

“Conversations that Matter”:
Child and Youth Study Students’ Perspectives on the
Professional Status of Early Childhood Education

Melissa Kennedy

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Thesis Supervisor: Dr. J. Turner

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Abstract

The focus of this research was to gain an understanding of how students enrolled in Mount Saint Vincent University's Bachelor of Arts (Child and Youth Study) program perceive the professional status of Early Childhood Education, and the impact the professional status of ECE may have on future career choices. Qualitative data was gathered using the World Café dialogue method. Data was collected from nineteen participants through audio-recordings, participant-written notes, and notes recorded by a note-taker. Thematic analysis, as described by Attride-Stirling (2001) and Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to identify themes in the data. Two global themes were identified: value placed on the knowledge and role of the early childhood educator, and early childhood education as a career option. The results of this study indicate that students in the Child and Youth Study program perceive Early Childhood Education to be a low-status occupation. Participants expressed concerns over the lack of professional compensation, the absence of a standard of credentialing, public disregard for the knowledge of ECEs, and the public perception of ECE as "babysitting" rather than education. Of the nineteen participants in this study none intended to work as an early childhood educator upon completion of the Child and Youth Study program, either in a childcare centre or in the newly-established pre-primary program. Based on the findings of this study, recommendations for policy makers are: develop a recruitment strategy for the field of Early Childhood Education, provide professional compensation for ECEs, ensure all individuals who hold the title of Early Childhood Educator hold either a diploma in Early Childhood Education or a degree in Child and Youth Study, and develop a public-awareness campaign on the value of early childhood education.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Within Canada, licenced childcare centres are experiencing challenges with the recruitment and retention of staff who hold post-secondary training in Early Childhood Education (Ferguson & Miller, 2000; Ferguson, 2003; Flanagan, Beach & Varmuza, 2013; Howe & Prochner, 2012). An analysis of unemployment rates and job vacancies within Canada's childcare sector found that, beginning in 2001, Canada has been experiencing a workforce shortage of early childhood educators who have completed training in Early Childhood Education (Centre for Spatial Economics, 2009). In 2007, the workforce shortage of qualified early childhood educators rose to 4,800 ECEs nationwide (Centre for Spatial Economics, 2009). Qualitative data collected for the Labour Market Update Study revealed that early childhood educators who hold the highest levels of post-secondary education are the most likely to leave work within Canadian childcare centres (Beach, Bertrand, Forer, Michal & Tougas, 2004). The recruitment of well-educated early childhood educators is important to early childhood programs, as studies have found that an ECE's level of education is positively correlated with measures of program quality within their classroom (Goelman, Doherty, Lero, LaGrange & Tougas, 2001; Goelman et al., 2006; Mims, Scott-Little, Lower, Cassidy, Hestenes, 2008; Zill et al., 2001).

Data exists that although students are preparing for a career in Early Childhood Education, less than half of the graduates of Early Childhood Education training programs choose to pursue a career as an early childhood educator (Beach et al., 2004; Forer, Beach & Flanagan, 2009). A cross-Canada survey of students in post-secondary Early Childhood Education training programs found that only 48% of ECE students intended to work in a childcare centre upon completion of the program (Forer et al., 2009). When asked about their long-term plans, only 25% of students had plans to work directly with children in a childcare centre five years

after graduating (Forer et al., 2009). An earlier survey of ECE students collected for the Labour Market Update Study revealed that in five ECE training colleges, less than 40% of students intended to work in the childcare field after graduation (Beach et al., 2004). An analysis of data collected through Statistics Canada's National Graduate Survey found that only 55% of the graduates of ECE training programs were employed in the field two years after graduating, and this decreased to 43% five years after graduation (Beach et al., 2004).

According to Griffin (2002), the former executive director of the Canadian Child Care Federation, the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators with post-secondary early childhood training is tied to the status of Early Childhood Education as a profession. Griffin asserts that as Early Childhood Education becomes recognized as a profession, levels of recruitment and retention will increase (Griffin, 2002). Ferguson and Miller (2000) agree that the lack of status that comes with work as an early childhood educator may prevent some individuals from seriously considering a career in the early childhood field.

Both practicing early childhood educators and students in ECE training programs are aware of the low status of ECE work (Adams, 2008; Boyd, 2013; Langford, 2008). A qualitative study of students undergoing training in Early Childhood Education in Ontario found that ECE students are concerned with the lack of status that comes with work as an early childhood educator (Langford, 2008). The ECE students described the public perception of an early childhood educator as a "babysitter" or "inferior" (Langford, 2008). Another qualitative study of UK students in their final year of a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Studies program found that over half of participants felt that the field of Early Childhood Education is not valued by other professionals or by society in general (Adams, 2008). Interviews conducted with American

ECEs revealed that the disconnect between qualifications and professional status has caused many to consider leaving the field (Boyd, 2013).

Research has shown that many students in Early Childhood Education training programs are choosing not to enter the field of early childhood education (Beach et al., 2004; Forer, Beach & Flanagan, 2009), yet the perspectives of these students remains largely unknown. It has been theorized that the professional status of early childhood education is related to the recruitment and retention of trained ECEs (Griffin, 2002; Ferguson & Miller, 2000), but little data exists on how students in ECE training programs perceive the professional status of Early Childhood Education, and the impact the professional status of ECE has on a student's intended career choices. Based on the gaps that exist in the research, the following thesis statement was developed: The low recruitment rate of graduates from Early Childhood Education training programs into licensed childcare centres is tied to the lack of professional status of Early Childhood Education work.

The following research questions were explored:

1. How do students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts (Child and Youth Study) program at Mount Saint Vincent University perceive the professional status of Early Childhood Education?
2. What characteristics of a profession do CHYS students perceive as being central to professional status?
3. Do CHYS students describe differences in status between programs that provide care and programs with a sole focus on education?
4. Does the status of Early Childhood Education as a profession influence the intended career choices of CHYS students?

Data collected during a World Café style focus group was analyzed to identify themes. Two broad themes were identified through thematic network analysis: Child and Youth Study students' perceptions of the value placed on the knowledge and role of early childhood educators, and Child and Youth Study students' perceptions of early childhood education as a career option. Results demonstrated that CHYS students perceive the field of Early Childhood Education as undervalued, and do not view the field of Early Childhood Education as a career option.

Glossary of Terms

Childcare. Refers to non-familial care that takes place outside of the school system.

Early Childhood Education training programs. Refers to college diploma programs and university degree programs where, upon completion of the program, individuals may apply for a Level 2 or Level 3 ECE classification.

Level 2 ECE Classification. Refers to a classification level for early childhood educators that is granted by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Individuals are eligible to obtain this classification after completion of a two-year ECE diploma program.

Level 3 ECE Classification. Refers to the highest available classification level for an early childhood educator that is granted by the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Individuals are eligible to obtain this classification after completion of either the Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Study degree, or a two-year diploma in Early Childhood Education in conjunction with any university degree.

Licensed childcare. Refers to childcare that is operated separately from the public education system, but is regulated by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The professionalization of the early childhood workforce has long been a topic of interest within the field of Early Childhood Education (Griffin, 2002; Katz, 1985). Over thirty years ago, Lilian Katz questioned the professional status of Early Childhood Education, illustrating that while ECE may resemble a profession in some areas, it did not yet conform to the expected standards of a profession (Katz, 1985). Over the past decade, efforts have been made to explore early childhood educators' sense of "professionalism" (Brock, 2012; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015; Urban & Dalli, 2011). Early childhood educators have little doubt that they conduct themselves in a professional manner and, when asked, describe themselves as "professionals" (Boyd, 2013; Harwood, Klopper, Osanyin & Vanderlee, 2013; Harwood & Tukonic, 2016; Moyles, 2001; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015; Urban & Dalli, 2011). An argument put forth by Bornfreund and Goffin (2016), however, is that the status of early childhood educators as "professionals" is tied to the status of Early Childhood Education as a profession. The authors explain that early childhood education does not conform to the standards of established professions, and when we overlook this fact we prevent the field of Early Childhood Education from reaching its full potential (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016). Recently, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2016) in the USA initiated a national project entitled Power to the Profession, which aims to define and advance the field of Early Childhood Education. The project, due in December of 2018, will require early childhood educators to think critically about characteristics of their field that may stand in the way of professional recognition (NAEYC, 2016).

What is a Profession?

There is currently no agreed-upon sociological definition of a profession, although many attempts have been made to determine what separates a profession from other occupational groups (Saks, 2012). The systematic study of professions began in 1933 with the work of Carr-Saunders and Wilson (Abbott, 1988; Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1964; Saks, 2012), who put forth a definition of a profession as an occupational group that holds specialized knowledge, has a system of credentialing, and adheres to a code of ethics (Abbott, 1988; Carr-Saunders & Wilson, 1964). No other serious attempts were made to define or study the professions until the 1950s and 1960s, when the taxonomic approach to defining the professions became popular (Saks, 2012). Under the taxonomic approach, professions were viewed as having a distinct set of characteristics that set them apart from other occupational groups (Saks, 2012). This led to a set of theories known as the “trait” theories of professions (Leicht & Fennell, 2001; Saks, 2012).

According to trait theorists, an occupational group can be classified as a profession if it has a set of characteristics that are typically associated with the classic professions such as law or medicine (Leicht & Fennell, 2001). Most trait theorists agreed on eight key traits that separated professions from other occupational groups: theory based knowledge, extensive training, value to society, dedication to service, autonomy, commitment to the profession, professional community, and a code of ethics (Leicht & Fennell, 2001). Researchers could not, however, agree on the relevant importance of each trait to an occupation’s professional status, leading some researchers to place greater weight on certain traits to either glorify or discredit an occupation (Leicht & Fennell, 2001; Saks, 2012). These inconsistencies led to a decline in the popularity of trait theories (Leicht & Fennell, 2001).

In 1988, Andrew Abbott put forth a theory on the development of professions, arguing that occupational groups occasionally engage in competition for the exclusive right to perform certain tasks. Abbott proposed that the occupations that win such “jurisdictional disputes”, and become recognized as professions, are those that are able to legitimize their body of expert knowledge in the eyes of the public and within the legal system (Abbott, 1988). According to Abbott, a profession holds a body of abstract knowledge, typically has a single ethics code, has one primary national professional association, and has formal schools and licensure. While no comprehensive and widely-accepted definition of a profession is available (Saks, 2012), theorists from all perspectives on professionalism agree that a profession is an occupational group with a specialized skill set, typically abstract and requiring extensive training, in which professionals are expected to apply their knowledge and skills to each unique situation (Abbott, 1988).

Specialized Knowledge

According to Abbott, an abstract knowledge base is the main characteristic that separates a profession from other occupational groups (Abbott, 1988). The field of Early Childhood Education holds an abstract knowledge base, which is shared by all early childhood educators who hold a diploma in Early Childhood Education, or an ECE-related degree (Beach et al., 2004). Focus group discussions with faculty and students in Canadian post-secondary ECE programs revealed that Early Childhood Education training programs have a similar core curriculum, with a strong focus on child development, early childhood pedagogy, and child-centered curriculum (Beach et al., 2004). A study of Canadian early childhood educators found that ECEs view abstract knowledge, in particular a solid foundation in child development, as essential to their practice (Harwood & Tukonic, 2016).

Abbott also proposed that a profession should hold a body of academic knowledge, as it legitimizes the work of the group by rooting the practice of the professionals in logic and science (Abbott, 1988). The field of Early Childhood Education does possess a body of academic knowledge, although it is often overlooked as a legitimate academic discipline (Moyles, 2001). Universities play a central role in furthering a field's knowledge base (Beach et al., 2004), and Canada has few university-based Early Childhood Education programs (Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008). A degree is not required to practice Early Childhood Education in any jurisdiction within Canada (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007; Goelman, 2004), and the majority of ECE training opportunities within Canada are one-or-two year college programs (Beach et al., 2004; Doherty-Derkowski, Friendly & Beach, 2003; Pence & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2008). In Canada, there is also no national body currently responsible for furthering the academic knowledge base of Canadian early childhood educators (Langford, Hewes, Hooper & Lysack, 2016). For a decade, The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council created and disseminated documents to aid Canadian early childhood educators in their practice, until the organization was dismantled in 2013 due to federal cuts (Langford et al., 2016).

Formal Training

One of the most central characteristics of a profession is the idea of credentialing, where entry into a profession is limited to individuals who have completed specific educational training (Leitch & Fennell, 2001). Through this extensive training, professionals internalize the norms of the profession (Leitch & Fennell, 2001). Uniform training standards ensure uniformity in practice (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016; Katz, 1985), which is an expectation held by the public of all professionals (Leitch & Fennell, 2001).

Within the field of early childhood education, there is no agreed upon standard of credentialing (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016). In Canada, the training requirements of early childhood educators vary by jurisdiction (Beach et al., 2004; Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007). Most provinces and territories have a requirement that a portion of the staff have post-secondary early childhood training (Beach et al., 2004), in the form of a diploma in Early Childhood Education (Beach et al., 2004; Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007; Goelman, 2004). Only one Canadian province, British Columbia, requires *all* ECEs to have postsecondary training in Early Childhood Education (Howe & Prochner, 2012). In the United States, the training requirements of ECEs also vary by jurisdiction, and range from a high school diploma to a four-year degree (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016).

The required credentials for early childhood educators also vary by work setting (Beach et al., 2004). Early childhood educators who work within Prince Edward Island's Early Years Centres or Ontario's Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten classrooms must hold a minimum of a diploma in Early Childhood Education (Flanagan, 2011; Gibson & Pelletier, 2011). In the US, early childhood educators who work within a Head Start program require a minimum of a two-year associate's degree, and those working within the public school system usually require a four-year degree in Early Childhood Education or a related field of study (Academic Info, 2017; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016; Study.com, 2017). In the UK, early childhood educators who hold a graduate degree typically work in government funded nurseries and schools (Miller, Dalli & Urban, 2012).

There is disagreement on the need for a standard of credentialing within the field of early childhood education (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016; Ferguson & Miller, 2000; Griffin, 2002; Katz,

1985). Bornfreund & Goffin (2016) suggest that the development of an educational standard for entry into the field of Early Childhood Education is necessary for the field to claim status as a profession. They elaborate by saying that strict entry standards, combined with professional status, would likely lead to an overall improvement in the practice of early childhood education, while greatly improving the compensation and benefits of ECEs (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016). When a profession has strict entry standards, such as a high level of education, it limits the number of people who can practice in that profession, which leads to higher standards in practice and greater compensation (Abbott, 1988). According to Ferguson and Miller (2000), the absence of a standard of credentialing for early childhood educators is related to the low status of ECE work. The authors specifically address the standard of credentialing within Nova Scotia, which allows individuals who have completed a combination of education and work-experience, but do not hold an ECE-related diploma or degree, to claim the title of “Early Childhood Educator”. According to the authors, allowing individuals to practice as an early childhood educator without first obtaining a related diploma or degree is damaging to the field, as it lowers the status of early childhood work (Ferguson & Miller, 2000). Boyd (2013) agrees that encouraging a standard of credentialing for all early childhood educators is essential for the professionalization of the ECE workforce. Griffin (2002), however, claims that putting restrictions on who should be considered a practicing early childhood educator could do more harm than good by creating division within the field. Instead, we should provide support for all those who work in the field, regardless of their formal education, to help them to grow as practitioners and to deliver a quality early childhood program (Griffin, 2002).

A common argument against the need for unified training standards for ECEs is the presentation of anecdotal evidence that ECEs with no formal training have been known to excel

in their position (Katz, 1985). This is known as workplace assimilation, which occurs when an individual who lacks the abstract knowledge base of a profession learns to complete the tasks of that profession through work experience in the field (Abbott, 1988). In some instances, the untrained workers will become more competent in that profession than others who hold formal training and credentials (Abbott, 1988). According to Jacobs and Adrien (2012) the presence of untrained staff is often necessary for the survival of early childhood programs, but the field should strive toward a standard of two-to-three years of training in Early Childhood Education for all centre staff. They explain that consistency in training among staff would ensure greater consistency in quality among, and even within, early childhood programs (Jacobs & Adrien, 2012). Katz (1985) put forth a similar argument that formal training for ECEs is necessary to ensure consistency among all practicing early childhood educators.

Professional Self-Regulation

True professions are self-governing to ensure quality and consistency in practice (Bornfreund and Goffin, 2016). When a profession is self-governing, it gives the professionals in that field control over ensuring that the profession has a body of academic knowledge, training programs are consistent across settings, and the knowledge base of the profession is applied in practice (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016). Early childhood educators are one of the few “professionals” working with children who are not regulated by self-regulatory colleges (College of Early Childhood Educators, n.d.). The one exception is Ontario’s College of Early Childhood Educators, which is the only regulatory body for early childhood educators within Canada (Langford et al., 2016). The College of Early Childhood Educators views the establishment of this self-regulatory organization as confirmation of the professional status of Early Childhood Educators within Ontario (College of Early Childhood Educators, n.d.).

Professional Organizations

Mature professions usually have hundreds of professional organizations (Abbott, 1988). These groups serve a variety of purposes, including information sharing, lobbying, and the development of various interests within the profession (Abbott, 1988). In Canada, there is at least one ECE professional organization in each province and in one territory (Canadian Child Care Federation, 2017a). These organizations represent diverse interests and specialties (Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003; Griffin, 2002). Membership in a professional organization is not required to work as an early childhood educator within Canada, and enrollment in these organizations is low (Beach et al., 2004). The Canadian ECEC workforce has approximately 300,000 members, yet membership in Canadian professional organizations is only 15,000 individuals (Beach et al., 2004).

According to Abbott, a profession should have a unified national professional association which is open only to members of that profession (Abbott, 1988). Canada has two national childcare organizations—the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, and the Canadian Child Care Federation (Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003). Canada’s most influential professional organization (Beach et al., 2004), the Canadian Child Care Federation, was founded with the goal of inclusivity and is open not only to Canadian early childhood educators, but to all those with an interest in early childhood education (Griffin, 2002). When the federation was formed in 1989, the founders of the CCCF realized that most individuals who practiced Early Childhood Education within Canada did not fit with the sociological definition of a “professional”. The intended purpose of the CCCF was to represent the entire early childhood workforce in Canada, and therefore the founders decided that the organization would be open to everyone working in the early childhood field regardless of their credentials, as well as all those with an interest in

Canadian early childhood education (Griffin, 2002). The position taken by the CCCF differs from that of the traditional professional organization, which limits entry into the organization to members of that profession (Abbott, 1988).

Ethics Code

Professions create a code of ethics to guide their members to behave in a way that would reflect positively on the profession (Abbott, 1988). The Canadian Child Care Federation developed a national Code of Ethics for Child Care Practitioners in 2000 (Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003). While professions typically have a single ethics code (Abbott, 1988), the CCCF Code of Ethics is just one of the ethics codes developed for early childhood educators in Canada (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2017; Flanagan, 2011; Gananthan, 2015). Ethics codes were originally developed to protect the public image of a profession (Abbott, 1988).

Professional organizations, beginning in the mid-1900's, encouraged members to conduct themselves in a professional and ethical manner, as the behaviour of individual professionals influenced public opinion of that profession (Abbott, 1988).

Public Perception of the Profession

The public perception of the field of early childhood education is mixed (Tough, Rikhy, Benzies, Vekved, Kehler & Johnston, 2013; Tukonic, & Harwood, 2015). The public is growing increasingly aware of the importance of the early years to a child's development, in part due to media campaigns designed to educate the public on research findings in neuroscience (Beach et al., 2004). According to Abbott (1988), media campaigns have the power to shape the public's image of a profession, which is important as the public's opinion of a profession has influence over the profession's level of autonomy. A telephone survey completed in 2007 and 2008 of 1,443 Albertans found that between 80% and 90% of Albertans felt that early

childhood educators were of equal importance to a child's development as elementary school teachers (Tough et al., 2013). In a survey of Canadian early childhood educators, all participants indicated that they believed they were viewed as professionals (Hardwood & Tukonic, 2016). In contrast, interviews conducted with early childhood educators in New England revealed that the majority of participants felt undervalued and did not feel they were viewed as professionals (Boyd, 2013). A qualitative study of the greater ECE workforce in the Republic of Ireland had similar findings, with participants expressing the opinion that ECE is not viewed as a profession or respected by society in general (Moloney, 2010). A questionnaire of Canadian early childhood educators found that less than 40% of participants felt respected by others in their role as an early childhood educator, yet close to 65% of participants felt that they were viewed as professionals by others (Tukonic, & Harwood, 2015).

In focus group discussions with early childhood educators across Canada, early childhood educators described a lack of recognition by other professionals, especially by teachers (Beach et al., 2004). In Ontario, early childhood educators work alongside kindergarten teachers within the public school system's junior kindergarten program (Flanagan et al., 2013). While the early childhood educator and the kindergarten teacher are considered teaching partners, studies indicate that the teaching staff in these partnerships have little regard for the knowledge and experience of early childhood educators, and have a tendency to view their ECE teaching partner as their assistant (Gibson & Pelletier, 2011; Lynch, 2014). In a survey of teaching partnerships, kindergarten teachers were much more likely than early childhood educators to agree that they have more authority in the classroom, they delegate tasks to their partner, and they have greater say in program changes and decisions (Gibson & Pelletier, 2011). Nearly 35% of ECEs in these working relationships reported that they act as an assistant to their teaching partner (Gibson &

Pelletier, 2011). In another study of the kindergarten teachers in these partnerships, the teachers indicated that it was their responsibility to provide direction to the early childhood educator (Lynch, 2014). Some teachers expressed frustration when their ECE partner took initiative, as they believed that the knowledge and role of early childhood educators are incompatible with the school system (Lynch, 2014).

Remuneration

The recognition of early childhood educators as knowledgeable professionals is hindered by the low wages paid to those in the field (Andrew & Newman, 2012; Boyd, 2013). An idea put forth by Boyd (2013) is that early childhood educators will not be viewed as professionals until the field of Early Childhood Education is compensated similarly to other professions. Without professional compensation, even early childhood educators who have high levels of education will continue to be de-valued and viewed as non-professionals by members of the public (Boyd, 2013). If the field of Early Childhood Education is to move forward as a profession and meet its full potential, the wage gap between early childhood educators and other professionals must be addressed (Andrew & Newman, 2012).

An observation made by Ganathan (2015) is that early childhood educators and teachers who work together in Ontario's junior kindergarten program are represented by separate unions. Ganathan suggests that differences in union representation between ECEs and teachers affects the professional image of early childhood educators. While teachers and early childhood educators are expected to work as equal partners in the delivery of an educational program, ECEs have not been invited to join the teachers union (Ganathan, 2015). The exclusion of early childhood educators from the teachers union undermines the authority of ECEs as educators, and

perpetuates the stereotype of early childhood education as only “care” with no educational component (Gananthan, 2015).

Major Professional Activity: Care or Education?

An argument put forth by Chang-Kredl (2015) is that the caring aspect of early childhood work is at odds with the image of a professional. According to Chang-Kredl, ECEs are viewed as substitute mothers, and with this comes the image of someone who is nurturing and selfless, whose needs are secondary to the needs of the children and families she serves. This image prevents others from seeing her as someone who is ambitious or worthy of professional compensation (Chang-Kredl, 2015). A paradox of early childhood education is that the role of educator is inseparable from the role of caregiver (Moyles, 2001). The caring nature of early childhood work is one of the reasons for the low status of the occupation (Ferguson & Miller, 2000). According to Nell Noddings (2001), the act of caring is undervalued in our society, in part because women’s traditional work, including childcare, is viewed as less important than the work traditionally done by men.

In Canada, programs that offer care for children are viewed differently than programs that provide an education (Cleveland & Colley, 2003; Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003). Some argue that the perceived distinction between “care” and “education” is central to the difference in training standards, pay, and social status between early childhood educators and teachers (Cleveland & Colley, 2003; Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003). In Canada, early childhood educators earn less than one half the income of elementary school and kindergarten teachers (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, n.d; Statistics Canada, 2011). Notable pay differences exist even when educational backgrounds are similar (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, n.d.). In 2005, the median income of a full-time centre-based ECE with a

bachelor's degree or higher was less than half the median income of a full-time elementary school or kindergarten teacher (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, n.d.). Kindergarten teachers are also widely regarded as professionals, while early childhood educators are not (Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003).

The stigma around the field of early childhood education in Canada can be traced back to its roots (Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007). In Canada, childcare developed as a service for low-income mothers, with the sole purpose of providing custodial care, while kindergarten has always been viewed as an educational service (Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003). The public's view of childcare as welfare and kindergarten as education is apparent in the differences in funding between childcare and kindergarten (Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003). Childcare in Canada is typically funded through parent fees and subsidy for low income families (Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003). For a child aged five and under, Canada provides less than one-sixth of the funding that it provides for each child in the public education system (Bell, 2007).

Canadian Context

Throughout Canada, childcare and Early Childhood Education operate under a variety of funding sources and regulations, in a system that McCain, Mustard, and Shanker have described as "chaos" (McCain et al., 2007, pp. 103-120). Childcare in Canada is delivered through a mixture of commercial, non-profit, and public providers (McCain, et al., 2007), with the majority of childcare centres being privately operated (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007). The federal government directly funds early childhood programs for military families, on-reserve First Nations families, and new Canadians studying French or English (Howe & Prochner, 2012; McCain et al., 2007). For the remainder of Canadian Early Childhood Education and Care

programs, the federal government provides transfer payments to each province to distribute according to their own criteria for funding (Howe & Prochner, 2012).

The federal government has been aware of the potential benefits of a unified system of Early Childhood Education and Care for many years (Howe & Prochner, 2012). In 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women called for a national childcare strategy as a means of addressing gender inequality within Canada (Childcare Canada, 2014). Almost half a century later, Canada still has no national strategy for funding and organizing early childhood programs (Howe & Prochner, 2012). In 1986, the Report of the Task Force on Child Care was released by Brian Mulroney's Conservative government, calling for a universal childcare system that would be co-funded by the federal and provincial governments (Childcare Canada, 2014). The recommendation was to develop an affordable childcare system that would eventually be available to all Canadian children (Childcare Canada, 2014). In 2004, the Paul Martin Liberal government ran for election with the promise of a national childcare strategy and, when elected, drafted funding agreements with each province (Howe & Prochner, 2012). Before the plan could move forward, however, the liberals were replaced by Stephen Harper's conservative government in 2006, who immediately cancelled the formal agreements with each province (Howe & Prochner, 2012; McCain et al., 2007). In June of 2017, the federal government committed to an increase in federal childcare funding, which will be available to all Canadian provinces until at least 2028 (Government of Canada, 2017). The funding is contingent on the provinces following a set of guidelines, including prioritizing spending for families and children most in need (Government of Canada, 2017). Childcare advocates see the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Agreement as a positive step, but feel that funding for the early years

should be distributed in a way that benefits all Canadian children instead of only those considered “at-risk” (Canadian Child Care Federation, 2017b).

Within Canada, each province has prioritized local early childhood needs, which has led to the development of unique systems of Early Childhood Education and Care (Government of Canada, 2012). In Prince Edward Island, Early Years Centres operate with government funding under certain conditions including regulated parent fees, wage scales for staff, and use of an early childhood curriculum (Government of Canada, 2012). Notably, kindergarten programs in Prince Edward Island are taught by early childhood educators (Flanagan, 2010). Early childhood educators within Ontario also work in kindergarten classrooms, alongside a certified teacher (Gibson & Pelletier, 2011; Lynch, 2014). Within Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta some childcare programs exist within public school buildings (Flanagan, 2010). In Quebec, childcare is publicly funded but privately operated, with parents paying a small set amount regardless of their income (Government of Canada, 2012).

The Changing Landscape of Early Childhood Education in Nova Scotia

Over the past year and a half, the Nova Scotia government has introduced changes to the compensation, training requirements, and work setting of the province’s early childhood educators (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016; Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017). In October of 2016, the provincial government introduced an hourly wage scale for Nova Scotia’s early childhood educators who work within licensed childcare centres, which rises with one’s level of post-secondary training in Early Childhood Education (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016). In the same year, the provincial government announced that new training requirements will be put in effect in 2021, which will require all new ECEs to hold post-secondary training in Early Childhood Education or a related field of

study (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016). In September of 2017, the province began implementing a free pre-primary program, which is expected to be fully staffed by early childhood educators and to be available to all four year olds in Nova Scotia by 2020 (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017). In September of 2017, early childhood educators also begin work within select grade primary classrooms in the Halifax Regional Municipality as Early Childhood Education Support Staff (Halifax Regional School Board, 2017). The majority of positions within the public school system require a minimum of a diploma in Early Childhood Education, with some positions requiring a Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Study or equivalent (Government of Nova Scotia, 2017). As outlined in Table 2, an early childhood educator with a Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Study can now earn up to 58% more per hour working as an ECE lead educator within the public school system than within the provinces licensed childcare centres (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016; HRSB/CUPE, 2014). These changes in compensation, required training and work setting have the potential to influence the perception of early childhood educators as professionals within Nova Scotia.

Table 2
Comparison of Remuneration: HRSB Pre-primary Program and Licensed Childcare

	ECE lead educator working in the HRSB	Level 3 ECE working in licensed childcare
Hourly wage	\$29.98 (annual salary divided by number of work hours per year, rounded to nearest cent)	\$19 base hourly wage (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016)
Number of work days per year	196 (HRSB/CUPE, 2014)	260 (Five work days per week multiplied by 52 weeks per year)
Work hours per day	7.5 (HRSB, 2017)	8 (40 work hours per week)
Work hours per year	1,470 (7.5 hours per day multiplied by 196 working days)	2,080 (8 hours per day multiplied by 260 working days)
Annual salary	\$44,076.07 (HRSB/CUPE, 2014)	\$39,520 (hourly rate of \$19 multiplied by 2,080 hours)

Effect of a Curriculum Framework on Professional Status

A curriculum framework for the early years will soon be implemented within Nova Scotia, which will define the expected outcomes of early childhood programs. The use of a curriculum framework has the potential to impact the public perception of Early Childhood Education as a profession. A curriculum framework for early childhood education exists in eight Canadian provinces (Flanagan & Beach, 2010), and in several other countries including Australia (Miller et al., 2012). Within Australia, both policy makers and early childhood educators saw the introduction of the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia as having the potential to increase the status of early childhood educators (Ortlipp, Arthur, & Woodrow, 2011). Early childhood educators who took part in the pilot of the EYLF view it as having the potential to increase their own authority with the public and other professionals by aligning the practice of the ECEs with scientific research, while increasing awareness on the educational purpose of ECE programs (Ortlipp et al., 2011). The authors theorized that as public recognition of the educational aspect of ECE work increases, the public image of ECEs as professionals will also increase (Ortlipp et al., 2011). The authors also stated that the EYLF could give power to the ECEs by demonstrating to the public that ECEs hold an abstract knowledge base that is centered around the education of young children (Ortlipp et al., 2011).

Conclusion

As illustrated in this paper, the field of Early Childhood Education does not conform to the expected standards of a profession (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016; Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003), and is not widely accepted as such (Bornfreund & Goffin, 2016; Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003; Griffin, 2002). While there is a growing appreciation in Canada for the importance of ECE work (Beach et al., 2004; Tough et al., 2013), both practicing ECEs and students in ECE

training programs are aware of the lack of status that comes with work as an early childhood educator (Adams, 2008; Boyd, 2013; Langford, 2008). One reason for the lack of professional recognition for ECEs may be the caring nature of work itself (Chang-Kredl, 2015; Ferguson & Miller, 2000). Recent developments within Nova Scotia have the potential to highlight the educational aspects of early childhood work (Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2017), which may influence the public perception of early childhood education as a profession (Ortlipp et al., 2011).

Chapter 3

Method

The aim of this qualitative research study was to gain an understanding of how students enrolled in a post-secondary Early Childhood Education training program perceive the professional status of early childhood education, and the impact the professional status of early childhood education may have on their intended career choices. Qualitative data was gathered using the World Café dialogue method, in which participants gathered in small groups to discuss three questions that focused on their perception of Early Childhood Education as a profession. A thematic analysis of the group discussions and participant-written notes was conducted to explore how participants perceive the professional status of Early Childhood Education, and the impact this perception has on intended career choices.

Research Design

The World Café method, as described by Brown and Isaacs (2005), was chosen because it encourages participants to explore issues through meaningful dialogue. The World Café process allows people to participate in intimate conversations in groups of four or five, while still remaining connected to the larger group conversation. The small discussion groups of the World Café create a feeling of safety, while the hospitable atmosphere creates an ideal environment for conversation, learning, and insight (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). The goal of the World Café method is for participants to think, explore, and to have “conversations that matter” (Brown & Isaacs, 2005, p. 4).

The World Café method. The first World Café was held in 1995 by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs. Since then, World Café dialogues have been used by tens of thousands of people

around the world, in groups ranging from a dozen to over a thousand (Brown & Isaacs, 2005).

Over the years, Brown and Isaacs (2005) have developed seven World Café design principles that they believe will encourage powerful dialogue.

The World Café design principles, as described by Brown and Isaacs (2005), are:

1. Set the context: The purpose of the dialogue should be made clear to participants. It is helpful to name the cafe in a way that reflects the intended purpose of the discussion.
2. Create hospitable space: A welcoming environment is essential to the World Café method, as it will put the participants at ease. Special attention should be paid to the physical set-up and the creation of a welcoming environment.
3. Explore questions that matter: When we ask genuine questions for which we don't already have the answers, it encourages the generation of ideas and insights. Experienced World Café hosts recommend asking open-ended questions.
4. Encourage everyone's contribution: World Café etiquette is to invite all to contribute, rather than ensuring everyone has a chance to participate. In a World Café dialogue, knowledge grows through everyone's contribution.
5. Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives: The typical World Café pattern is for the participants to move from table to table, engaging in conversation, and sharing insights from previous conversations. As the participants move around the room, they will build on the ideas discussed by the table's previous group of participants, and these ideas will grow.
6. Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions: Before the large group discussion, participants are asked to take a few minutes to make notes on key ideas, insights or discoveries, and to reflect on what they have learned during the group conversations. The

participants should also be encouraged to think about pieces that may be missing from the conversation that should be explored.

7. Harvest and share collective discoveries: During a large group discussion at the end of the dialogue, participants are asked to share an idea or theme that was meaningful to them.

According to Brown and Isaacs (2005), the typical format of a World Café is to hold three rounds of conversation lasting 20 to 30 minutes each, followed by a large group discussion. A minimum time of one and a half hours is recommended to host a World Café. A common variation on the World Café method is to explore multiple questions that share a common theme, with each table dedicated to exploring one question.

World Café questions. The World Café method was used to explore the theme “Perceptions of Early Childhood Education as a Profession” through the discussion of the following three questions:

Question one. In your experience so far, what do you think people in the general public feel about the field of Early Childhood Education as a profession?

Question one probes. What do your parents think about the field of Early Childhood Education? What do your friends and peers think about the field of Early Childhood Education? Do you think that the position of Early Childhood Educator has much status?

Question two. What do you know about the recent changes within the field of Early Childhood Education in Nova Scotia this year? Do you think that these recent changes might have an impact on the extent to which early childhood educators are perceived as professionals?

Question two probes. Do you know that Early Childhood Educators have been hired to lead pre-primary classes? Do you know that the Halifax Regional School Board has

initiated the hiring of early childhood educators as Early Childhood Education Support Staff? Do you know that a salary scale for Early Childhood Educators has been introduced, that is based on one's level of training in Early Childhood Education?

Question three. What factors are determining your career path, and is Early Childhood Education the path you are planning to take? If yes, what factors have impacted your decision? If no, what factors have impacted your decision?

Procedure

Recruitment. Participants were recruited from the class CHYS 2208 Guiding Children's Learning Development and Behavior. The researcher invited students to participate in the study during the CHYS 2208 Guiding Children's Learning Development and Behavior class the week before the World Café dialogue session was to be held. The students were informed of the purpose of the study, and were provided with both an informal invitation (Appendix 1), and a formal letter of invitation and consent (Appendix 2). An informal invitation was developed because, according to Brown and Isaacs (2005), the invitation should be informal, personal, and should include a question or theme that will be of interest to those receiving the invitation. The invitation should make it clear that participants can expect to enjoy themselves, learn new things, and be engaged (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). The students were given one week to review the materials and to decide if they wished to participate.

Data Collection

The demographics of the group were collected using a short questionnaire (Appendix 3), which asked each participant to provide their year of study, age-group, gender, previous ECE-related education, and years of work experience in early childhood education. Audio recorders

were used at each table to record the group discussion. These recordings were later transcribed verbatim. In addition, participants were asked to make notes throughout the process. Using the World Café method, all participants are encouraged to draw, doodle, or write on paper tablecloths to record the group's key ideas (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). To obtain a record of each participant's experience, the host can also ask each participant to write one central idea or insight they are taking from the discussions, and post for all to see (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). The participants were provided with "post-it" notes to record their individual ideas and insights, and these were collected for analysis. As recommended by Brown and Isaacs (2005), a note taker was also available to record the key insights and ideas presented during the large group discussion. The methods of data collection are listed in table 3.

Table 3 Data Collection

Data Collection for Analysis
Demographics questionnaire
Transcript of audio on each group discussion
Group notes taken by participants on paper tablecloth
Key ideas and insights written on "post-it" notes by individual participants
Notes taken by a note-taker during the large-group discussion

Participants. Nineteen participants took part in the study, which fell in the target range of 12 -24 participants. The criteria for participation was students who were enrolled in Mount Saint Vincent University's Bachelor of Arts (Child and Youth Study) program, and who were members of the class CHYS 2208 Guiding Children's Learning Development and Behavior. All participants in the study identified as female and fell in the age range of 19 to 34. Of the nineteen

participants, 17 fell into the age-group of 19 to 24, and 2 participants fell into the age-group of 25 to 34. Fourteen participants were in their second year of study in the four-year CHYS program, and 5 participants were in their third year of study. Three participants were transfer students from another program. None of the participants were transfer students from another ECE training program. Participants were asked to share their years of work experience in the field of Early Childhood Education. Fifteen participants indicated that they had less than one year of work experience as an ECE, three indicated they had 1 to 5 years of experience as an ECE, and one participant did not answer the question.

Ethical Considerations

As potential participants indicated their interest in the World Café, they were asked to review the informed consent. Prior to beginning the World Café discussion, each participant was asked again to review and sign the informed consent. The participants, the note-taker, and the graduate-student volunteer were asked to sign a confidentiality agreement that states that they will not share the information discussed during our group discussions outside of the World Café. The participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point during the activity without penalty. This study had minimal risk for the participants.

A mock World Café was planned with the help of a student colleague for any students who did not wish to participate in the research. The design of the mock World Café dialogue session was identical to the primary World Café dialogue session. During the mock World Café, audio-recorders were not to be used. Data would have still been produced through the participant's notes, as well as notes taken by a note-taker during the large-group discussion. All data was to be immediately discarded upon completion of the mock World Café dialogue session. The mock World Café dialogue session was to be facilitated by a graduate student. The

researcher provided training to the graduate student in facilitating a World Café dialogue session. The researcher also developed a facilitator guide for the student colleague. In the end, the mock World Café was unnecessary, as all students chose to participate in the study.

Analysis

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a flexible research tool for identifying patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) served as the primary guide for the analysis. The steps of the thematic analysis are summarized in table 3 (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A theoretical thematic analysis was used to identify themes or patterns within the data. A theoretical thematic analysis is driven by the researcher's interest in providing a detailed analysis in an area of interest, and differs from inductive analysis which is driven by a desire to produce a rich description of the data itself (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research was conducted within a realist/essentialist paradigm, in which a simple relationship is assumed to exist between meaning, experience, and language (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A semantic approach was used to organize the themes. The semantic approach is used to explore a particular question or topic, with the themes identified through the surface meaning of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic networks, as described by Attride-Stirling (2001), were used as a tool to break up text and organize themes into a web-like structure (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Using thematic network analysis, data is organized first by basic themes, followed by middle-order themes, and finally global themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Basic themes are the lowest order themes that are identified through the data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Organizing themes are middle-order themes that are used to organize the basic themes into groups (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Global themes are

super-ordinate themes that identify the larger topic represented through the lower-level themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

Table 4: Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with the data	Verbal data will be transcribed verbatim, and patterns will be identified through the initial reading of the data.
Phase 2: Generating initial codes	Meaningful and manageable pieces of text, which are relevant to the research question, will be identified and coded.
Phase 3: Searching for themes	The coded data will be sorted into potential themes
Phase 4: Reviewing themes	Themes will be reviewed to determine if there is enough data to support each theme, and if some themes require subdivision. The data will be reviewed to determine if a pattern exists. Themes will be reviewed to determine if they accurately represent the data set.
Phase 5: Defining and naming themes	Themes will be clearly defined, and then refined. An analysis will be written for each theme, which will identify how the theme answers the larger research question.
Phase 6: Producing the report	The data will be analyzed and presented by themes, with data extracts chosen to represent each theme.

Chapter 4

Results

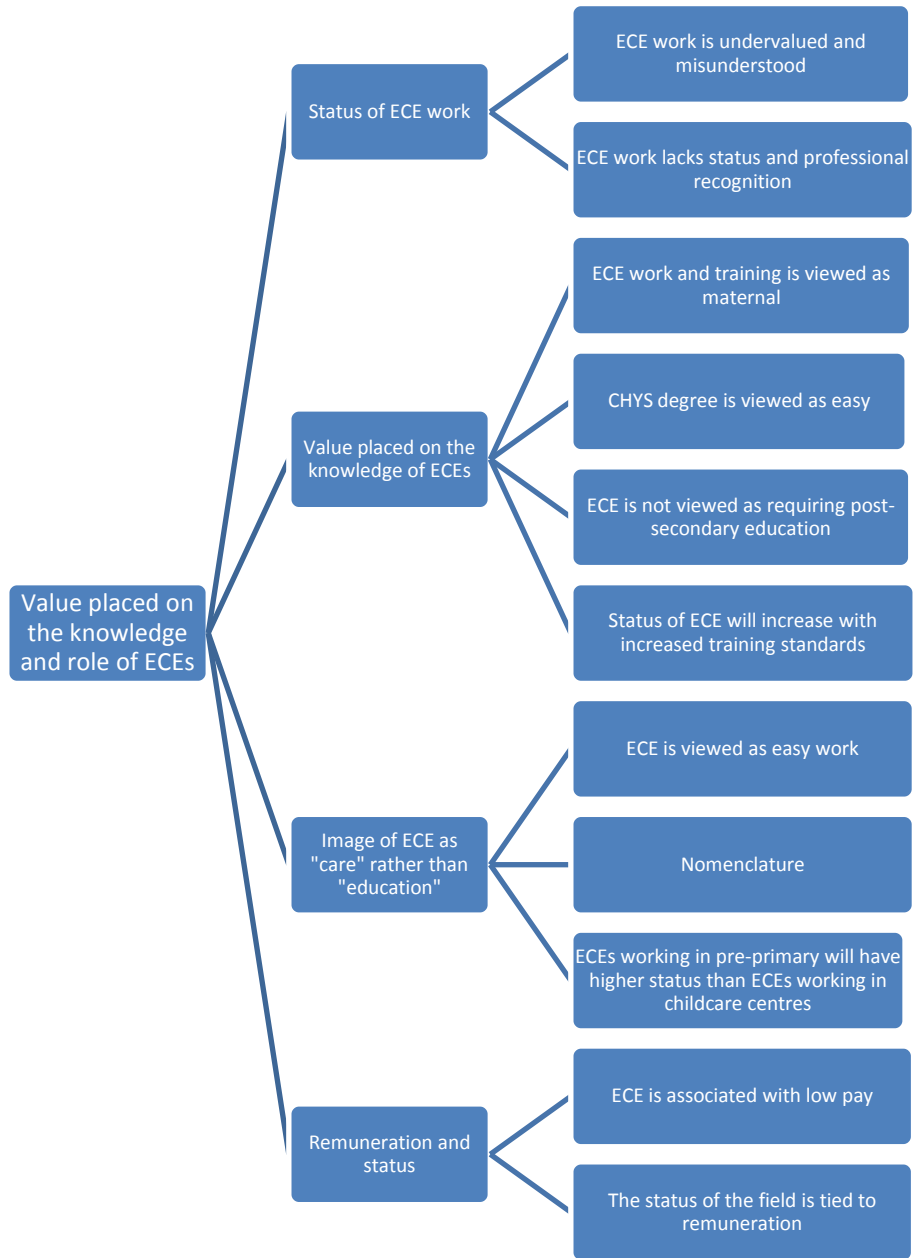
Overview

Thematic analysis, as described by Attride-Stirling (2001) and Braun & Clarke (2006), was used to identify themes from the transcripts, the participant-written notes, and notes written by a note-taker. Twenty-two basic themes were identified. The twenty-two basic themes were grouped into eight organizing themes. From these eight organizing themes, two global themes emerged. The basic themes, organizing themes, and global themes are presented in Appendix D and Appendix E. The first global theme that emerged from the data is “Value placed on the knowledge and role of the Early Childhood Educator”. The data presented in this network provides an understanding of how students enrolled in the CHYS program perceive the public image of Early Childhood Education as a profession. The second global theme that emerged from the data is “Early Childhood Education as a Career Option”. The data in this network provide an understanding of how students enrolled in the CHYS program perceive Early Childhood Education as a career option.

Global Theme: Value Placed on the Knowledge and Role of the Early Childhood Educator

Of the 22 basic themes identified, 11 focused on the public perception of the field of Early Childhood Education. From these 11 basic themes, 4 organizing themes were identified. The organizing themes are: status of ECE work, value placed on the knowledge of early childhood educators, image of ECE as “care” rather than “education”, and remuneration and status.

Figure 1 Global Theme: Value Placed on the Knowledge and Role of the ECE



Organizing Theme: Status of ECE Work

The participants in this study were in agreement that the role of the early childhood educator is undervalued by the general public. Participants said that the role of early childhood educators is “not viewed as important”, is “not taken seriously”, and is “underappreciated” by members of the public. One participant was able to capture the feeling of the group with the statement, “I feel like Early Childhood Educators are taken for granted a lot. They’re not...people don’t appreciate what it is that they do.” Some participants spoke of a lack of public understanding on the role of the early childhood educator. One participant noted, “There’s such a big misconception about what we do.” Another participant described a lack of public awareness on the value of play-based learning:

A lot of people expect early childhood centres to teach their kids the ABCs and their 123s. And when I [tried] to talk to someone about how that’s not necessarily the best case, they were very taken aback and they weren’t really open to any of what I was saying. And they were kind of stuck in their... it’s where they learn what they’re supposed to learn...it’s not about play.

There was a consensus among study participants that the position of early childhood educator holds little, if any, status in the eyes of the public. The participants elaborated on their assertion that ECE is a low-status occupation by saying that work as an early childhood educator is associated with low pay and a lack of education, and is undervalued by society in general. A few participants pointed out that Early Childhood Education is not regarded as a profession by members of the public. Participants in one group suggested that early childhood education has a stigma attached to it, which prevents the public from viewing the occupation as professional work as opposed to “babysitting”.

Organizing Theme: Value Placed on the Knowledge of Early Childhood Educators

An idea emerged in two group conversations that work as an early childhood educator is viewed as maternal in nature. One participant described the public image of early childhood education as “women’s work”, while another noted, “I feel like they think of us as mothers”. The participants perceived the maternal image of ECE work as extending to the CHYS program, with the degree being viewed as a form of preparation for their future role of “mother”. One participant said that the CHYS degree has a stigma attached to it, in that it is viewed by the public as little more than “training to be a mom”. Another participant once heard a program outsider describe the CHYS degree as “just training for motherhood”.

It was the perspective of some participants that the Child and Youth Study degree is not viewed by program outsiders as a rigorous academic program. Four participants used the term “easy” to describe the public image of the CHYS degree. One participant observed that program outsiders tend to describe their degree as “fun”, with the implication that it does not involve any challenging academic work. It was the opinion of two participants that the Child and Youth Study program is not viewed as a serious degree in comparison to other degree programs. One participant said that the CHYS program is not perceived as a “legitimate degree.” Another participant recalled, “I’ve been asked a lot if I get a degree from this”, noting that she once heard a program outsider describe the CHYS degree as “just a fun course you put on a resume”. Participants expressed the opinion that the general public is unaware of the scope of the CHYS program. One group discussed the misconception that the Child and Youth Study program does not include science courses. It was also suggested that that the classification of the CHYS program as a Bachelor of Arts may add to misconceptions about the program, “And I think too,

where Child and Youth is classified under an arts degree, I think that people think that we're seriously just doing artsy fartsy courses..."

A few participants indicated that the position of early childhood educator is associated with a lack of education. One participant said that the public image of ECE work is that "you don't need an education to do it...you can just go right into it." Another participant acknowledged that the public "may think you're uneducated" if you choose to work as an early childhood educator. It was also noted that members of the public may question why someone would pursue post-secondary training "to just look after kids".

An idea emerged during one group conversation that the status and perceived value of ECE work will increase when post-secondary education becomes a requirement to work as an early childhood educator in Nova Scotia. One participant said that a standard of credentialing "will put more emphasis on how important caring for children is". This statement was mirrored in a written submission, which stated that the field of early childhood education "may be viewed with more respect now that you need an education to work with kids". Another participant felt that by increasing the training requirements for early childhood educators, the government was demonstrating recognition for the value of ECE work:

Some of the changes are you now need a higher level of education to be an early childhood educator. So it can't be you just come from high school and you start working with kids. And I guess that's saying now that they see the value of early childhood educators.

Organizing Theme: Image of ECE as "Care" Rather than "Education"

Occupational titles that are used interchangeably with "Early Childhood Educator" highlight the perception of early childhood education as custodial care rather than education. When asked

about the public perception of early childhood education as a profession, the term “babysitter” presented in each group conversation. One participant said that, when reflecting on the public image of ECE work, “Babysitting is the first thing that comes to my mind”. Another participant noted that for those in the field of ECE, “Every single person you talk to says that you’re babysitting. You’re a professional babysitter.” The terms “childcare worker” and “daycare workers” were also used by two participants to describe the public image of early childhood educators. One participant described the public image of the field in the following terms, “You’re just a daycare worker. You’re always a daycare worker.” It was the opinion of two participants that if early childhood educators who work within pre-primary classrooms were referred to as “pre-primary teachers”, their status would increase in the eyes of the public. One participant theorized, “When the teacher term is attached to the name it may sound a little more professional. People would take it more seriously, maybe.”

It was noted by study participants that early childhood education is viewed as an uncomplicated occupation. The word “easy” was used by several participants to describe the public image of ECE work. Participants also described the image of ECE work as “fun” and “just playing with kids all day”. Some participants felt that the public is unaware of the amount of work that goes into planning and implementing an early childhood program. The public perception of the field was described as involving “no prep”, “no extra work”, and “no thought”. One CHYS student brought up the misconception that ECEs do not bring their work home, “...they also don’t realize that there’s a lot of extra work and preparation needed. That it’s not just, you go in and work and leave.”

Some participants believed that early childhood educators who choose to work in the pre-primary program will have higher status in the eyes of the public, and will be viewed as more

professional, than ECEs who choose to work in childcare centres. One participant said that ECEs working in the pre-primary program “would be perceived as more professional than someone working in a childcare centre.” Another noted, “I feel like the people that are in the pre-primary programs are definitely going to get more recognition than the people who are just doing...daycare, essentially.” It was the opinion of one CHYS student that work within a childcare centre is looked down upon by the public, “there’s kinda a stigma, I guess, that it’s not as professional”. The participants theorized that any elevated status for ECEs working in the pre-primary program would stem from the program’s alignment with the public education system. Participants said that work through the school board would be viewed as “more professional” and would command “more respect”. The participants did feel, however, that any new-found status for ECEs working in the school board would have little effect on the status of ECEs working in childcare centres. One participant spoke of her belief that the field of Early Childhood Education will continue to be viewed as unprofessional despite recent developments in the field:

I think within the context of the pre-primary program, anyways, the educators there probably have a bit more status. But I don’t think it’s gonna change how the professionalism of the field is really perceived. Not all that much.

A few participants expressed concerns that the stigma attached to the field of early childhood education would carry over to the newly-introduced pre-primary program. There was a belief that members of the public will view the pre-primary program as “babysitting” rather than early education. One participant theorized that “the public will still probably think of us as babysitters, or a daycare...a free daycare.” A few CHYS students thought that the public will have a difficult time viewing pre-primary ECEs as educators. It was the opinion of one

participant that the public will “still probably think of us as babysitters”. Another participant agreed that the perception of pre-primary ECEs will be that “you’re not teaching...you’re just playing with kids.” This participant expressed the opinion that alignment with the public education system will do little to lessen the stigma surrounding the field, noting “I don’t think it will make *that* much of an impact.” One CHYS student spoke of her concerns that the pre-primary program will not be recognized for its educational potential:

I think that they are still going to think that we’re below. That we’re babysitting. That we’ve turned into...you know...Pre-primary is just...I don’t think people see it as prepping kids for school. I think they’ll see it as a ‘here’s a place to send your children before they’re sent to school’.

Organizing Theme: Remuneration and Status

Participants were well-aware of the public image of the underpaid early childhood educator, and recognized the connection between remuneration and the professional image of ECEs. Participants described the public image of the field as having “no ‘good’ jobs”, “no money”, and “low pay”. One participant pointed out that the field of early childhood education is still strongly associated with minimum wage earning potential, “Every single person they’re like “Oh, so you’re gonna make minimum wage?”. Four participants brought up the connection between professional status and remuneration. The participants expressed the belief that the low status of the field is both reflected in and exacerbated by the infamously low wages paid to early childhood educators. One participant described the public image of ECE work as having low status, low pay, and little public recognition, “There’s not a lot of status associated with the career. Underpaid, mostly, underappreciated.” It was the opinion of another participant that the low status of ECE work is tied to the underfunding of ECE programs, noting that while the

government is aware of the importance of the early years, “they still are just closed-fisted when it comes to funding”.

Summary of First Thematic Network

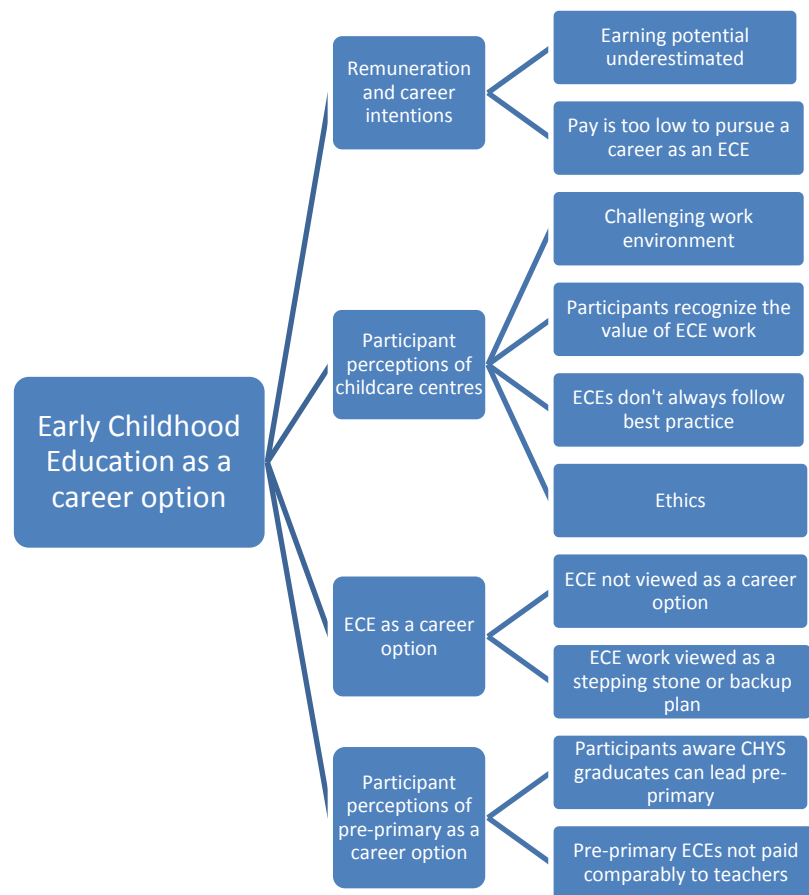
The participants in this study viewed early childhood education as a low-status occupation. They theorized that the low status of the field is tied to the absence of a standard of credentialing, the low wages, and the image of ECEs as “babysitters” rather than educators. Participants also expressed the opinion that the field of ECE has a stigma attached to it, which prevents the public from viewing the occupation as professional work. The study participants indicated that the public does not associate ECE work with post-secondary education, and suggested that the training programs that do exist are believed to lack any serious academic rigor. Participants also noted that the field of ECE is strongly associated with poverty-level wages in the eyes of the public. Finally, the participants expressed concerns that members of the public perceive ECE programs as custodial care rather than early education. The public perception of ECE as custodial care was believed to be so persistent that it would attach itself to the newly-implemented pre-primary program.

Despite the bleak picture participants painted of the current status of ECE work, there was optimism that the status of the field could one day increase. The participants suggested that the status of the field would begin to increase when post-secondary education becomes a requirement to work as an early childhood educator. Participants also theorized that alignment with the public education system would enhance the status of ECEs working within the newly-established pre-primary program.

Global Theme: Early Childhood Education as a Career Option

The second global theme that emerged from the data is participants’ perceptions of Early Childhood Education as a career option. Eleven basic themes were sorted into four organizing themes, which are: remuneration and career intentions, participant perceptions of childcare centres, ECE as career option, and participant perceptions of pre-primary as a career option.

Figure 2 Global Theme: Early Childhood Education as a Career Option



Organizing Theme: Remuneration and Career Intentions

The topic that presented most often in group conversations and in participant-written notes was the issue of remuneration. The field of Early Childhood Education is strongly associated with low wages, and this knowledge factored heavily in participants' decisions whether or not to pursue a career as an early childhood educator. Several participants cited low earning potential as a deterrent from pursuing a career as an early childhood educator. One participant said that she would not work as an ECE upon graduating from the CHYS program because "There's just not enough money". Another acknowledged that, given the earning potential of an ECE, a career in the field is "just not practical". It should be noted, however, that many of these participants underestimated the pay of early childhood educators in Nova Scotia.

Participants demonstrated varying degrees of knowledge on the wage scale for early childhood educators. Some participants were unaware that a wage scale existed. Others believed that early childhood educators earn minimum wage or slightly above. A few participants believed the hourly wage of an ECE with a CHYS degree to be \$17 an hour when, in actuality, it is \$19 an hour. Some participants were aware of the \$19 per hour figure for CHYS graduates, but two participants thought that the wage base of \$19 an hour was actually a wage cap. One participant believed that the wage scale was based on experience as well as education, with an ECE earning \$19 after gaining a few years of work experience.

Some participants discussed the impracticality of pursuing a career as an early childhood educator due to the limited earning potential. Two participants raised concerns over one's ability to repay student debt on the income of an early childhood educator. One participant stated that her choice of profession is influenced by her desire to re-pay her debt upon entering the

workforce. The other participant said that taking out a student loan made little sense to pursue a career with such limited earning potential:

And, I know that it shouldn't be the main factor, but it's definitely a factor is, like, money wise. I don't really wanna get out of school and be paid minimum wage for something that I'm thousands of dollars in debt for.

It should be noted that both students who were concerned with debt repayment seemed to be unaware of the wage scale for ECEs, with one believing ECEs earned \$12 an hour and the other believing ECEs earn minimum wage. A few participants who were aware of the wage scale for ECEs, however, noted that an hourly wage of \$19 an hour is insufficient to persuade them to consider working as an early childhood educator upon completion of the CHYS program. The participants also raised practical concerns over the lifestyle they would be able to afford working as an early childhood educator. One participant believed that she would be unable to raise a family of her own on the income of an ECE, while another described \$19 an hour as "barely enough for one person to live on". It was the perspective of two participants that an hourly wage of \$19 is too low given the demands of the job.

Organizing Theme: Participant Perceptions of Childcare Centres

Several participants noted that work within a childcare centre can be demanding. Participants described work within some childcare centres as "loud" and "stressful". Work in a childcare centre was also described as tiring, with one participant noting, "I come home from practicum and I pass out for three hours." Three participants cited either noise level or class size as a reason they would not consider working as an early childhood educator. A few participants expressed the opinion that there is a lack of support within licensed childcare for children with

special needs and behavioural issues. One participant described her experience in licensed childcare centres, “In all honesty, when I go to a daycare, there [are] so many behavioural issues now and there’s just no help to, like, contain them...almost.” A suggestion made by another participant was that “ECEs need more assistance with children with behavioural issues as it can become too overwhelming...”.

A few participants discussed the value of ECE work and the crucial role early childhood educators play in the lives of children. One participant pointed out that by educating young children “We are helping the next generation.” Two other participants felt that ECEs play a critical role in the lives of children because of the amount of time they spend with the children in their care, and the impressionable age of the children who attend ECE programs. One participant described the early years as “the most important part of a child’s life”, and acknowledged that “it is up to the ECEs to steer [children] in the right direction.” The other participant noted that in some cases “childhood educators spend more time with children than their own parents do”, adding that when you work with children “you are influencing the child’s life so much and people just don’t get that.”

A few participants discussed their experiences working alongside ECEs, and noted that practicing early childhood educators do not follow standardized practice, and do not always adhere to a code of ethics. Two participants noted that early childhood educators do not always follow the widely-accepted best practices for early childhood programs. One participant said that she has seen ECEs prepare teacher-modeled, as opposed to child-directed, art activities with the children. Another participant noted that she has seen ECEs provide an overly-structured program with limited freedom of choice for activities, “It’s just so structured. Kids aren’t allowed to do what they wanna do”. Both participants said that the education they received

through the Child and Youth Study degree allowed them to recognize that such practices are not developmentally appropriate and are not in the best interests of the children in the program.

Another participant brought up the issue of ethics for early childhood educators. This participant recollected witnessing an inappropriate form of discipline at a childcare centre. She immediately intervened and reported the incident, but was disappointed with the childcare centre's reaction to the situation. The participant admitted that the incident, and the way it was handled, made her distrustful of childcare centres and of early childhood educators in general.

Organizing Theme: ECE as a Career Option

Of the nineteen participants in this study, not one indicated a desire to work as an early childhood educator upon completion of the Child and Youth Study program. Some participants entered the Child and Youth Study program with a particular career goal in mind. Other participants were using their time in the program to narrow down their career interests. A few participants stated that they entered the program knowing they wanted to work with children, but had not yet decided on the most suitable career for them. One participant acknowledged that her desire to work with children was central to her decision to enter the CHYS program, "I knew that I wanted to work with kids, so this seemed like a good...diving board". The majority of participants viewed the Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Study degree as the first step in their educational journey, and planned to take another degree upon completion of the program. One participant described the Child and Youth Study degree as "a stepping stone". Another participant discussed her plans to further her education upon completion of the CHYS program:

I'm gonna have to explain a lot that this is like a foundation degree, so that you start with this degree and then you build from it. That this isn't just... it can be...it can be the

whole degree, if you want to go into running your own daycare or stuff like that. But then I find I have to explain a lot, you know, it is a foundation degree for me. That I am going to have to do more schooling than this degree to actually get to the area that I want.

The career goals of the participants varied. Of the nineteen participants, six were interested in a teaching career, five had another career goal in mind that would require a secondary degree, one indicated a desire for a government position, and two said they would like to work in early intervention. The rest were still exploring their career options, although notably none were considering work as an early childhood educator. Two participants expressed the opinion that the Child and Youth Study degree is incompatible with work as an early childhood educator. One participant said, "I feel like if you're coming to the Mount to do this, you don't have early, like being in a childcare centre as your main goal." Another participant suggested that those interested in working as an ECE would be more likely to enroll in a college program than a university, "If you just wanna work in daycare, you go to NSCC or NSCECE."

It became clear throughout the group discussions that some CHYS students view ECE work as a backup plan, or as a stepping stone to a more desirable career. One participant noted that she had other career goals, but would work as an ECE if necessary, "Well, I'm saying no because there's an idea where I want to go. But I will do early childhood education if I have to." Another described ECE work as an acceptable temporary position, as well as a means to an end, noting that "I would do it to gain experience. But I would not do it long term." Two other participants viewed ECE as a "backup", in case they met a setback in their desired career path. One participant stated, "I feel like it'll be like my backup... if I can't get into grad school". Another acknowledged, "This is my backup just in case I can't find a job anywhere else. But I'll still be searching."

A few participants said that they would consider temporarily providing home-based childcare after having children of their own. This was seen as a means of ensuring their child received quality care within a small-group setting while helping to support their family financially. Providing home-based childcare was not viewed as a long-term career option for any of the participants, however. One reason home-based childcare was not viewed as a permanent career option was because of the limited potential income. One participant noted that the expenses of providing home-based childcare could be high compared to the earning potential:

Yeah. And that is what can be challenging. And if you're being a daycare provider, right...to have enough to buy yourself your own house and then keep up with all the bills, and you're just making like 30 bucks a day off of a child. You can only have 6.

Providing home-based childcare was also viewed as a temporary option because of the demands of the job. Participants recognized that as a home-childcare provider, it would be difficult to meet your own needs, in particular the need for vacation days, while also meeting the needs of the families in your care. Two of the participants said that they know someone who provides home-based childcare, and were aware that both women take only two weeks of vacation annually. One participant shared, "And there's no Christmas break for her. There's just Christmas and Christmas Eve. And if it's a holiday then she doesn't work. But rather than that, she is granted two weeks' vacation in a whole year." Another participant noted that vacation time is important when caring for others, but as a home-childcare provider you would feel obligated to put the needs of families first, "But see, that's the hard part about it. Parents are relying on you." Two participants felt that the daily demands of providing home-based childcare would be draining, with one saying that as a home-based childcare provider "You would be exhausted."

Organizing Theme: Participant Perceptions of Pre-Primary as a Career Option

No participants in this study indicated a desire to work within the newly-established pre-primary program upon completion of the Child and Youth Study degree. The participants were aware of the pre-primary program, and understood that graduates of the Child and Youth Study program were being hired to lead pre-primary classrooms. The participants expressed concerns, however, with the compensation and status of ECEs working within this program.

It became clear through an analysis of the data that participants were concerned with the differences in pay between the ECEs working in the pre-primary program and school teachers. Although no participants demonstrated knowledge of the exact salary paid to ECEs working in the pre-primary program, they were aware that the pay was considerably lower than that of teachers. One participant noted that “ECEs do not get paid enough or similarly to primary teachers”, while another described the pay difference as “an unfair payment”. Employment in the pre-primary program was described by one participant as something that would be undesirable to a teacher:

When the pre-primary program was announced for Nova Scotia, one of the first things I heard was that they wouldn't be hiring teachers. Teachers could apply for the job. But they were looking for ECEs, and teachers won't want it because they'll be paid less.

A few participants were concerned that early childhood educators who work within the pre-primary program will not have the same status as teachers. Two participants expressed the opinion that teachers themselves will view pre-primary ECEs as inferior. It was the opinion of one participant that the salary disparity between the two occupational groups would prevent

ECEs working in the pre-primary program from being viewed with the same professional respect as teachers.

Summary for Second Thematic Network

Of the nineteen participants in this study, none indicated a desire to work as an early childhood educator upon completion of the CHYS degree. Although the participants indicated a desire to work with children, and demonstrated respect for the role of the ECE, none believed ECE to be an attractive career option. The participants cited the lack of professional pay, issues within the working environment, and lack of professional status as deterrents from considering a career as an ECE. The participants described early childhood education as a backup plan rather than a career, and expressed the opinion that ECE work is incompatible with a university education. Interestingly, no participants expressed an interest in working as an early childhood educator within the newly-established pre-primary program.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how students enrolled in the CHYS program perceive the professional status of Early Childhood Education, and whether or not the professional status of ECE has an impact on intended career choices. It became clear during this study that students are concerned with the lack of status and professional recognition that comes with work as an early childhood educator. The students were particularly concerned with the lack of professional compensation, but also expressed concerns with the absence of training standards, the lack of value placed on the knowledge and role of the ECE, and the perception of ECEs as “babysitters” rather than educators. The insights provided by the participants provide an image of how students in a university-based ECE training program perceive the field of Early Childhood Education as a career option.

The design of this study was based on four research questions. Using the data collected during the World Café, each research question was explored. The data provided by participants allowed for a greater understanding of how CHYS students perceive the professional status of ECEs, the characteristics they perceive as being central to professional status, and how they perceive differences in status between programs that provide care and programs with a sole focus on education. The participants were also able to offer valuable insight into the relationship between the professional status of the field and their decision whether or not to pursue a career as an early childhood educator.

To provide a better understanding of how Child and Youth Study students perceive the field of Early Childhood Education, the four research questions are discussed below.

How do students enrolled in the BA (Child and Youth Study) program perceive the professional status of Early Childhood Education?

It was the opinion of the study participants that the field of Early Childhood Education holds little to no status, and is not viewed as a profession by the general public. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies, where both practicing ECEs and students in ECE training programs revealed that they are aware of the low status of ECE work (Hargreaves & Hopper, 2006; Langford, 2008), and feel that the role of the early childhood educator is not valued by members of the public (Adams, 2008; Boyd, 2013; Langford, 2008; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015). The perception that ECE is not viewed as a profession by the general public is also consistent with the findings of previous studies of practicing ECEs, teachers, and university students (Boyd, 2013; Moloney, 2010).

A recurrent theme throughout this study is the idea that the field of Early Childhood Education has a stigma attached to it, which prevents it from being viewed as professional work. While the stigma was believed to be especially applicable to work within childcare centres, participants felt that the stigma around ECE work affects the image of the entire field, including ECE training programs and the newly introduced pre-primary program. This stigma attached to the field of Early Childhood Education has been previously addressed by Canadian authors, who have theorized that the stigma stems from the field's roots as custodial care for low-income families rather than education for all Canadian children (Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007).

Question 2: What characteristics of a profession do CHYS students perceive as being central to professional status?

Two characteristics of a profession that Child and Youth Study students perceive as central to professional status are professional compensation and recognition of an occupation's knowledge base. It was the opinion of study participants that the knowledge of early childhood educators is undervalued by the general public. Participants suggested that, even at the university level, ECE training programs are perceived as "easy" and are viewed more as preparation for motherhood than as preparation for a professional career. This perceived lack of recognition for the knowledge of the ECEs is concerning, as Abbott (1988) theorized that an occupation's status as a profession is in part dependent on public recognition of the occupation's knowledge base. Some participants also saw a connection between professional status and professional compensation. The participants pointed out that the field of Early Childhood Education is associated with low wages, which some felt prevents early childhood education from being viewed as professional work. In a qualitative study of members of the Irish ECE workforce, participants also made a connection between the low status of ECE work and the low wages paid to those in the field (Moloney, 2010).

Another characteristic of a profession that Child and Youth Study students see as central to professional status is required credentialing for entry into the field. The study participants recognized a connection between the low status of ECE work and the absence of a standard of credentialing for the field. It was suggested that when post-secondary training becomes a requirement to work as an early childhood educator, the status of the field will begin to increase. The idea that the status of ECE work is tied to the absence of a standard of entry into the field has been suggested by Bornfreund and Goffin (2016), Boyd (2013), and Ferguson and Miller (2000). This idea also presented during interviews with Irish ECEs, who believed that the absence of a standard of training for entry into the field prevented the public from viewing ECEs

as professionals, and perpetuated the belief that anyone is capable of work as an early childhood educator regardless of training (Maloney, 2010).

The Child and Youth Study students who took part in this study noted a connection between the professional status of ECE work and the lack of public awareness on the educational benefits of ECE programs. The participants described the public image of early childhood education as custodial care rather than education, and noted that the role of ECEs is largely misunderstood. Participants described the public image of ECE work as “easy”, “fun”, and “just playing with kids all day”. In a study of Irish early years professionals, participants used almost identical language to describe the misconceptions around early childhood education, describing their work as “easy”, “fun”, and “just play” (Moloney, 2010). Several study participants described the public image of ECE work as “babysitting”, which is a term that presented in two other studies to describe the public image of early childhood education (Langford, 2008; Moloney, 2010). The participants indicated that a relationship exists between the caring nature of ECE work and the low status of the field, which is an idea that has been previously suggested by other authors and researchers (Adrew & Newman, 2012; Cleveland & Colley, 2003; Doherty-Derkowski et al., 2003; and Ferguson & Miller, 2000).

Do CHYS students describe differences in status between programs that provide care and programs with a sole focus on education?

It was the perspective of study participants that programs with a sole focus on education have a higher status than programs with a dual focus on care and education. This was especially apparent in participant descriptions of the newly-introduced pre-primary program. There was a belief that alignment with the public education system would lead to an increase in status and greater recognition as professionals for ECEs working within that program. It was also theorized

by a minority of participants that if ECEs working in the pre-primary program were referred to as “teachers”, they would be shown greater professional respect. This is consistent with a finding from a study of UK students in an ECE degree program, where a minority of participants suggested that the status of ECEs would increase if they were referred to as “teachers” (Adams, 2008).

Does the status of Early Childhood Education as a profession influence the intended career choices of CHYS students?

Perhaps the most surprising finding of this study was that, out of nineteen participants, none indicated a desire to work as an early childhood educator upon completion of the Child and Youth Study program, either in a childcare centre or in the new pre-primary program. This finding differs significantly from the findings of a cross-Canada survey of students in ECE training programs, where 48% of participants responded that they had plans to work as an early childhood educator upon completion of the program (Forer et al., 2009). It became clear throughout the group discussions that some CHYS students view ECE work as a backup plan, or as a stepping stone to a more desirable career. A study of graduates from an Irish ECE training program had similar findings, with all participants indicating that they were planning to work as an early childhood educator to gain experience but did not view ECE as a long-term career option (Moloney, 2010). A few participants indicated that they would consider providing home-based childcare while their own children were young, which is consistent with findings from the Labour Market Update Study where six percent of participants indicated that they were planning to provide home-based childcare (Forer, Beach, & Flanagan, 2007). The majority of study participants planned to further their education upon completion of the CHYS degree. An earlier study of students in Canadian ECE training programs had similar findings, revealing that about

half of ECE students planned to further their education upon completion of the ECE program (Forer, Beach, & Flanagan, 2007). The most common plan for MSVU Child and Youth Study students was to pursue a teaching career, with almost 32% of study participants expressing interest in this career path. This is consistent with findings from an earlier study, where over a quarter of students in Canadian ECE training programs expressed an interest in eventually obtaining a teaching degree (Forer, Beach, & Flanagan, 2007).

It became clear through participant descriptions of the newly-introduced pre-primary program that the professional status of Early Childhood Education is a factor in participant career intentions. The participants expressed concerns that ECEs working in pre-primary will not be shown the same professional respect as teachers, and would not be accepted as equals by the teachers themselves. Previous research on ECEs and teachers working within the public school system indicate that teachers do, in fact, have difficulty accepting ECEs as professionals (Beach et al., 2000; Gibson & Pelletier, 2011; Lynch, 2014; Tukonic & Harwood, 2015).

The issue of professional compensation was the most discussed topic throughout the World Café, and many participants cited the lack of professional pay as a reason they will not consider a career in the field. Previous studies have found that the issue of compensation is central to the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators (Boyd, 2013; Forer, Beach, & Flanagan, 2007; Moloney, 2010). The Labour Market Update study revealed that Canadian ECE students are concerned with the low wages paid to early childhood educators (Forer, Beach, & Flanagan, 2007), while graduates of an Irish university-based ECE program indicated that they did not view ECE as a career option in part because of the low wages paid to those in the field (Maloney, 2010). A study of practicing American ECEs revealed that the lack of professional compensation has caused many to consider leaving the field (Boyd, 2013). A few study participants, who were

aware of the recently-implemented wage scale for Nova Scotia's early childhood educators, indicated that the earning potential of a CHYS graduate is insufficient to persuade them to consider work as an ECE. According to Boyd (2013), implementing a career lattice based on education and training for early childhood educators will not shift the perception of the field if the compensation is ultimately not comparable to the pay of other professions. It was noted by participants that work within a childcare centre can be challenging, and that an hourly wage of \$19 is too low given the demands of the job. A similar observation was made by Andrew and Newman (2012), who suggest that the compensation provided to early childhood educators is not reflective of the role of the ECE or the high level of responsibility ECEs hold.

The participants also cited work environment and a lack of professional support as a deterrent from considering a career as an early childhood educator. A few participants felt that childcare centres need more support for children with special needs and behavioural issues. This indicates that students may feel underprepared to work with children with some special needs and some behavioural issues, which would be consistent with findings from two previous studies (Boyd, 2013; Forer, Beach, & Flanagan, 2007). Results from a cross-Canada survey of ECE students found that one third of participants felt that they were not adequately prepared to work with children with special needs, while almost a quarter of participants said that they could use additional training for working with children with special needs (Forer, Beach, & Flanagan, 2007). Practicing ECEs have also expressed concerns with the special needs and behavioral issues in their classrooms, and felt that they could use increased training for working with children with behavioural issues (Boyd, 2013). Two participants in this study pointed out inconsistencies in quality among ECE programs, noting that practicing early childhood educators do not always follow best practice. It has been suggested that a standard of training for early

childhood educators would ensure consistency in program quality among early childhood programs, as consistency in training is required for consistency in practice (Jacobs & Adrien, 2012; Katz, 1985).

Research Gaps and Limitations

This study was able to address a gap in the current literature by exploring the perceptions of students in an ECE training program regarding the professional status of Early Childhood Education, and implications this may have on recruitment into the field. The qualitative research method allowed for an exploration of this topic from the students' point of view. The insights provided by participants allow for a greater understanding of how professional status influences career intentions, and which characteristics of a profession are central to the recruitment of CHYS students into the field of Early Childhood Education.

A major limitation of this study was the lack of diversity among study participants, in that they all attended the same university program. The insights presented from this study cannot be generalized to students in other ECE training programs, as the CHYS program is the only university-based ECE training program east of Montreal. The results of this study also cannot be generalized to all ECEs who hold a Level 3 classification with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The Level 3 ECE classification can be obtained after the completion of the CHYS program, or after the completion of an ECE diploma in conjunction with any university degree. Within Nova Scotia, an individual with a Level 3 ECE classification is qualified to work in or direct a licensed childcare centre, and to work as a Lead Early Childhood Educator in the new pre-primary program. It is important to note that Level 3 ECEs who have obtained a diploma in Early Childhood Education may have different perspectives on ECE as a career option from students in the Child and Youth Study program. This possibility

was addressed by two participants, who expressed the opinion that someone interested in working as an early childhood educator would be more likely to enroll in an ECE diploma program than the Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Study degree.

Another limitation of this study is that the participants may have felt uncomfortable at times expressing their views, due to two issues with data collection. The first possible issue is the researcher's own connection to the research topic. The researcher is an early childhood educator and, although this was not explicitly stated to participants, assumptions may have been made that the researcher's interest in the topic stems from personal experience in the field. There were instances during the World Café conversations where the study participants expressed hesitation to openly discuss their feelings toward the field of Early Childhood Education. It is possible that study participants felt uncomfortable expressing some negative opinions on the field of ECE knowing that the researcher is likely to be an early childhood educator. The participants may have also felt uncomfortable expressing their views during the final stage of the World Café due to an error in question wording. During the "harvest" portion, the researcher asked the participants to share something from the day's conversations which they found particularly meaningful. The phrasing of this question may have placed pressure on what was meant to be an informal discussion, as only two participants chose to share.

Conversations that Matter: Implications and Future Research

Implications of this research. The insights provided by study participants have allowed for a greater understanding of how students in a university-based ECE training program perceive the field of Early Childhood Education as a career option. This research might be of interest to ECE and CHYS students, ECE training programs, and the provincial government.

Both students in ECE training programs and practicing early childhood educators may be interested in this research, as the insights provided by participants might reflect their own concerns about the field of Early Childhood Education. Through the World Café conversations, the study participants were able to articulate some of the deep-rooted problems with the field of Early Childhood Education. The topic that presented most often during the World Café conversations was the issue of remuneration. The participants raised practical concerns over the earning potential of an ECE, but also expressed deeper concerns over the relationship between the lack of professional compensation for ECEs and the lack of recognition of ECEs as professionals. The participants also spoke of a stigma that, some believed, surrounds the entire field of Early Childhood Education and prevents others from viewing ECE as professional work. The participants expressed the opinion that early childhood programs are not valued for their educational potential, and that the knowledge and role of the ECE is undervalued and dismissed as “babysitting”. The insights provided by the participants may encourage readers to reflect on the connections among compensation, status, and the perceived purpose of ECE programs in a way that they had previously not considered.

This research may also encourage students in ECE training programs to reflect on the factors influencing their own career intentions. The current and future students of ECE training programs are in a unique position in that, for the first time, work as an early childhood educator in Nova Scotia may be financially viable. The introduction of the pre-primary program and a provincial wage scale for ECEs have increased the earning potential of Child and Youth Study graduates who choose to pursue a career as an early childhood educator. Still, no participants in this study indicated a desire to work as an early childhood educator upon completion of the CHYS degree. While remuneration was the most cited reason for participant’s lack of interest in

ECE work, it was also clear that participants' career intentions were influenced by the lack of professional status and the stigma surrounding the field of Early Childhood Education. This acknowledgment of how status and stigma affect career intentions may encourage personal reflection on the reasoning behind their career intentions for students in ECE training programs.

This research highlights the need for further advocacy on the knowledge and role of early childhood educators, and the educational benefits of early childhood programs. The study participants expressed concerns that the knowledge and role of early childhood educators are undervalued by the general public, and that ECE programs are viewed as babysitting rather than early education. This research may encourage students in ECE training programs to educate others on the value of early childhood education, either independently or through an ECE professional association. Early Childhood Education training programs could aid students in these efforts by opening a dialogue with ECE students on the importance of advocacy in early childhood education as well as practical ways to enhance the professional image of the field.

For students in ECE training programs, greater research may be required to make an informed career choice. Participants cited low salary as a primary deterrent from considering a career as an ECE. Two students indicated a desire to work in Early Intervention, however, where remuneration is comparable to the field of Early Childhood Education. The majority of participants in this study were misinformed on some new developments in the field of Early Childhood Education within Nova Scotia, including the earning potential of a CHYS graduate. ECE training programs could help students to make an informed career choice by offering an information-sharing session, where students would be presented with the various career paths available to them upon completion of their program. This would include information students may not learn during practicum placement such as required credentialing, compensation, and job

availability. Encouraging practicum opportunities in the pre-primary program would also be useful in showcasing another opportunity available to early childhood educators.

This research would be a valuable tool in developing a recruitment strategy for the field of Early Childhood Education in Nova Scotia. The insights provided by participants allow for a greater understanding of the barriers to recruitment in ECE programs. The participants indicated that reward and respect are important to them, and have a strong influence on their choice of career path. It is clear that CHYS students see ECE work as lacking both professional compensation and status. The issues identified by participants could aid anyone interested in developing a recruitment strategy for the field of Early Childhood Education.

Suggestions for further research. Before the development of a recruitment strategy, more research needs to be conducted on the perceptions of students in ECE training programs regarding early childhood education as a career option. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to all students in Nova Scotia's ECE training programs, as the Child and Youth Study program is Nova Scotia's only university-based ECE training program. A suggestion for further research would be to gather data from students in college-based ECE training programs on their perceptions of early childhood education as a career path. A separate analysis should be conducted on students enrolled in an ECE diploma program who have already completed a university degree. Individuals who hold both an ECE diploma and a university degree are eligible for the same ECE classification level as CHYS graduates. It is possible that students who choose to enrol in an ECE diploma program after completion of a university degree will be more likely to view early childhood education as a career option, and could be recruited to lead pre-primary classrooms. Further research should also be conducted on how students in ECE training programs define "professional compensation". The study participants indicated that professional

compensation is important to them, yet gave little indication of what they consider to be professional pay. Research on how students in ECE training programs define “professional compensation”, as well as the perceptions of students in ECE diploma programs, would be valuable to anyone interested in developing a recruitment strategy for the field of Early Childhood Education in Nova Scotia.

The study participants cited the lack of value placed on the field of Early Childhood Education as another deterrent from considering a career in the field. It was suggested that the knowledge and role of early childhood educators is undervalued by the general public, and may be undervalued by teachers. Further research should be conducted on public attitudes regarding the value of ECE programs and the knowledge and role of early childhood educators. Qualitative research on practicing teachers’ attitudes towards the field of ECE is also important to gain an understanding of how teachers perceive the pre-primary program, as well as their perceptions on the knowledge, training and role of early childhood educators. The participants in this study expressed concerns that teachers would not respect pre-primary ECEs as equals. As the two groups will share a working environment, it is important that any issues that would prevent the successful collaboration of these two occupational groups are noted and addressed before the roll-out of the pre-primary program is complete. If a qualitative study of this nature was to take place, a recommendation is to exclude researchers with a background in early childhood education from the data collection process. During data collection for this study, participants expressed hesitation at times to openly discuss their thoughts on the field of Early Childhood Education. It is the opinion of the researcher that her own connection with the field of Early Childhood Education prevented honest dialogue among participants during data collection.

Further research on the perceptions of teachers and members of the public could lead to a greater understanding of the value placed on the field of Early Childhood Education.

Recommendations. Of the nineteen participants in this study, none indicated a desire to work as an early childhood educator upon completion of the Child and Youth Study program. A recommendation of this study is that a recruitment strategy be developed for the field of Early Childhood Education in Nova Scotia. Within Nova Scotia, the recruitment of Level 2 and Level 3 ECEs is growing increasingly relevant with the recent implementation of the pre-primary program. By 2020, the pre-primary program will be available throughout the province and will be fully-staffed by trained early childhood educators. The implementation of the pre-primary program is likely to exacerbate the recruitment challenges already experienced by licensed childcare centres, as the most highly-educated ECEs may be drawn to the higher pay and more desirable working hours of the pre-primary program. A recruitment strategy for the field of ECE could be useful in mitigating some of the damage to Nova Scotia's licensed childcare programs. The participants in this study have provided valuable information on the factors determining their career intentions, which could be a useful tool in developing a strategy to recruit ECEs with post-secondary training in Early Childhood Education.

The topic that was discussed most often throughout the World Café was the absence of professional compensation for ECEs, and the impact this had on participant career intentions. A recommendation of this study is that early childhood educators receive professional compensation for their work. Until those holding the title of Early Childhood Educator are compensated as professionals, the knowledge and role of ECEs will continue to be devalued by members of the public. The implementation of a province-wide wage scale for early childhood educators is a good starting point, but participants expressed the opinion that an hourly wage of

\$19 is insufficient to persuade them to consider a career as an early childhood educator. While lead ECEs in the pre-primary program earn considerably more per hour, the participants expressed concerns with the salary disparity between pre-primary ECEs and teachers. For the field of Early Childhood Education to attract graduates from the Child and Youth Study program, students must feel that as an early childhood educator they would be compensated comparably to other university-educated professionals.

The development of a well-educated ECE workforce is important if the field is to move forward as a profession. A second recommendation from this study is to ensure that all individuals who hold the title of “Early Childhood Educator” hold either a two-year diploma in Early Childhood Education or a degree in Child and Youth Study. During the World Café discussions, participants talked about the public perception that work as an early childhood educator does not require specialized training. The perception that ECE work requires no specialized training devalues the knowledge of early childhood educators, and lowers the status of the field. It was the opinion of participants that the field of ECE is viewed as babysitting, and is believed to require no thought or preparation. In 2016, the provincial government announced that, by 2021, new training requirements will be put into effect for early childhood educators working in licensed childcare (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016). A one-year certificate in Early Childhood Education will be developed, as will a competency-based assessment process (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016). The introduction of a one-year certificate and a competency-based assessment is important for ensuring that Early Childhood Educators who have years of valuable experience, but little formal education, are recognized for their knowledge and are able to continue to hold the title of Early Childhood Educator. Moving forward, however,

it is important for the public image of the field that all new early childhood educators hold either a diploma in Early Childhood Education or a degree in Child and Youth Study.

The participants noted that there is a lack of public awareness on the role, training and knowledge of early childhood educators. The final recommendation from this study is for the development of a public awareness campaign on the importance of Early Childhood Education. According to Abbott (1988), media campaigns can be effective in shaping the public perception of a profession. This recommendation mirrors a recommendation made in the 2016 Nova Scotia government report “Affordable Quality Child Care: A Great Place to Grow”, which identified the need for public awareness on the importance of early childhood education (Government of Nova Scotia, 2016).

This research looked at how Child and Youth Study students perceive Early Childhood Education as a career option. The researcher theorized that the professional status of Early Childhood Education influences the career intentions of CHYS students. The insights provided by study participants have supported this theory. The CHYS students who participated in this study indicated that their career intentions are influenced the public image of the field, the value placed on the knowledge of ECEs, and the lack of professional compensation. It is the hope of the researcher that the insights provided by the CHYS students who took part in this study will have practical implications for the field of Early Childhood Education within Nova Scotia, and will contribute to the advancement of the field.

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Appendix A

Invitation to the World Café (Informal)

You Are Invited...

My name is Melissa Kennedy and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts (Child and Youth Study) program at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am conducting research as part of my degree requirements. I am inviting you to participate in my study *Conversations that Matter: Child and Youth Study students' perspectives on the professional status of early childhood education*. The purpose of the research is to gain an understanding of how students enrolled in Mount Saint Vincent University's Bachelor of Arts (Child and Youth Study) program perceive the professional status of Early Childhood Education, and the impact the professional status of ECE may have on future career choices.

Early Childhood Education as a profession has been a topic of interest in recent years. It has been explored by researchers, policy makers, and professional organizations. Largely missing from the conversation, however, is the perspective of students in ECE training programs. As a student in the Child and Youth Study program, your voice is needed.

I am inviting you to a fun and informal, café-style conversation on Early Childhood Education as a profession. In small-group conversations, you will exchange your personal experiences, viewpoints, and opinions, while exploring the following topics:

- The public image of Early Childhood Education
- Recent changes to Early Childhood Education in Nova Scotia
- Your personal career intentions

All CHYS students are invited to join our conversation, regardless of your career intentions. I would appreciate your unique perspective. Will you join us?

Please contact Melissa Kennedy at XXXXXXXXXX for more information on this study, or to RSVP.

I hope to see you there!

Melissa Kennedy

Appendix B

Letter of Invitation & Informed Consent

Dear CHYS Student,

Date:

My name is Melissa Kennedy and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts (Child and Youth Study) program at Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of my degree requirements, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Joan Turner. I am inviting you to participate in my study *Conversations that Matter: Child and Youth Study students' perspectives on the professional status of early childhood education*. The recruitment of individuals who hold post-secondary training in Early Childhood Education is important for Canadian early childhood programs, as an early childhood educator's level of education is positively correlated with measures of program quality within his/her classroom.

The purpose of the research is to gain an understanding of how students enrolled in Mount Saint Vincent University's Bachelor of Arts (Child and Youth Study) program perceive the professional status of Early Childhood Education, and the impact the professional status of ECE may have on future career choices. The benefits for CHYS students, ECEs and families are that the information collected during the focus group could help build current research on how students in ECE training program perceive the field of Early Childhood Education. The research could be used in the development of recruitment strategies for the field of Early Childhood Education.

This study requires participants to participate in one of two focus groups that will occur on TBA. The most convenient focus group time will be discussed and decided upon with you via email, and a confirmation email will be sent to you. The focus group will be set for an hour and a half

and will take place at Mount Saint Vincent University. The focus group will be audio recorded and there will be an individual assigned to be a note taker present at each group. You will be asked to sign a form agreeing to the recording of the focus group. A confidentiality agreement will be read to the group before beginning the discussion in order to assure confidentiality of information shared and identity of participants of the focus groups. The results of the study will be presented in group data only and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from the discussion may be used in the thesis and in future publications and presentations to illustrate important findings. Quotes will not be accompanied by any identifying information.

Your participation is completely voluntary and it entails minimal risk to you. Discussing your perception of the field of Early Childhood Education may bring greater awareness of the role of the early childhood educator, as well as a greater awareness of your own career intentions.

Sharing your perspective may also provide insight to other students in Early Childhood Education training programs, as well as practicing early childhood educators. You may decline to respond to any questions that you may be uncomfortable answering and are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, up to the publication of the thesis.

Every effort will be made to maintain participants' confidentiality. Although the focus groups will be audio taped, the researcher will not identify participants by name on the recordings.

Pseudonyms will be assigned in order to protect your privacy in any narrations that you share.

Transcripts will be coded using the pseudonyms so as to ensure that participant anonymity is maintained. The demographic questionnaires will also remain anonymous and will be used only as a means of contextualizing data.

All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential with the exception of any disclosure of harm or intent to harm a child or vulnerable person, or a participants' intent to harm themselves. In the event of any such disclosure, the researcher has a duty to report the information to the proper authorities.

Results of this study will be published in a Master's level thesis document. In addition, information and/or quotes from this study may be published and/or presented to academic and non-academic audiences via presentations or publication. Only Melissa Kennedy and the thesis supervisor will have access to the focus group transcripts. After completion of this research, a summary of the study will be made available to you upon your request, and a copy of the completed thesis will be available at the University Library and/or Child and Youth Study office, Mount Saint Vincent University.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Melissa Kennedy (x) or Dr. Joan Turner, (email address). This research activity has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak to someone who is not directly involved in the study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, at (XXX)XXX-XXXX or via email at (email address).

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you have fully read and understand the above information and agree to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your files.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

One signed copy to be kept by the researcher, and one signed copy to the participant.

Audio Recording

Interviews will be recorded using audio recording to assist with the accuracy of your responses.

Please select one of the following options:

I consent to audio recording: Yes _____ No _____

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

Appendix C
Demographic Survey

Gender _____

Age group:

- under 18
- 18 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64
- 65 +

Year of Study in the Bachelor of Arts (Child and Youth Study) program:

- first year
- second year
- third year
- fourth year

Are you a transfer student from another program? Yes _____ No _____

Previous ECE-related education:

- None
- Completed diploma in Early Childhood Education
- Completed some college-level courses in Early Childhood Education
- Other _____

Years of work experience in the field of Early Childhood Education:

- Less than one
- 1 - 5

5 - 10

More than 10

Appendix D

Codes

Codes	Issues Discussed	Themes Identified
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value of ECE work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public recognition of the value of ECE work Public awareness of the role of the ECE Value placed on play-based learning 	1. ECE work is undervalued and misunderstood
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of the word "status" ECE as a profession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Status of ECE work Public image of ECE as a profession ECE as professional work 	2. ECE work lacks status and professional recognition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women's work/mothering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECE as women's work Image of ECEs as maternal CHYS degree viewed as preparation for motherhood 	3. ECE work and training is viewed as maternal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Image of CHYS degree as easy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic rigor Perceived legitimacy of CHYS degree Public understanding of the CHYS program 	4. CHYS degree is viewed as easy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECE work not viewed as requiring training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECE associated with lack of education Credentialing 	5. ECE is not viewed as requiring post-secondary education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effect of new training standards on status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Changes to system of ECE in NS Perceived value of ECE work 	6. Status of ECE will increase with increased training standards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easy work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Image of ECE as easy work Image of ECE as requiring no prep work 	7. ECE is viewed as easy work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nomenclature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alternate names for ECEs highlight "care" over "education" Professionalism 	8. Nomenclature prevents public from viewing ECEs as professionals and educators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-primary and status 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Image 	9. ECEs working in pre-primary will have higher status than

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Recognition Stigma Status Alignment of ECE with the public education system 	ECEs working in childcare centres
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stigma and pre-primary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Image of ECEs as low-earners Connection between status and remuneration Government funding of ECE 	<p>10. ECE work is associated with low pay</p> <p>11. The status of the field is tied to remuneration</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of wage scale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant perception of ECE earning potential 	12. Earning potential of ECEs is underestimated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practical concerns over ECE wages Thoughts on \$19 hourly wage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wages as deterrent from ECE work Inability to repay student debt Inability to afford comfortable lifestyle 	13. Pay is too low to pursue a career as an ECE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns with work environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working conditions Support for children with behavioural issues and special needs 	14. Challenging work environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value of ECE work to society 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of ECE programs Influence of ECEs in children's lives 	15. Participants recognize the value of ECE work
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Best practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard of practice 	16. ECEs don't always follow best practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public image of ECEs 	17. Ethics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intention to pursue second degree Participant career intentions Intention to work as an ECE ECE work incompatible with university education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant plans for career/schooling CHYS degree incompatible with ECE work 	18. ECE not viewed as a career option
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECE work as stepping stone/backup plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECE work as stepping stone ECE as backup plan 	19. ECE work viewed as a stepping stone or backup plan

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-based childcare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits and challenges of providing home-based childcare • Home-based childcare viewed as temporary option 	<p>20. Home-based childcare viewed as temporary career option</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualifications for pre-primary ECEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness CHYS graduates can lead pre-primary classrooms 	<p>21. Participants are aware CHYS graduates can lead pre-primary classrooms</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remuneration for pre-primary ECEs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences in pay between pre-primary ECEs and teachers 	<p>22. Pre-primary ECEs are not paid comparably to teachers</p>

Appendix E

Presentation of Basic, Organizing, and Global Themes

Themes as Basic Themes	Organizing Themes	Global Themes
1. ECE work is undervalued and misunderstood	Status of ECE Work	Value placed on the knowledge and role of the Early Childhood Educator
2. ECE work lacks status and professional recognition		
3. ECE work and training is viewed as maternal	Value placed on the knowledge of early childhood educators	
4. CHYS degree is viewed as easy		
5. ECE is not viewed as requiring post-secondary education		
6. Status of ECE will increase with increased training standards		
7. ECE is viewed as easy work	Image of ECE as “care” rather than “education”	
8. Nomenclature prevents public from viewing ECEs as professionals and educators		
9. ECEs working in pre-primary will have higher status than ECEs working in childcare centres		
10. ECE work is associated with low pay	Remuneration and status	
11. The status of the field is tied to remuneration		
12. Earning potential of ECEs is underestimated	Remuneration and career intentions	Early Childhood Education as a Career Option
13. Pay is too low to pursue a career as an ECE		
14. Challenging work environment	Participant perceptions of childcare centres	
15. Participants recognize the value of ECE work		
16. ECEs don’t always follow best practice		
17. Ethics		
18. ECE not viewed as a career option	ECE not viewed as a permanent career option	

19. ECE work viewed as a stepping stone or backup plan		
20. Home-based childcare viewed as temporary career option		
21. Participants are aware CHYS graduates can lead pre-primary classrooms	Participant perceptions of pre-primary as a career option	
22. Pre-primary ECEs are not paid comparably to teachers		