

# Policy Statement regarding Education for Entry to Practice

(Approved November 3, 2021)

## 1 Introduction

To be able to practise safely, competently and professionally, prospective registered early childhood educators (RECEs) must successfully complete post-secondary education in early childhood education as the essential foundation for practice.

### 1.1 Purpose

The College of Early Childhood Educators' (College's) mandate includes developing, establishing and maintaining qualifications for membership, approving programs for the purposes of the education requirement for registration and accrediting post-secondary programs in early childhood education. As part of this mandate, the College may make recommendations to stakeholders such as government and post-secondary institutions regarding the qualifications that individuals must meet to practise safely, competently and professionally in the public interest.

This policy statement sets out the value and importance of post-secondary education as an entry to practice requirement in order to serve and protect the public interest by ensuring that RECEs are appropriately equipped for practice.

### 1.2 Context

This statement is supported by several other policy statements and policies, which detail the College's standards and expectations for the post-secondary education needed to be considered qualified to register as an RECE in Ontario.<sup>1</sup>

## 2 The importance of education

Education is a learning process by which individuals acquire knowledge and understanding from, and develop skills under the guidance of, other individuals, groups or organizations.

There are many aspects to education and learning, including:

- *Reason or purpose:* Individuals undertake education for a variety of reasons, such as to prepare to enter a profession, for career advancement, for professional learning, or for personal interest.

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<sup>1</sup> Diploma programs in early childhood education offered by Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) are required to adhere to a program standard set by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU). MCU's program standard identifies the vocational learning outcomes that students of the diploma program are expected to achieve by the time of graduation from the program. The program standard also guides the College's assessment of educational qualifications under the individual assessment process as well as the assessment of programs for the purpose of being approved by the College.

- *Timing:* Individuals undertake education at different stages in their professional and personal lives.
- *Structure and forum:* Individuals complete education through post-secondary education programs, non-credit continuing education courses, learning events such as workshops and conferences, experience on the job, etc.
- *Way of learning:* Individuals learn through lecture or seminar courses with peers, self-directed learning, hands-on learning in labs, experiential, mentored learning in practice settings, informal sharing of information between colleagues, etc.

Education is a key contributor to professional and personal development, and all of these aspects of education and learning are of benefit and value in their own ways.

### 3 Post-secondary education for entry to practice

Post-secondary education for entry to practice is distinct from other forms of education and learning. The appended table outlines key distinctions.

*At its core, “post-secondary education for entry to practice” refers to a program that:*

- *Is a formal, defined, structured course of study at a post-secondary institution,*
- *Is purposively designed to prepare individuals for the full scope of practice of a profession, and*
- *Ensures that individuals acquire and develop the knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, behaviours and direct experience needed to practise safely, competently, professionally and ethically with any population in any setting consistent with the full scope of practice.*

Important features of post-secondary education for entry to practice include:

- *The program is structured in a deliberate way to best facilitate students’ learning of all aspects of the profession.*
- *At the core of the program is a suite of courses (core courses) that focus on the profession.<sup>2</sup> Core courses are purposively designed and sequenced within the program to:*

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<sup>2</sup> The emphasis and critical element here is that the core of the program is defined by the suite of courses focused on the profession, occupation or area of practice. The College recognizes that programs may include or require courses in other subjects (e.g., research methodology courses, courses taken as part of general education requirements) or related fields.

- Span the full breadth and depth of practice of the profession.
- Ensure that by the time students successfully complete the program they are well prepared to practise according to established standards for the profession.
- *Curriculum content, especially in core courses, is presented and considered in the context of becoming prepared to enter the profession, occupation or area of practice.*  
The context covers the full scope of practice, including the many different:
  - Populations served by the profession, occupation or area of practice.
  - Types of settings where the profession, occupation or area of practice is or may be practised.
  - Practitioners, professionals, community organizations, community supports and other stakeholders that individuals may work and engage with in the course of their practice.
- *Core courses include complementary theory courses and practicum courses.*
  - In theory courses, students study, learn and acquire the theoretical knowledge needed to practise the profession, occupation or area of practice.
  - Students study a variety of different theories and frameworks related to the profession, both established and developing, and learn how to critically evaluate and apply them.
  - In practicum courses, students learn how to apply theoretical knowledge in practice.
- *The program instills concepts of professional judgment and ethics and promotes a sense of personal responsibility for the practice of the profession.*
  - Students learn how to be accountable and take responsibility for their practice, including by putting the interests of clients and the public ahead of their own.
  - Students acquire the theoretical knowledge related to the code of ethics and standards of practice of the profession and develop skills to support professional judgement and ethical decision-making.
- *Participants are viewed first and foremost as students in a learner role.*
  - That is, participants are viewed as learners rather than as employees, workers, practitioners or professionals as they would be for other types of education.
- *Exercises and assignments are intentionally designed to support students' learning of the profession.* Exercises and assignments are designed to:
  - Reinforce knowledge acquisition and facilitate deeper understanding.
  - Help students to develop the skills, attitudes, behaviours and judgment needed to practise the profession.

- *Assessments and evaluations focus on determining students' readiness for practice.*
  - In each core course, assessments and evaluations of students are designed to determine the extent to which students are achieving learning outcomes needed to practise the profession.
  - In all courses, students are held accountable for meeting requirements in order to pass.
  - Throughout the program, students are held accountable for progressing in the development of their knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours leading up to the full scope of practice of the profession.
- *Students' learning processes are facilitated with a primary focus on becoming prepared to practise the profession.*
  - Especially for core courses, students are taught by faculty members and instructors who are recognized members of the profession
  - Students also learn through peer-to-peer learning (e.g., class discussions, group projects) facilitated by faculty members and instructors to ensure that the learning experience aligns with course and program objectives and learning outcomes.
- *The program is designed, delivered, reviewed and updated using established standards and robust quality assurance mechanisms so that content remains current, relevant and focused on preparing individuals for entering the profession, occupation or area of practice.*

#### **4 Why successful completion of post-secondary education is a necessary requirement for practising early childhood education in Ontario**

Preparation for safe, competent, professional and ethical RECE practice in Ontario requires the rigorous and comprehensive education and training that post-secondary education programs provide.

##### **4.1 Unique and complex body of knowledge**

The current practice of early childhood education has emerged and evolved since the Industrial Revolution<sup>3</sup>. The practice is based on a distinct and rapidly growing body of research-based knowledge that incorporates both theoretical and practical aspects of child development and early learning. This knowledge includes but is not limited to, holistic child development across multiple domains, pedagogical approaches, as well as observation and documentation of development and learning. Increasingly this is being recognized across the network of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries and

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<sup>3</sup> Nutbrown, C. & Clough, P. (2008) *Early Childhood Education: History, philosophy & experience*.

beyond<sup>4</sup> as a key support that enables children and families to grow, thrive, and achieve their full potential.

In Ontario the practice of early childhood education is defined by the unique combination of what RECEs do, how RECEs do what they do and why. Early childhood education practice can only come from this distinct, specialized body of knowledge.

The dynamic between the what, why and how of RECE practice is reflected in the scope of practice for the profession, which is “the planning and delivery of inclusive play-based learning and care programs for children” (i.e., the what and how) “in order to promote the well-being and holistic development of children” (i.e., the why).

The scope of RECEs’ practice is broad and occurs in dynamic and complex environments and situations. RECEs must have knowledge and understanding in a range of subjects, as well as the skills, attitudes and behaviours to synthesize, apply and integrate that knowledge and understanding in practice. RECEs need to be prepared to practise according to the full scope of practice in these contexts and be able to adapt within specific practice settings and across different types of practice settings.

Early childhood education practice and the early learning and child care (ELCC) sector are ever evolving. RECEs need to have mastery of the core body of knowledge for the early childhood education profession, understand its history, consider its future trajectory and develop skills so they can successfully navigate and adapt to evolution in practice over time.

RECEs need to know and appreciate the many layers of the broader context and understand how those contexts influence and intersect with the practice of early childhood education in different settings and with different population groups. Examples of layers include systemic issues that influence the organization and functioning of the ELCC sector, anti-racism and anti-oppression frameworks in which to ground their practice, and different worldviews, including Indigenous worldviews and approaches to learning.

## **4.2 Position of trust and risk of harm**

Regulation of a profession is a recognition of the fact that individuals occupy a unique position of trust in relation to the population they serve. There is risk of harm if individuals who practise the profession are not qualified nor held accountable for their conduct, practice and competency.

High quality ELCC programs rely on qualified staff. As reinforced in literature, and by national and international organizations, having qualified staff – i.e., RECEs – is imperative for quality ELCC programs that have long-lasting positive impacts on children’s growth and development.

To ensure the safety, health and well-being of children and families and to promote children’s holistic development, RECEs need to have the knowledge, understanding and professional and

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<sup>4</sup> OECD (2006) Starting Strong II.

ethical judgment necessary to recognize, appreciate, foresee, address and mitigate the risks of harm that may arise in their practice and practice environment.

Risks of harm to children's physical, cognitive, communication and language, social and emotional development and well-being are mitigated when RECEs are knowledgeable about child development and early learning curriculum and pedagogy and understand how their practice and conduct can positively or negatively impact children's development.

RECEs are leaders regardless of employment position and setting. RECEs must be prepared with the knowledge of what leadership is and understand and develop the skills to demonstrate leadership in practice. RECEs use their unique body of knowledge to lead programming and the development of relationships with children and families.

Early childhood education is a relationship-based practice. To lead in these positions of trust, RECEs rely on their understanding that child development is flexible (i.e., children's development is not a linear universal theory that is applied in the same way for each child) and will depend on the child's social, cultural and familial context, experiences, interests, personality, and outlook as well as the child's family's hopes and ambitions for them. RECEs need to be prepared with the knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the many diversities that exist within, beyond and across their communities and of the historical and contemporary issues and experiences that may inform children's and families' identities and sense of inclusion and belonging.

### **4.3 Professional judgment and ethics**

Early childhood education is recognized as a profession in Ontario. By definition, the 'profession' status requires that individuals assume personal responsibility for practising within the framework of the ethics and standards of the profession, and that decisions are made in the best interests of children and families. RECEs need to be prepared with the knowledge, appreciation and opportunity to develop the discernment necessary to practise in the interests of children, families and the public in accordance with the standards for the profession.

RECEs routinely work in ambiguous situations with others where they are required to make difficult decisions and provide ethical and appropriate advice on complex issues. Professional and ethical judgment and decision-making are only possible when RECEs know the underlying theory that informs early childhood education practice and have the skills to apply that knowledge appropriately in any given situation for the appropriate reasons. As leaders, RECEs need to know how to take responsibility for their decisions, actions and interactions and use professional judgment to support children and families through strong relationships.

Being responsive and adaptable to everyday, unpredictable, dynamic situations relies heavily on reflective practice skills. To be prepared, RECEs need to have opportunity to study the importance of reflective practice for professional and ethical judgement and decision-making. RECEs need to be able to think and reflect critically on their daily practice and on the impact of their choices and actions on children, families and colleagues. RECEs also need to be equipped with insights about how their approach to education, care, relationships and learning is influenced by the diversities that make up their own identity, as well as their own beliefs and biases. It is through reflective practice that RECEs are better able to understand and work to improve their practice.

The authority of a profession to regulate itself relies on accountability and trust. RECEs need to know, appreciate and be able to demonstrate professional accountability to themselves, to the profession and, ultimately, to the children, families and public of Ontario. Families need to have trust and confidence in RECEs who are educating and caring for their children. Employers, other regulated professionals and practitioners need to be confident that RECEs are prepared for inter-professional collaboration and understand each other's roles and contributions to the education and care of children. To be prepared for their leadership roles in early learning, RECEs need to have developed the collaborative skills to work with children, families, colleagues and others to plan, evaluate situations, assess risks, make informed decisions and take steps to create change. It is through such collaboration that RECEs build on their existing knowledge and increase their capacity to use their professional judgment effectively.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Because of these key aspects of the profession of early childhood education - the unique and complex body of knowledge, the position of trust that educators occupy and the risk of harm to children, and the importance of professional judgement and ethics – the educational preparation for practice as an RECE can only be met by post-secondary programs meeting the requirements for entry to practice. This comprehensive and rigorous education is essential to ensure the safety, well-being and best possible outcomes for children and families.

### Appendix. Post-secondary education for entry to practice in comparison to other types of education experiences

	Description	Purpose or focus	Role of participant	Assessment	Educator
<b>Post-secondary education for entry to practice</b>	<p>A formal, defined, structured course of study purposively designed to prepare individuals for the full scope of practice of a profession</p> <p>The program requires the individual to complete theory and practicum courses</p>	To acquire and develop the knowledge and skills needed to practise the profession safely, competently, professionally and ethically	The participant is a student in a learner role	<p>Assessment is mandatory and designed to determine the extent to which the individual is achieving learning outcomes needed to practise the profession</p> <p>The individual is held accountable for meeting requirements in order to pass</p>	The individual is taught by faculty members and instructors who are recognized members of the profession, occupation or area of practice
<b>Apprenticeship</b>	<p>An individual is employed in a learning-on-the-job relationship for an established trade</p> <p>The individual must successfully complete the apprenticeship, in addition to in-class courses and other requirements, in order to be able to seek authority to practise the trade independently</p>	To learn the skills to practise a trade by undertaking lengthy continuous and direct supervised practice	The individual is an apprentice	<p>Assessment is mandatory</p> <p>The apprentice's work and development of knowledge and skills is assessed according to established competencies for the trade</p>	<p>During the apprenticeship the apprentice is supervised and mentored by a fully qualified practitioner of the trade</p> <p>For associated theory courses, the apprentice is taught by faculty members and instructors who are recognized members of the profession, occupation or area of practice</p>
<b>Non-credit continuing education course or series of such courses</b>	An individual is a student in a post-secondary non-credit continuing education course or series of such courses on a particular topic	To learn about a specific topic (e.g., accounting, history of x) or skill (e.g., communications in difficult situations) for professional or personal development purposes	The individual is a professional, practitioner, post-secondary education student or interested member of the public in a learner role	<p>Assessment may or may not be required</p> <p>Students may have an option to be assessed or not</p> <p>Assessment is developed by the instructor</p>	Usually a professional or practitioner from, or related to, the field



	Description	Purpose or focus	Role of participant	Assessment	Educator
<b>Workshops, conferences, lunch-and-learn sessions and other such learning events</b>	<p>An individual is an attendee at the learning event</p>	<p>To learn about current issues, current thinking and debates, emerging research, etc. related to a particular subject or field of work</p>	<p>The individual is a professional, practitioner, post-secondary education student or interested member of the public in a learner role</p> <p>Beyond active listening and discussion with other attendees, learning is passive</p>	<p>Usually no assessment</p> <p>Where assessment occurs, is very informal, focused on a specific, narrowly defined topic and most likely used by the presenters to illustrate a claim or point</p>	<p>Colleague, professional or researcher, etc. in the field</p>
<b>Employment in the sector</b>  <i>Training by the employer</i>	<p>An individual is employed by an employer to perform a particular job</p> <p>The individual is required to participate in and complete orientation and other training</p>	<p>To learn about the specific employer and place of work (especially the policies, procedures and other occupational on-the-job learning requirements) in order to provide services for pay</p>	<p>The individual has the competencies, skills and designation required for the role; they are not a student or learner in their role</p>	<p>As determined by the employer</p> <p>Assessment is based on the job description and organizational policies</p>	<p>As determined by the employer</p>