condensing them into preliminary conceptual categories (themes, concepts, and similar

features). During the open coding, I created my first codes according to the working condition indicators which emerged from the literature review. I then continued to find new emerging themes that had been discussed by multiple participants throughout the interview. The concepts and themes with the most evidence were considered the strongest. From these codes I wrote out a preliminary list of concepts or labels and highlighted each one with individually brightly coloured markers and highlighters. Throughout this process I was consciously open to creating new themes, collapsing themes, and to changing initial codes in subsequent analysis, demonstrating understanding that initial indicators are not firm and may change multiple times through the analysis process (Neuman & Robson, 2012).

Phase two—axial coding. During a second read-through of my data I organized the codes, developed links among them, and discovered analytical categories. In this phase I focused more on the initial codes created in ‘open coding’ rather than on the data. My primary task in this phase was to create, review, and examine initial codes in an effort to create linkages between similar sets. I also noted any additional codes or new ideas that had emerged during this phase. During this phase I looked to see if: a) any existing concepts could be divided into subcategories, b) any categories could be organized into a causal sequence (Neuman & Robson, 2012). I examined some themes in further depth to potentially drop themes, because such choices can “reinforce the connections between evidence and concepts” (Neuman & Robson, 2012, p. 319). As I consolidated codes, I looked for evidence in many places for core themes which would build a dense web of support for the themes I drew out of the data.

Phase three—selective coding. In this last phase I drew out a resulting core theme around which the remaining codes fit. In order to make sense of the relationship among the codes, I made concept maps of them. My concept maps visually illustrated the themes’ relationship with each other. At the centre of the concept map I placed the main theme which I saw feeding into all the other themes. I used my concept map to develop statements (or propositions) on how the concepts worked together (Neuman & Robson, 2012).

Researcher’s Bias

My professional experience as a supply ECE at a non-profit college-affiliated childcare lab school has given me the opportunity to hear the complaints made by ECEs in the lunch room. As an ECE, I have also experienced firsthand why some full-time ECEs are unhappy. Through my studies I was taught about the difference between for-profit and non-profit childcare centres in a light which favoured the non-profit childcare sector. My

past experiences and who I am as a researcher in this study are relevant to note and understand since in qualitative research the researcher is the instrument of data analysis (Jacelon and O'Dell, 2005). Through this qualitative approach I tried to remain conscious and sensitive to the subjective role I played as the researcher (Check and Schutt, 2012). My previous experience as an ECE in a non-profit childcare centre and my preference toward the non-profit childcare sector will inevitably have an influence on this research study; however, the utmost attempt will be made to highlight and focus my findings on the participants and their experiences in regards to working conditions in both sectors. In an attempt to accomplish this objectivity, an analytical memo was kept.

Participants' Profiles

Information was gathered through the interview process which provided a brief background of each participant's experience in the field of childcare and the respective sectors (Table 1). The information included for this article is limited in an effort to maintain confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

Table 1

Participants' Experience in the Field of Childcare

Participant	Pseudonyms	Years of Experience in For-Profit Centre(s)	Years of Experience in Non-profit childcare centre(s)	Total Years of Experience
A	Ashley	1	6	7
B	Brittney	2	Few years	Unknown
C	Cathryn	6	3	9
D	Diana	3	6	9

Results

Four ECEs were interviewed and there were two overarching themes that emerged from the voices of these ECEs. The first theme, material conditions, refer to the concrete and tangible working conditions identified by the participants, which consisted of: benefits, wages, staff qualifications, and professional development. According to ECE participants the sector of a centre had an impact on first, the level of compensation given to ECEs, which includes benefits, wages, and raises; and second, the value employers placed on education, which was evident in who was hired and what kind of professional development opportunities were provided.

The second theme which emerged through the analysis of participants' interviews illuminated how these ECEs were psychologically impacted by non-material conditions within their work environments. Non-material conditions refer to the intangible working

conditions expressed by the participants, in regard to their psychological wellbeing. ECE participants' psychological well-being was influenced by the amount of support offered/given by the centre, sense of community in the working environment, decision-making/autonomy, how they were valued as ECE professionals, turnover rate, and the disconnect between centres' and ECEs' goals, philosophies and visions. It is important to note that turnover rate was included as a non-material condition, because the ECE participants explained that they resigned due to psychological factors brought about by working conditions in non-profit centres. Through the interviewed ECEs' reports and stories the participants bring to the forefront their knowledge and how they experienced working conditions on a personal level in each sector, for-profit and non-profit

Theme One

Benefits. Not all for-profit childcare centres offered benefits to their ECEs. Two of the four participants interviewed reported not receiving benefits at all in for-profit centres and the for-profit centres that did offer benefits covered only a limited number of services. Ashley said, "full-time staff did get some benefits. Were they as good as the not-for-profit ones? No, but they did get something."

Wages. Wages were identified by all four participants as a major distinguisher between sectors. Wage was a topic addressed spontaneously by all participants. During the open-ended interview questions all four participants spoke of the issue of variance in wages between the sectors. Participants addressed the issue of wages on their own accord and without prompts.

All four ECEs agreed that wages were higher within the non-profit sector. When asked, 'in which sector were the wages higher,' participants replied with the following quotes: "...certainly the not-for-profit," "definitely, the not-for-profit," "not-for-profit did pay better overall, the wages were higher in the, not-for-profit," and "the not-for-profit of course." Brittney said, "Non-for-profit was a higher paid salary in comparison with for-profit." Brittney continued on to say, "I wasn't paid as well as I would have liked" in a for-profit centre.

These participants reported no schedule for regular raises in ECEs' salaries in their for-profit childcare centres. All four participants explained that from their experiences in for-profit centres ECEs would have to request/advocate for a raise. Brittney says that raises would be earned in her for-profit centre, but that they were "very minimum, there was not much."

Staff qualifications. Participants reported that ECEs and ECAs working at for-profit childcare centres were under qualified. Two of the four ECEs interviewed stated that their centre hired ECEs who had not yet completed their diploma. Ashley said, “staff were often untrained.”

Within the non-profit childcare centres the participant reported ECEs working with additional educational qualification, such as Bachelors of Arts and master’s degrees. Ashley said,

Not-for-profit ECEs were very much more qualified, at the very minimum is the early childhood assistant certificate. But many of us have our diploma in early childhood education, degrees in education, and some of us well, at least one masters.

Cathryn said, “in a not-for-profit it was at least a diploma in early childhood education but many of the staff had degrees.” Brittney even said that being a registered ECE was the minimum requirement. A bachelor’s degree was suggested, although it was not written or advertised as being required.

Professional development opportunities. Professional development was not a requirement for participants when working in for-profit childcare centres. Ashley reported, “there were no PD (professional development) opportunities for full time staff.” For-profit centres were reported providing limited opportunities for professional development if any at all. Cathryn said, “they really didn’t have anything available other than the first aid and CPR which was mandatory each year.” Diana said, “No, that wasn’t an expectation at all. There wasn’t even a discussion about that.” One ECE, Brittney, remarked, “I was the one that had asked or inquired about some workshops because as a young graduate I think some of the challenges I was facing I definitely needed that support but I think I had maybe attended one workshop on my own time but most of the time the answers I received were ‘that we don’t have enough funding to send you.’”

Ashley believed that for-profit centres’ concerns around their budget and generating a profit took priority over professional development opportunities. When asked if professional development opportunities were encouraged in her for-profit centre Ashley explained,

No, not at all. That wasn’t even on their radar. It affects the bottom line when you’re sending staff out to professional development opportunities. The expectation is that the owner would pay for the workshop; therefore, they were more concerned about meeting their minimum, I think, in order to turn a profit.

Ashley’s belief was supported by the comments of two other participants’ experiences. Brittney and Cathryn expressed that while working as ECEs in their for-profit

childcare centres they were not compensated for taking part in professional development opportunities. Brittney mentioned that professional development opportunities were usually not paid for by the centre and were usually after work or during their lunch. Brittney said, “for-profit places that I worked at didn’t compensate the staff for their time.” Cathryn said, “in the for-profit there wasn’t really time or the resources to allow the staff to do professional development, it was really on their own. Whereas in the non-profit there were plenty of opportunities and supply staff were hired to fill the roles of full-time ECEs who were out at workshops.”

Professional development was a mandatory requirement for all participants’ in their non-profit childcare centres. Cathryn said that professional development opportunities were mandatory and that ECEs,

Were required to do a number of courses or workshops per year. So there were a lot more opportunities for professional development in the not-for-profit centre because, they had people coming in to do workshops with staff which made it a lot more accommodating. It was easier for ECEs to just stay at work and have a workshop there rather than having to travel to a different centre or find time on their own to do that kind of stuff.

When asked if she was required to complete professional development courses Diana explains that,

In my current work, the non-profit, that is an expectation. At the end of the year when we are evaluated there is a part in the evaluation we have to fill out what we did throughout the year, professional development and we do have to attend different workshops, conferences, seminars, even taking courses to keep upgraded with what’s current in our field.

Diana elaborates to say, “We have three PD days. If we want to use more than those three days they do support, and they do compensate you with the money; a hundred percent.” When asked if professional development opportunities were encouraged in her non-profit centre Ashley said,

All the time. Yes, that is actually a part of our annual performance review, what professional development opportunities have you done over the course of your year and what would you like to do. We also have mandatory professional development days we have two days a year that are designated particularly for our own in house professional development where all of our centres gather together. Also, we have professional development opportunities outside of the organization so if we would like to continue on, and I have taken advantage of this myself, I wanted to continue on and complete my degree in education I had tuition reimbursement from my organization. If I would like to complete

my masters I can have tuition reimbursement for that as well so it's a huge difference. Participants illuminate the variation in professional development opportunities offered in the for-profit sector in comparison to the non-profit sector.

Theme Two

While it is not listed as a working condition in other research, I found that support given to ECEs was important, because without it ECE participants reported feeling as if they were alone. Participants reported not receiving supports as ECEs when employed in for-profit childcare centres compared to the support they felt from managers in their non-profit childcare centres. Ashley felt unsupported when she went to ask her for-profit employer for help and was told to just keep doing what she had been doing. Ashley said, "the manager was not around to assess the quality of the programming or the quality of the interactions, they were always either in the office or away from the centre." Ashley did not know what to do and felt like she had no one to turn to.

I found the sense of community to be relevant to the ECEs I interviewed. Participants expressed the sense of community found in their non-profit childcare centres as a positive experience. For example, Cathryn shared the following:

Personally, I liked the non-profit better. I thought it was just a more inviting environment. It was really friendly to parents and to staff. There were a lot of events that we had with parents, and it was really important to build those relationships with families. We would have potlucks and other kinds of events that would bring us together as a community. There was a huge sense of community in that childcare centre oppose to the for-profit where I didn't find that to be as much. I really liked the not-for-profit a lot better because, in general, I was able to grow as an ECE and really learn from people and learn from the families and the kids.

In contrast, in the for-profit childcare centre Diana expressed that "the working environment wasn't supporting teamwork. Everybody there, at the for-profit centre, would argue with each other." Also, Cathryn said, "in the private one people were driven to work for those higher positions because we had team leaders and supervisors. Kind of like a hierarchy system within the childcare centre which I didn't necessarily like because it took away from just providing care for the children and made it more of like a hierarchy and a competitive nature to getting the better job." On the other hand, in the non-profit childcare centre Cathryn, said, "I liked the team building that we had. I felt like we were really close and it didn't come down to who was making what money because we were all making kind of the same amount and we were all on the same level."

A poor work environment can impede the psychological well-being of an ECE and the resulting sense of community in their for-profit work environment. Cathryn and Diana described their work environment as very competitive. Cathryn perceived her role in her for-profit working community as insignificant, and as a result felt as she held no value and had no decision-making power.

Participants reported having more decision-making power and autonomy when working in their non-profit centres than in their for-profit centres. Decision-making opportunities enhanced ECEs' working conditions because they felt respected and valued.

My findings indicate that participants felt valued as professionals in their non-profit childcare centres, which seemed to be in connection with the level of autonomy given to them. Diana mentioned that the owner at her for-profit centre would come into the room and watch her all the time and ask her to justify and validate her every practice and action. Diana felt very depressed and disrespected because, although she knew her job and what was expected of her, she was constantly supervised. Diana was viewed and treated as a professional within her non-profit childcare centre, as opposed to within her for-profit childcare centre.

All four participants in this study resigned from a for-profit centre, and their reasons for resigning had to do with one or more working conditions. While working in for-profit centres, the participants in this study viewed their own current positions as temporary. The temporary nature of these positions likely is a reflection of or has an impact on their perceptions of themselves as professionals.

Discussion

Four ECEs who have worked in both for-profit and non-profit childcare centres reported vast differences in working conditions between sectors. The following discussion will identify research consistent or inconsistent with this study's findings, as well as discuss the impact that the variations between for-profit and non-profit have on the efforts put towards professionalizing the field of ECEC.

Theme One: Material Conditions

Most ECEs are women in what has traditionally been viewed as a woman's field. The public and consumers continue to question the use of the term professional in discussion of ECEs. Despite the lack of understanding, social respect, and value of the ECEC field, ECEs continue to work towards developing a professional status. In reality, efforts towards attaining professional status for ECEs inevitably connect to economic issues, in particular compensation in the form of wages and benefits (Culkin, 1999).

This study found that non-profit childcare centres were more likely to provide health care benefits to their ECE employees. Benefits are an important factor to consider when discussing ECE working conditions. In a field where employees are earning lower wages, benefits can be viewed as an addition to an ECE's individual salary as well as "provide a measure of longer-term security" (Doherty et al., 2000).

ECEs that were interviewed reported receiving significantly lower wages in for-profit childcare centres, which is consistent with research that found ECEs received higher wages in non-profit childcare centres. ECE practitioners are significantly underpaid compared to other occupations which require similar educational and personal backgrounds (Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995), which calls into question the professional status equated to the ECEC field (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2004; Doherty et al., 2000; Sosinsky et al., 2007). With the ultimate goal of yielding a profit, there is often no reference or consideration to democratic political practice. Cuts to operating costs, including cuts to ECEs compensation, have an inevitable effect on ECEs, and the ECE profession as a whole, yet their voices are rarely considered in such initiatives. As a professional group ECEs have a responsibility to engage in decision-making debates surrounding issues concerning their work (Moriarty, 2000; Barnett, 1997). Corporatized childcare centres, that are running a business, are required to accommodate the needs of owners and shareholders first (Friendly & Prentice, 2009), all the while ignoring all efforts towards achieving a professional status, by not considering or valuing the voice of ECEs as the experts.

The ECEs interviewed reported that the for-profit childcare centres they worked at tended to hire employees who held the bare minimum of credentials. In this study, non-profit centres were found to employ ECEs with significantly higher levels of education in comparison with the for-profit centres. This study validates both the results of Doherty et al., (2000) and Sosinsky, Lord, and Zigler., (2007) who found a relationship between a sector type and ECEs qualifications. Professionalism is often understood as a practitioner with substantial acquisition of specialist knowledge/qualifications, as well as the ability to meet high standards (Moss, 2006; Osgood, 2010). The findings in this study demonstrate that for-profit childcare centers were more lackadaisical when it came to educational qualification requirements in their employees. This, in turn, demonstrates a devaluing for the professionalization of the ECEC field.

It is important to note that for a centre to hire highly educated staff they would likely need to pay higher wages in order to retain these employees. Highly educated staff are more likely to leave a job if they earn lower wages (Whitebook & Sakai, 2003). In this study, a relationship between qualifications and job retention was evident. Generally, ECEs with more education will not be satisfied receiving a minimum wage. As a result,

these highly qualified ECEs, who would help to increase the professionalized perception of the ECEC field, may look for employment elsewhere (Moss, 2006). Many graduates do not enter, or plan to stay, in the workforce due to the field's economic, social, and political marginalization (Langford, 2008).

Participants expressed that when they worked for for-profit childcare centres, professional development opportunities were not mandatory nor were they compensated, as opposed to their non-profit employers. This study's findings are consistent with Mullis et al. (2003) and Kagan, Sobol, and Quarnstrom (1987)'s results that found that non-profit childcare centres offered and provided more professional development opportunities than did for-profit childcare centres.

Professional development was particularly meaningful to ECE participants in this study. All participants, unprompted, addressed the issue of professional development in their responses to open-ended questions. Martin et al. (2010) found that ECEs who received relevant and applicable training felt more qualified and perceived themselves as more professional. Doherty et al. (2000) validate that ECEs should continue to develop their skills and build on their knowledge beyond what they were initially taught; according, to these researchers, "life-long participation in professional development is necessary to expand skills and knowledge, to develop fresh ideas, and to refine practice" (p.43). Although ECEs are willing to attend professional development courses, the extra time and financial resources needed may be seen as a considerable deterrent. Auspices that support ECEs in completing continued professional development highlight a value for knowledge and aid in developing a professional status for ECEs.

Theme Two: Non-Material Conditions

The psychological well-being of ECEs was found to be a relevant factor to include as an indicator of working conditions, and their perceptions of themselves as professionals. Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) describe the role of 'presence' in professionalism "as a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional, and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their environment, and the ability to respond with a compassionate best next step" (p. 265). The psychological impact experienced by ECEs can be recognized as a working condition, since it too has an effect on how ECEs perceive themselves as professionals within their respective auspice.

Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) highlight the importance of connectedness between the mental, emotional, and physical with the group to an individual ECE's sense of presence in professionalism. Staff collaboration and the building of a sense of

community among the staff within a centre help contribute to ECEs' psychological well-being and perception of themselves as professionals (Martin et al., 2010).

A sense of community within the work environment as well as how ECEs related and interacted with their colleagues and clientele was reflected in ECEs' desire to perform at a high level, and to be willing to put the effort forward that's required to achieve the goal of professionalism (Martin et al., 2010). Doherty et al. (2000) addresses a sense of community and collaboration as important since it "enables staff to socialize informally, to give each other support, to confer about problems, and to exert some influence on decision-making in the centre" (p.32).

My findings indicate that participants felt valued as professionals in their non-profit childcare centres, which seemed to be in connection with the level of autonomy given to them. Osgoode (2010) expresses the connection between professionalism and one's right "to exercise high levels of autonomy" (p.121), which was not evident within two of the participants' for-profit childcare centres.

Moyles (2001) discusses the relationship to professionalism and ECEs' own feelings of value to the field. At times ECEs may feel insecure about their professional status since they often perceive themselves as powerless against 'authority' (Noddings, 1994). ECEs need to gain confidence and value their perspectives as professionals. ECEs need to recognize that they "bring an important perspective and a relevant local knowledge to the democratic forum" (Moss, 2007, p.13) as professionals and experts within the ECEC field. When for-profit childcare centres' owners negate to provide decision-making and autonomy opportunities they fail to validate ECEs as knowledgeable and competent professionals in their field.

"The variety of ways in which care is understood by educators themselves becomes a salient issue in defining professionalism" (Harwood et al., 2013, p.7). In such a model, ECEs are trusted as professionals, providing them greater agency in how they guide, judge, and limit themselves (Harwood et al., 2013). Rather, in Diana's account, she was subjected to what Osgood (2006) describes as "construction of professionalism within early years education, [where educators are subject] to a disempowering, regulatory gaze in the name of higher standards" (p. 7). Referring to Osgood's definition, Diana was viewed and treated as a professional within her non-profit childcare centre, as opposed to within her for-profit childcare centre.

Langford (2008) found that many graduates were not willing to become on the floor ECEs, or to stay within these positions, as the workforce is marginalized economically, socially and politically. Martin et al. (2010) identifies that among professionalism indicators, an ECE's sense of commitment demonstrated the most significant relationship to feeling like a professional. Knowing that one is not in a work

environment long-term may inhibit and minimize the efforts one may put forward in a job, as well as inhibit their self-perception as a professional, which in turn reflects on the professionalism of the ECEC field itself.

High turnover rates can impede and even jeopardize the operation of any childcare center. The abrupt departure of an ECE can disrupt child/family and caregiver relationships (Sosinsky et al., 2007). The resignation of a primary caregiver can compromise a child's developmental growth (Helburn, 1995; Whitebook & Bellum, 1999) as well as the view of professionalism within our field. This study's findings were consistent with those of Mullis et al., (2003), Nuttall (1991), Sosinsky et al., (2007), and Whitebook et al., (1990), who found that turnover rates are significantly higher in for-profit centres. The high turnover rates found in for-profit centres may lead to overall negative effects on the quality of service and quality of working conditions provided.

In conclusion, the psychological effects when working in for-profit childcare centres were reported by the ECEs interviewed for this study to be more negative compared to more positive psychological effects when working in non-profit childcare centres

Looking Ahead: Recommendations

In this study, I found that the for-profit childcare centres of the reported participants provided inadequate and poor quality working conditions for these ECEs. However, readers must recognize that, although this may shed a favorable light on the working conditions non-profit childcare centres are reported to have provided, this is a false façade. There needs to be "an increasing recognition that the work is complex" (Moss, 2006, p. 30). For all ECEs working in for-profit and non-profit childcare centres, fair material and non-material compensations should be provided in an effort to retain competent, skilled and quality ECEs in the childcare field.

A provincial/territorial salary grid should be implemented to provide better pay and regulate scheduled raises. A salary grid would illuminate wage disparities among staff with similar qualifications and experience levels. Improving and regulating the types of benefits provided to ECEs would also help to retain ECEs within the field of childcare. It is important to note that such a change will have an impact on employers, and this is where government funded supports would be an added benefit to a smoother transition into such a recommendation.

Moss (2011) argued that based on their local knowledge, ECEs should be invited to engage in "decision-making about the purposes, the practices, and the environment" (p.3) of a childcare centre, since they are the professionals within the ECEC field. Moriarty (2000) agreed with Moss, suggesting that in order to professionalize the field of ECEC, we

must adopt an understanding of professionalism that calls for ECE practitioners to take more complex and democratic roles. One way that ECEs could be included in the democratic decision-making process is through consultation meetings offering invitations for volunteers to share their opinions and voices in advance of policy changes. Democracy calls for ECEs to be included and involved in decisions that directly affect them (i.e., working conditions) as well as broader issues surrounding their work. Democratic political practice involves a collective decision-making process that should involve policy makers, owners, managers, and ECEs.

Government legislation or professional association policy need to require that centres offer, support, and provide professional development opportunities for all ECEs. Owners and managers should compensate professional development fees, tuition, and time taken off by ECEs. With these further qualifications perhaps managers, owners, policymakers, and Canadians as a whole, would find a new value in ECEs and view them more as professionals.

There needs to be further clarity, guidelines, and details when it comes to professional development requirements. With the aim of achieving professional status within the ECEC field Buysse, Winton, and Rous (2009) suggested that a consistent and mandated definition of professional development be created, laying out a set of professional development competencies or standards. Martin et al. (2010) agreed with Buysse et al.'s (2009) point when they stressed the importance of having suggested "training recommendations to create a better knowledge of the 'what' the child care workforce should know about children and families" (p. 342) when moving towards early childhood professionalization.

Limitations

Due to the limited number of participants this study is only able to provide an understanding of reported ECEs' perspectives of working conditions in the for-profit and non-profit sectors of childcare centres. This study's purpose is not to generalize, but rather to explore deeply the views of the four ECE participants. Few participants allowed for deeper analysis of their experiences and perceptions. It is also important to highlight that the snowball method demonstrated a few limitations. Potential participants were limited to people that I had direct access to through my colleagues. My recruitment method could be argued to yield "poor quality data and lack intellectual credibility" (Marshall, 1996, p.523).

Conclusion

Four ECEs were interviewed and through a qualitative analysis process, differences in working conditions between for-profit and non-profit centres were found. The themes which emerged from the participants' voices were not only consistent with previous research findings but also identified new findings, such as the non-material conditions, the psychological well-being of ECEs. The psychological effects when working in for-profit childcare centres were reported by the ECEs interviewed for this study to be more negative compared to more positive psychological effects when working in non-profit childcare centres.

Through listening to the experiences of the ECEs, I was surprised that all ECEs had resigned from for-profit childcare centres. I was also surprised at the extent to which the psychological impacts (referred to as non-material conditions) of working in each sector had on their working conditions. However, this research is only a preliminary examination of the perceived differences between the working conditions of ECEs in both the for-profit and non-profit childcare sector. As a result, additional research is required in an effort to further confirm the divide between the working conditions in each sector. I have proposed further research that may further substantiate these surprisingly new findings.

Doherty et al. (2000) state that, "how teaching staff feel about child care as a career directly influences both how they respond to children and their likelihood of remaining in the child care field" (p.85). The early childhood workforce is growing and for-profit childcare centres are expanding, so ECE working conditions are becoming a pressing issue, especially since we know the working conditions of ECEs have been demonstrated, through research, to correlate to the quality of service provided to children and their families. This issue, therefore, "needs to encompass restructuring and rethinking" (Moss, 2006, p.31) in an effort to ensure improved working conditions for early childhood educators who care for and educate young children

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