

Leadership Pilot Two (LP2) Project Evaluation Report Executive Summary

Based on the success of the first Leadership Pilot (LP1), the College of Early Childhood Educators launched a second Leadership Pilot (LP2) in September 2015. While the first pilot project was primarily open to all members of the College practising in a variety of roles and workplace settings, LP2 targeted RECEs in supervisory roles in licensed child care. The focus was not only on building leadership capacity in the early childhood education profession but also on creating a network of leaders in licensed child care who are committed to integrating the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* in their work with children, families, colleagues and communities.

The purposes for the second Leadership Pilot project included:

- focusing on enhancing the leadership capacity of RECEs who are in supervisory roles in licensed child care,
- building on the involvement of participants in order to establish and/or expand local RECE learning communities,
- engaging the provincial municipal sector in active support for leadership initiatives and RECE continuous professional learning and,
- enhancing the relationship between the College of Early Childhood Educators and groups such as employers, administrators, policy makers and other influential decision-makers.

In order to support leadership development on a community level, the College invited the child care service system managers (CMSMs/DSSABs¹) to be part of the pilot. The service system managers receive government funding to support licensed child care and capacity building that includes professional learning for the sector. As important partners in administration and implementation of the Ministry of Education's policy and programs, creating stronger linkages between the College, our members and the service system managers was a key project priority. The service system managers also had direct contact with licensed child care operators due to existing service agreements and could distribute the call for participants to supervisors in their community.

Given that licensed child care funding of First Nations is provided directly from the Ministry of Education (EDU) rather than through the province's child care service system managers, the College worked with EDU's regional offices to circulate application information to RECEs working in First Nations.

¹ Consolidated Municipal Service Manager and District Social Services Administration Boards

Application Process

In April 2015, 27 of the 47 CMSMs and DSSABs circulated the LP2 application information in English and French to licensed child care operators in their respective regions. EDU regional offices, through the Child Care Advisors, circulated the adapted application information to First Nations child care operators.

The College received 75 applications from RECEs from 24 CMSMs/DSSABs and four First Nations. Despite extending the application deadline, the College did not receive applications from RECEs in three of the service system catchment areas who were interested in supporting the project. The College committed to doing targeted outreach in the three service system catchment areas where no RECEs applied.

Selection Process

A selection committee comprised of the Registrar, Director of Professional Practice, Chair of the Standards of Practice Committee, a Council public appointee and an LP1 RECE mentor, reviewed the applications received from English, French and First Nations RECEs.

The committee selected 41 RECEs from 24 service system catchment areas and three First Nations. One candidate withdrew before the program began following a job change which was not in a supervisory role in licensed child care. During the pilot, one other candidate withdrew for personal reasons and a second did not complete the program for unknown reasons. Therefore, 38 RECEs in supervisory roles completed the program.

Community Liaisons assigned by CMSM/DSSABs and two EDU Child Care Advisors supporting First Nations communities were asked to help the participants make connections in their respective early learning and child care communities through existing networks, professional learning communities and quality assurance programs.

The LP2 Program

The LP2 program was an 80-hour program and included the following activities:

- An opening retreat and symposium (14 hours),
- Five online modules of study (19 hours) covering five areas of leadership, including:
 - Governance and Fiscal Responsibility (pre-recorded)
 - Pedagogical Leadership (pre-recorded)
 - Communication and Collaboration (live)
 - Creating and Maintaining Welcoming Learning Environments (live)
 - Human Resources Management (live),
- A self-directed learning component (21 hours),
- A practicum experience (12 hours) and,

- A closing retreat (14 hours).

Evaluation

An evaluation framework was developed based on Guskey's (2000) five-level model for evaluating professional development. Building from the first Leadership Pilot project evaluation, the intention was to try and evaluate participants' learning at higher levels of Guskey's model than what was done for LP1 (i.e. organizational support and change versus participant reactions or learning).

Data was collected through the following tools:

- Opening Retreat Feedback Survey
- Symposium Feedback Survey
- Modules of Study Feedback Surveys (5)
- Self-Directed Learning Feedback Survey
- Practicum Feedback Survey
- Pre and Post-Assessment Survey
- Community Liaison Survey
- Employer Survey
- Closing Retreat Feedback Survey
- Closing Retreat SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results) Activity Notes
- Overall Project Feedback Survey

Data Analysis and Discussion

Feedback surveys on the components of the project highlighted that the majority of participants responded positively to the activities included in the project and were satisfied with the experience overall.

The opening and closing retreats received particularly positive feedback and provide the greatest insight into how the project met the objective of enhancing the leadership capacity of RECEs who are in supervisory roles in licensed child care. The two retreats had an explicit focus on leadership and responses highlighted new concepts on leadership and professional learning acquired by participants. A number of themes were evident in the responses from both retreats. New leadership knowledge and skills identified by participants focused on reflective practice, connecting with other professionals and supporting leadership in others.

Learning about and applying the concept of distributed leadership (Rodd, 2015) was identified by a number of participants in the feedback for both retreats. This finding is particularly interesting because Vukelich and O'Toole (2017) identified that "leadership as a participatory concept, not connected with title or position, and therefore, accessible to many" was one of the main concepts that had a long term impact on LP1 participants. Considering there is very little

research on leadership development with RECEs, the LP project evaluations indicate a strong theoretical starting point to develop ongoing training for leadership in the profession.

Similar themes around how participants planned on sharing or using new learning were also evident in the feedback from the retreats. Providing professional learning to others, joining or creating networks or communities of practice and integrating new knowledge about the College and leadership more broadly into their daily work were common responses from participants. Responses to the closing retreat also highlighted a new type of activity that involved taking on more explicit leadership roles outside of their supervisory role/work such as establishing or chairing a supervisor's network in their community and writing a briefing note for an external community organization.

Notes from the SOAR activity at the closing retreat also echoed the feedback from both retreats and provided more insight into the perceived leadership capacity of participants. Participants identified leadership strengths they brought to the project or that emerged during the project. A shift in language was noticeable from the strengths they identified as bringing to the project and the ones that emerged. Strengths brought to the project revolved more around basic skills and attitudes such as communication, organization and passion. Strengths that emerged were more action oriented and specific. For example, participants identified reflective leadership, accountability, advocacy, networking and empowering others as emerging leadership skills.

Feedback on the five modules of study was mostly positive and participants appreciated the accessibility of the online learning format. Benefits and drawbacks to both the recorded and live module delivery were documented. Several participants identified that the content in some of the modules was too basic or not in-depth enough. Similar to findings in the recent LP1 impact study (Vukelich and O'Toole, 2017), participants rated the usefulness of the modules that were focused on administrative leadership (i.e. human resources, finance) lower than those focused on communication and relationships or pedagogical leadership.

Based on feedback data it seems that the modules did not shift participants' perceptions of their roles as leaders to include specialized knowledge in administrative areas. Although pedagogical leadership was very well received by participants, the connection of high quality pedagogy to professional working environments that have competent leadership in areas such as human resources, governance and finance (Rodd, 2015) was not fully explored or embedded into the project.

The self-directed study and practicum components of the project overlapped in that the activities participants chose for both components were very similar. It was evident from the feedback that the two components supported the project goal of establishing and/or expanding local RECE learning communities. The majority of participants focused on supporting professional learning in their community in one or both of the project components either through direct provision, participation in established community networks or the development of new groups to support professional learning in their communities.

Participants explored or created learning opportunities for others on a variety of topics including approaches to leadership, *How Does Learning Happen?*, the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*, the Continuous Professional Learning Program, culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum for First Nations children, working with resistant or challenging groups of people and advocating for school-age programs.

Participants responded that they felt that their leadership-related professional learning priorities and interests were supported and applied in their self-directed study and practicum experiences. Seventy-eight percent agreed that they were able to gain additional practical experience as a leader in their community and several participants identified increased confidence as a leader as a learning outcome for both components. A number of participants indicated that their practicum activities would continue after the project ended indicating a possible sustained impact as a result of the project.

There was not a strong connection between participants' self-directed learning and practicum activities and the topics covered in the learning modules. The lack of connection indicates that the topics covered in the modules may not have supported the areas of learning and activities the participants chose to focus on for their self-directed study and practicum. It may also suggest that the design of the project could have been more cohesive as to ensure that the learning from one component would be integrated and applied into the next component for a more holistic learning experience.

Surveys for the self-directed learning and practicum components also asked participants about their interactions with their assigned Community Liaisons and other community members. Feedback shows that engagement with Community Liaisons and other LP2 participants around the two components was low (between 0 and five interactions) for more than half of the participants and did not happen at all for several participants. Support from colleagues within the work place was higher for both components.

In some cases Community Liaisons played an important role in mentoring participants and facilitating connections with other leaders or community members. These experiences highlight the potential impact these strong connections across the system can have but this area of the project was very inconsistent for participants. College staff observed a weaker connection between project participants, including Community Liaisons, compared to the LP1 project. The use of an explicit mentorship model with defined roles and actions in LP1 may have been more effective in facilitating ongoing communication and collaboration.

The various experiences and level of interaction between participants and their Community Liaisons may have been a result of the fact that the College did not maintain on-going communication with the Community Liaisons or outline specific requirements for interactions with participants. The College decided on this approach in the beginning stages of the project to nurture participants' autonomy and initiative, however, participants and Community Liaisons may have benefitted from stronger guidelines or requirements from the College.

The varying engagement was also evident in the low response rate to the feedback survey for the Community Liaisons. Only 14 Community Liaisons responded to the feedback survey and less than 80% of those respondents agreed that their role and expectations from the College was clear. Eighty-six percent agreed that having an LP2 participant in their community was 'good value' for their community, but fewer agreed that their involvement benefited children and families (71%), supported them to understand the expectations of the College's CPL program (71%) or enhanced the participant's understanding of the early years system (64%).

The varied level of involvement from Community Liaisons limited the impact of one of the project's objectives to engage the province's municipal sector in active support for leadership initiatives and continuous professional learning for RECEs. It also highlights the existing variation in involvement of municipal service system managers in the provision or facilitation of professional learning for the early childhood profession and the child care sector specifically. It was a missed opportunity that the project did not better support and evaluate an increased understanding of leadership development and capacity between the College and the CMSMs and DSSABs involved.

The response rate from participants' employers was also low with only 14 responses. Although most of the respondents agreed that their employee's participation in the project was beneficial to their program, the feedback indicates less of an impact on enhancing the relationship with employers and the College. Only 64% percent of employers felt that the guidelines provided by the College were clear and only 64% agreed that having their employee participate in the project helped them better understand the CPL expectations. Employers had a limited role in the design of the project and there was not ongoing communication beyond their initial letter of support for their employee. It was expected that participants would communicate and demonstrate the project objectives to their respective employers.

Based on the data, a stronger role for both the employers and Community Liaisons in the conception of the project, along with greater engagement from the College, may have contributed to supporting multiple project objectives and enabled additional evaluation measures to assess the impact of the project overall.

The overall project feedback echoed the responses provided for the individual components of the project. Thirty-two participants responded to the overall feedback survey and the majority of responses were positive. Most participants felt that the project supported growth through their leadership role and their participation in communities of practice or local professional networks. The majority of participants also felt that their learning would be useful in their practice and support them in system-level actions. The following comments from participants support the above findings and highlight the impact of the project overall:

Working with my Community Liaison facilitated my leadership role in my professional learning and helped me to participate in communities of practice or local professional networks.

I feel my confidence has grown as well as my support and partnerships with others that will continue to help me work towards the vision of our early years program.

This was the best experience of my 20 year career and I am so thankful for being given the opportunity. Thank you so much!!!

Thank you for everything. I could not imagine in a million years not having this experience now. I look forward to seeing what CECE has in store in the future.

Thank you for this AMAZING opportunity. If it were not for this I would have not emerged into the leader I am becoming

Conclusion and Recommendations

The LP2 project provided a positive learning experience for the majority of participants and facilitated some important connections and opportunities for and between RECEs working in supervisory roles in licensed child care across Ontario. The feedback collected from participants highlights that participants did meet the project objective of establishing and expanding local RECE learning communities. The College should consider following-up with participants as it may highlight further evidence of participants strengthening professional learning networks among RECEs in their communities.

The data supports some assumptions about the impacts of the project on participant's leadership capacity. Participants did identify new learning, acknowledged an increase in their confidence and may have incorporated new concepts of leadership in their roles as supervisors. The evaluation framework and supporting tools failed to measure the full impact of the project on participants' enhanced leadership capacity.

Participants indicated an increasing understanding of and connection to the broader early years system. Several made strong connections to their local or regional child care service manager through their Community Liaisons or EDU Child Care Advisors and the benefits of these connections should continue to develop over time. The difference in experiences and responses from Community Liaisons and employers highlights the variation of realities in the sector more broadly and the ongoing need for communications from the College to support a shared understanding across the various stakeholders.

The experiences and learning from facilitating both the LP1 and LP2 projects has influenced the College's working definitions of leadership and leadership development as reflected in the second edition of the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* and the Continuous Professional Learning Portfolio Handbook. These documents will contribute to future conversations with RECEs and other stakeholders and enhance collective ideas around leadership for the profession.

Moving forward, the College would benefit from creating or adopting a conceptual framework for leadership development and capacity. The work done by McCormick Centre (2016) through

their *Whole Leadership Framework* provides an example of a conceptual framework that could be used to support and evaluate increased leadership capacity. Vukelich and O'Toole (2017) have also recommended "the development of a conceptual framework for leadership development that builds on the strength of the sector and cultivates conditions for leadership".

The idea of a collective framework from which to develop and support leadership in the early childhood education profession in Ontario would enhance the culture and practice of the profession and support greater cohesion between multiple stakeholders in the sector. The question of who should develop, publish or promote the framework warrants further consideration.

References

Guskey, T.R. (2000). *Evaluation Professional Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership (2017). *Whole Leadership Framework for Early Childhood Programs (Birth to age 8)*. Retrieved from <http://mccormickcenter.nl.edu/whole-leadership-framework-now-available-in-exchange/>

Rodd, J. (2015). *Leading Change in the Early Years: Principles and Practice*. New York, NY: Open University Press.

Vukelich, G. & O'Toole, C. (2017). *Evaluation of Leadership Pilot One: Draft Report*. Kitchener, ON: Conestoga College.