

**SUBMISSION OF THE COLLEGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATORS REGARDING THE EARLY LEARNING ADVISOR'S
ADVICE TO THE PREMIER ON FULL-DAY LEARNING FOR FOUR
AND FIVE YEAR OLDS**

MADE BY:

COLLEGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

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Introduction

The College of Early Childhood Educators (College) is the regulatory body which will regulate the practice of early childhood education in Ontario. The College has been established by the *Early Childhood Educators Act, 2007* (ECE Act). A transitional Council has been appointed by the Minister of Children and Youth Services and is currently in the process of establishing the structure and processes for the registration of members and the election of Council members to the first elected and appointed Council. A number of the provisions of the ECE Act were brought into force on May 17, 2007, while the remainder await proclamation.

The primary duty of the College, in carrying out its objects, is to serve and protect the public interest. The objects of the College include:

- to regulate the practice of early childhood education and to govern its members;
- to develop, establish and maintain qualifications for membership in the College;
- to issue certificates of registration to members of the College;
- to establish and enforce professional standards and ethical standards that are applicable to members of the College and that demonstrate a respect for diversity and a sensitivity to the multicultural character of the Province; and
- to receive and investigate complaints against members of the College and to deal with issues of discipline, professional misconduct, incompetency and incapacity.

Practice of Early Childhood Education

The practice of early childhood education is the planning and delivery of inclusive play-based learning and care programs for children in order to promote their well-being and holistic development, and includes:

- the delivery of programs to pre-school children and school aged children, including children with special needs;
- the assessment of the programs and of the progress of children in the programs;
- communication with the parents or persons with legal custody of the children in the programs in order to improve the development of the children; and
- such other services or activities as may be prescribed by the regulations.¹

Early childhood educators work in a variety of settings including, but not limited to: infant, toddler and preschool (including child care and nursery school) programs; before- and after-school programs; kindergarten and primary grade classrooms; special education and intervention programs; Ontario Early Years Centres; Head Start programs; family supports; home child care programs; parent/child/caregiver drop-in programs; paediatric playrooms and health care settings.

The duties and responsibilities of an early childhood educator include:

- assessing children's developmental needs and stages in all developmental domains;
- designing curriculum to address children's identified needs, stages of development and interests;
- planning programs and environments for play and activities that help children make developmental progress;
- maintaining healthy emotional and social learning contexts for children; and

¹ Section 2 of the ECE Act, which will come into force on proclamation.

- reporting to parents and supervisors on children's developmental progress within healthy, safe, nurturing, and challenging play environments.

Distinct Body of Professional Knowledge of Early Childhood Education

(a) Unique characteristics of learning and development during early childhood

Early childhood education developed as a profession in part to ensure that full day, group-based learning environments for young children are aligned with young children's developmental needs. The distinct body of professional knowledge in early childhood education reflects the unique characteristics of learning and development during early childhood. Early childhood educators understand how these characteristics influence development and learning, especially from birth to age six. Unique characteristics of early childhood include a greater level of plasticity, more rapid rate of development, different ways of relating to knowledge, and a greater need for socially nurturing bonds. Professional practices of early childhood education are based on scientifically derived theories and findings for how to best meet children's developmental needs, including by working across all developmental domains (social-emotional, cognitive, and physical) and through developmentally appropriate practices that respect the primary role of a child's caregivers and family in supporting early childhood development. Developmentally appropriate practices are both age appropriate and individually appropriate. This means that practices must be aligned with how young children actually learn (age appropriate) and must meet the developmental needs of each individual child in any given program (individually appropriate).

(b) Educational programs for young children

Development in early childhood differs from development in middle and late childhood. As a result, early childhood educators specialize in applying best practices for how to meet the developmental needs of young children across educational settings. This specialized knowledge is derived from scientific findings on young children's learning and development and is based on observations of young children's learning across settings. The educational program which results is based on features necessary for the program to be suitable for both the age and developmental level of the children in the program and setting of the program itself. The educational programs are designed at all levels to meet children's developmental needs, including how curriculum is organized and presented, and basic pedagogical approaches

practiced by the early childhood educator. These practices are tightly integrated across all aspects of programming, including the environment, materials, activities, and the practice of inclusive, developmentally appropriate and family-centred approaches.

Education and Training of Early Childhood Educators

Early childhood educators become qualified to practise early childhood education through successful completion of recognized post secondary programs offered by universities and colleges. Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology offer 2-year diplomas in early childhood education. There are also degree programs offered at universities, such as the Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education at Ryerson University.

The preparation of the early childhood educator through these post secondary programs includes foundations in developmental psychology, in children's health and nutrition, and in the holistic understanding of human development across all developmental domains. Early childhood educators are trained to teach through play, using a variety of concrete and age appropriate learning materials of immediate interest to the young child, and are trained to provide inclusive education and care in the context of the child's family and community. This includes training to develop routines and transitions that support children's learning, and developing an understanding and awareness of how the entire learning environment influences optimal development and learning. Early childhood educators learn to make provisions for outdoor play, provide time and place for quiet reflection, and ensure that each child is provided adequate rest periods for their developmental level. The training of early childhood educators is based on the findings that young children learn through play, as active participants in their own learning, through repeated exposure to new concepts across many contexts, within meaning-based and socially contextualized experiences, and are especially dependent on primary caregivers for safety and optimal health.

Early childhood educators are trained to understand early language and literacy development, foundational mathematics concepts, inquiry-based approaches to scientific learning, core concepts of the visual and performing arts, and other foundational concepts in the transmission of culturally valued knowledge. Early childhood educators are taught how to use concrete instructional materials and activities, such as puppets, math manipulatives, hands-on art projects, scientific experiments, materials for observation, building materials, imaginative play supplies, music, dance, storytelling, and modeling of print conventions in order to teach core concepts within the cognitive domain and across subject areas. Connections between

subject areas are made explicit through guided play, directed observation, and open ended conversation. By learning how to integrate the early education and care functions of early childhood education, early childhood educators are able to provide rich and nurturing learning experiences across all developmental domains.

Based on the distinct body of knowledge of early childhood education and the education and training of early childhood educators, the College believes that early childhood educators are well qualified and uniquely positioned to deliver quality, play-based learning to four and five year old children.

Registration of Members under the ECE Act

One of the objects of the College is to register members of the College based on the qualifications for membership. The registration regulation made under the ECE Act sets out the requirements for registration of members, both during the transitional period and thereafter.² During the transitional period, in order for a certificate of registration to be issued by the Registrar, an applicant must meet one of the following educational and training requirements:

- (a) possess a diploma from a program in early childhood education offered by an Ontario College of Applied Arts and Technology;
- (b) successfully complete a post secondary program in early childhood education at a Canadian institution which is equivalent to that described in subparagraph (a) and which has been approved by the College³;
- (c) possess a degree from a Canadian university, whose major course content, both academic and practical, is relevant to early childhood education and which has been approved by the College⁴; or
- (d) possess a letter of equivalency certificate or a recognition of equivalency certificate issued by the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario or the Association francophone à l'éducation des services à l'enfance de l'Ontario.

² Three other regulations have been made under the ECE Act: transitional period, designation of geographic areas and professional misconduct.

³ The regulation also permits a program referred to in subparagraph (b) to be approved through an assessment process approved by the College.

⁴ The regulation also permits a degree referred to in subparagraph (c) to be approved through an assessment process approved by the College.

The College has approved a number of programs in early childhood education offered by Canadian post secondary institutions, including degrees from Canadian universities. Attached is a copy of the list of post secondary programs offered in Ontario and other provinces which are currently approved by the College.

After the end of the transitional period, an applicant will be required to meet one of the above educational and training requirements (subject to a 5 year restriction regarding paragraph (d)), or the following requirement:

- (e) possess a diploma or degree from a post secondary institution or a combination of a diploma or degree from a post secondary institution and experience which is equivalent to that described in paragraph (a) and demonstrated by the successful completion of a prior learning assessment process approved by the College.⁵

There are other requirements for registration set out in the registration regulation, such as the requirement for an applicant to disclose findings and proceedings regarding past conduct (for example, findings of guilt in relation to a criminal offence or any other offence relevant to the applicant's suitability to practise the profession). In order for an applicant to be registered, the Registrar must believe, based on the applicant's past and present conduct, that the applicant will practise the profession with decency, integrity and honesty in accordance with the law.

These registration requirements and the registration process set out in the ECE Act will serve to assure the public that early childhood education programs are planned and delivered by qualified professionals. The public of Ontario, including parents and children, will be assured that individuals who use the title "early childhood educator" or "registered early childhood educator" are qualified professionals.

The College's Role in Protecting the Public

Members of the College will be accountable to meet professional and ethical standards approved by the College. These professional and ethical standards will be delineated in a Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice for members of the College. The professional misconduct regulation made under the ECE Act enumerates conduct that is defined as professional misconduct, and includes:

⁵ There is also provision under the registration regulation for the College to set or approve an examination or other means to assess a person's competence. The sections of the registration regulation that relate to registration after the transitional period will be in force when section 25 of the ECE Act is proclaimed.

- Failing to maintain the standards of the profession;
- Contravening a law, if the contravention is relevant to the member's suitability to hold a certificate of registration; and
- Contravening a law, if the contravention has caused or may cause a child who is under the member's professional supervision to be put at or remain at risk.⁶

Once the remaining provisions of the ECE Act are brought into force, there will be a process for complaints and mandatory reports to be filed with the College. Under the ECE Act, a Complaints Committee will be established, whose responsibility it will be to consider and investigate complaints regarding the conduct or actions of members of the College. Matters may be referred to the Discipline Committee for a hearing to determine any allegation of professional misconduct or incompetence on the part of a member of the College and to impose sanctions if a member is found guilty of professional misconduct.

There will also be a public register providing information to the public about the members of the College, including:

- their name and class of certificate of registration;
- any terms, conditions and limitations imposed on a member's certificate of registration;
- any notation of revocation, cancellation or suspension of a member's certificate of registration; and
- information directed to be added to the register by a committee of the College, such as the results of discipline or fitness to practise proceedings.

Scope of Practice and Title Protection

Under the ECE Act, no person will be permitted to engage in the practice of early childhood education unless that person is a member of the College, subject to certain exceptions. Under the ECE Act, only members of the College will be permitted to use the

⁶ The professional misconduct regulation is not yet in force. It will come into force when section 33(2) of the ECE Act is proclaimed.

protected title “early childhood educator” or “registered early childhood educator” or the French equivalents or any abbreviation of those titles to describe themselves or their profession.

These provisions will protect the public of Ontario, including parents and children, as they will serve to assure the public of Ontario that only qualified professionals practise the profession of early childhood education. They also will serve to ensure that the persons who use the title of "early childhood educator" or "registered early childhood educator" will be regulated in accordance with the ECE Act, the regulations and by-laws made under the ECE Act, including the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice of the profession approved by the College.⁷

Impact of Current Legislation

We appreciate that the legislative framework for full-day learning for four and five year olds is very complex. However, the following two legislative provisions, in our view, may be impediments to the continued role of early childhood educators in the planning and delivery of play-based learning and care programs for four and five year old children:

- Section 3(2)1 of the ECE Act provides an exception to the general rule that only those registered with the College may practise early childhood education, and allows teachers and teaching assistants, when employed in a school (as defined by s. 1(1) of the *Education Act*), to so practise.
- Section 262 of the *Education Act* requires all persons employed in elementary schools to teach (or to perform any duty for which membership in the Ontario College of Teachers is required under that Act) to be members of the Ontario College of Teachers, except as otherwise provided in or under that Act.⁸

We would be pleased to have the opportunity to engage in discussions regarding the legislative framework for full-day learning for four and five year olds.

⁷ Sections 2 to 5 of the ECE Act which relate to the scope of practice of early childhood education, the prohibition regarding persons who are not members engaging in the practice of early childhood education and the use of title are not yet in force. It is anticipated that they will be proclaimed in force at the end of the transitional period (February 2009).

⁸ We note that Section 170.3 of the *Education Act*, titled “Teachers’ Assistants, etc.”, allows the Cabinet to make regulations governing duties and minimum qualifications of persons who are assigned to assist teachers or to complement instruction by teachers in elementary schools. We also note that currently teaching assistants are not regulated in the public interest.

Conclusion

Early childhood education has a distinct body of professional knowledge which reflects the unique characteristics of learning and development during early childhood. Through their education and training, early childhood educators are well-qualified and uniquely positioned to deliver quality, play-based learning to four and five year old children. The College will protect the public, including children and parents of Ontario, through its registration of qualified professionals and its regulation of the practice of early childhood education, based on professional and ethical standards of practice. In order to protect the public, including children and parents of Ontario, the College believes that the delivery of a full-day program for four and five year olds should be done by qualified professionals who are regulated in the public interest and should recognize the particular qualifications of early childhood educators to deliver this program.

We would be pleased to elaborate on any of these comments. Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.