

EXPERIENCES AND BELIEFS OF PRE-SERVICE
ECEC TEACHERS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study sought to better understand the experiences and resources that pre-service early childhood education and care (ECEC) teachers in British Columbia use in their emergent practice. The participants for this study were five female pre-service ECE teachers enrolled at a small British Columbia university. Participants were divided into two groups, the first comprised of 3 students enrolled in a two year diploma program in ECEC and the other comprised of 2 students enrolled in a four year BA program in ECEC. Both groups participated in one 90 minute interview at their university. The interview was semi-structured and posed questions about the experiences and resources participants use in their ECEC practice. Using a variety of qualitative methods, data were coded and analyzed for themes. The results from this study showed that for participants, the experience of being a pre-service teacher in a university education program, which included participating in practicum and reading course materials, was the main factor that was influencing participants' emergent ECEC practice. A number of other results emerged from this study as well. These were participants' desire for professional community, a perception that ECEC was a temporary career and lastly, several implications of the BA program in ECEC, which was relatively new at the time of this study. The findings from this study suggest that the experiences of pre-service ECEC teachers are crucial to planning and service delivery in ECEC and that more research is needed in this area, particularly in the province of BC. Recommendations were provided for both the BC provincial government and post-secondary institutions with ECEC teacher education programs to consider carefully the needs and experiences of pre-service ECEC teachers.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 Introduction

Significant changes to early childhood education and care (ECEC) are underway in British Columbia (BC). Two main factors are driving this change. The first is that more families than ever before are now dual-earner families, necessitating an increase in daycare and other early childhood options. Coupled with these shifting family and workplace demographics are changes to cultural perceptions about early childhood and the role of ECEC programs in relation to school readiness. ECEC is not only seen as providing a safe place for children to stay while their parents work: rather, many ECEC programs now focus more on facilitating the intellectual, social and aesthetic growth of young children.

This pedagogical change to ECEC is perhaps the most significant. A great deal of research has been carried out over the past fifty years or so examining the impacts of deprivation (or conversely, enrichment) on the development of young children and the potentially mediating effects of quality early childhood programs. Arguably, the most compelling data comes from the early intervention Head Start preschools in the United States. Numerous studies (e.g., Gilliam & Zigler, 2000) have shown Head Start to have positive impacts on the children and families it serves, and that some of the cognitive and other gains last well beyond the years spent in Head Start programs.

In addition to Head Start, studies looking at other early intervention preschool programs that have been operating since the 1960s and 70s demonstrate similar, lasting impacts on low-income and at-risk children's later school and behavioural outcomes. For example, Campbell, Pungello, Miller-Johnson, Burchinal, and Ramey (2001) found that children enrolled in the Abecedarian preschool program in North Carolina when they were preschoolers were less likely

to repeat a grade or require special education services when they were in elementary school. Campbell et al. also found that Abecedarian children scored higher on math and reading measures throughout their schooling and were more likely to hold skilled labour jobs as adults than non-Abecedarian children in a control group. Belfield, Nores, Barnett, and Schweinhart (2006) reported on a well known study from the HighScope Perry Preschool Project that followed 123 preschoolers considered to be at high-risk for poverty and failing school. Forty years later, participants from this study were found to be more likely to have completed high school, have gainful employment and higher earnings than their counterparts that did not attend the HighScope program. In fact, from an economic standpoint, Belfield et al. report that for every dollar that was invested in the HighScope project there were returns of more than twelve dollars, primarily because HighScope participants were found to be less likely to require income assistance and encounter the criminal justice system.

Numerous other studies, including the large-scale *Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers* (Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, & Kagan, 1999) and *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Study of Early Child Care* (NICHD) (NICHD, 1993), have shown quality ECEC programs to have a positive effect on young children. Therefore, the changes to ECEC that are happening in the province of BC should also be considered in the context of research showing the importance of the early years as a developmental stage and the potential of ECEC programs to support this development.

The changes to ECEC in BC have taken a number of forms. Most notably, half-day kindergarten was expanded to full-day kindergarten and the number of StrongStart BC centres (a free drop-in preschool program) doubled. Further, the BC Early Learning Framework (ELF), co-developed by the BC Ministry of Health (BCMh) and BC Ministry of Children and Family

Development (MCFD), was published in 2008. The ELF included best practices for working with young children during the early childhood years. These changes took place in a relatively short period of a few years from 2008-2011, and it remains to be seen whether any further changes will occur.

As with any venture, ECEC has various stakeholder groups that are impacted by changes to programs for young children. A main stakeholder group, of course, are the children and families served by ECEC programs in BC. Government agencies, private businesses and non-profit agencies are instrumental in creating preschool or daycare spaces for children. Women's and children's rights activists lobby for universal access and funding for ECEC programs. There is however, another stakeholder group that is sometimes overlooked in ECEC: the teachers who work directly with children in ECEC programs. Teachers are perhaps second only to young children themselves when it comes to groups that would be most impacted by significant changes to ECEC taking place in BC. Taking this one step further, the people currently studying to be ECEC teachers, the pre-service teachers enrolled in college or university education programs, are almost always overlooked, yet they stand to be heavily impacted by changes to ECEC as they leave school to begin working in a system in flux. As the future workforce of ECEC, pre-service teachers are indeed an important stakeholder group. However, as will be shown in this thesis, there is a dearth of research, both quantitative and qualitative, on pre-service ECEC teacher education. Consequently, although this study drew as much as possible from available research in the area of pre-service ECEC teacher education, it is very much an exploratory work that aimed to understand the experiences of a small group of pre-service ECEC teachers in BC.

Framed as a conversation taking place in a time of great change, the goal of this study was to document these pre-service teachers' ideas about teaching young children, how they

constructed their own identities as teachers, and how they made sense of the field of ECEC and the context of BC specifically. The concept of *quality ECEC practice*, though not always explicitly named by participants, was discussed at length and is very important in the field of ECEC. Hence, this study assumes a focus on quality ECEC practice and how this relates to pre-service ECEC teachers.

1.2 Literature Review

This chapter provides an overview of the research literature pertaining to quality ECEC practice and the structural and proximal factors that influence quality. Quality in ECEC is also discussed in relation to pre-service ECEC teachers and teacher education. A lack of research in the area of ECEC teacher education and how education translates into later practice is identified and discussed. Lastly, the research questions and aims of this study are introduced.

To situate this discussion, two conclusions from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001) report on ECEC, *Starting Strong*, are presented:

1. Defining, ensuring and monitoring quality should be a participatory and democratic process that engages staff, parents and children
2. Pedagogical frameworks focusing on children's holistic development across the age group can support quality practice (p.11).

Two very important points arise from this paragraph. The first is that "quality" is a process, one that involves multiple stakeholders with diverse perspectives. The second is that as a pedagogical framework, the Early Learning Framework (ELF) has the potential to support this process of quality. These conclusions have implications for BC as the province considers expanding ECEC services. Groups that range from families to businesses have interests in and needs from an

ECEC system. To address the second conclusion, it is encouraging that BC has invested in creating a document that describes its vision for best practice with young children.

To understand the context of ECEC service delivery in BC, it should be noted that ECEC programs are overseen by a separate government ministry than kindergarten-grade 12 schools. The Ministry of Children and Family Development oversees all early years initiatives (including daycare, preschools and StrongStart), while the Ministry of Education is responsible for all kindergarten-grade 12 schools. Teacher education for ECEC teachers and school teachers is also separated in BC. For the most part, ECEC teachers receive their qualifications from community colleges and require a minimum 1 year certificate to practice, whereas all elementary school teachers must study at universities and earn a BA in education to teach.

Research and discourse about ECEC often centre on the notion of quality ECEC practice. Indeed, quality is a major concern of the OECD report cited previously. Defining quality in terms of ECEC and deciding how it is operationalized have been a major focus of much research and debate in ECEC (Mitchell, Wylie, & Carr, 2008). For the purpose of this review, quality will be discussed as it relates to the professional practice of pre-service ECEC teachers.

1.2.1 Defining Quality in ECEC

High quality ECEC programs are consistently found to yield favourable developmental outcomes in young children. Results found in relation to quality ECEC programming include, for example: sustained, positive cognitive outcomes for some children (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010; Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007) and better reading skills (Gilliam & Zigler, 2000). In fact, Shonkoff and Philips (2001) go as far as to state that, “the positive relation between childcare quality and virtually every facet of children’s development that has been studied is one of the most consistent findings in developmental science” (p. 313).

Although findings about quality are compelling, the concept itself is not always well defined (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999). Pianta (2005) addresses this, and provides the following definition: “quality is a multidimensional construct that is assessed using a variety of metrics and differing units of analysis” and “derive(s) from proximal-level interactions and transactions among teachers, children, and materials” (p.146). This definition is useful because it presents quality as multi-dimensional and involving teachers, children and environments. In short, Pianta demonstrates that quality is contextual.

Often, ECEC programs are considered high quality if they produce characteristics in children that prepare them for formal schooling (Friendly, Doherty, & Beach, 2004), or if they receive high scores on standardized environment measures such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) (de Kruif, McWilliams, Ridley, & Wakely, 2000). Others have argued that school readiness, though certainly an important factor, is a narrow definition of quality (Goelman, Anderson, Kershaw, & Mort, 2008). Rather, many researchers (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2008) focus more on the quality of the teacher-child interactions and developmentally appropriate practices as supporting children’s growth. Mitchell et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of sustained shared thinking, situations during which teachers and children focus together on common goals, as stimulating children and supporting development.

1.2.2 Quality is a Process

Many researchers (e.g., Belaguer, 2004; Canella, 1997) focus on quality as a process rather than a short- term goal to be achieved. Belaguer (2004) emphasizes that quality is a relative, value-laden concept that should be continually redefined and reassessed, a process which is equally important as achieving quality in day to day practice.

There is some consensus (i.e., BCMH & MCFD, 2008, Dahlberg et al., 1999; Friendly et al., 2008) that examining and reflecting upon one's beliefs and attitudes towards children, childhood and ECEC is central to engaging in a process of quality. The BC Early Learning Framework for example, encourages ECEC practitioners to reflect on their image of the child, and identify assumptions embedded therein. Addressing issues such as the place and role of children in society, what adults want for their children and what the purpose of ECEC is for families are also important (BCMH & MCFD, 2008; Moss, 2004).

Attention to quality had led researchers to differentiate between process quality and structural quality (Mitchell et al., 2008; Pianta, 2005). Structural quality can be understood as the physical indicators which contribute to high quality ECEC, factors such as ratio, classroom layout and teacher education. Many aspects of structural quality can be observed and regulated.

Process quality, on the other hand is more abstract, comprising the activities and style of caregiving that contribute to favourable experiences for young children in ECEC. Cryer, Tietze, Burchinal, Leal, and Palacios (1999) point out that process and structural quality are inextricably linked. They contend, "Process quality is most proximally influenced by the structural variables that actually exist within the classroom" (p. 339). To illustrate, the emotional climate of the classroom, the level of teacher sensitivity as well as behaviour management techniques employed in the classroom have all been found to contribute to process quality (see for example, Hamre & Pianta, 2008). Factors such as emotional climate or teacher sensitivity are more subtle than outward classroom characteristics such as good lighting or safe equipment, but they are equally, if not more important. Pianta and Hamre (2008) state, "Children in classrooms with higher composite levels of teacher support have higher levels of peer acceptance and classroom engagement than do their peers in less supportive classrooms, even after controlling for

individual levels of teacher support” (p.60). It is critical for ECEC teachers to ensure the physical health and wellbeing of the children in their classrooms, as well as the social-emotional health. Classrooms vary in the quality of emotional climate they provide to children as well as the quality of the teacher-child relationship.

Researchers from the Canadian child care study *You Bet I Care!* (YBIC) (Doherty, Lero, Goelman, LaGrange, & Tougas, 2000) examined process and structural quality in a variety of ECEC settings. Rather than simply observe separate indicators of process and structural quality, the YBIC study looked at the relationships between quality indicators using path analysis. For example, taken alone, the finding that teacher wage was a significant predictor of centre quality is important, but doesn't reveal much about why wage is important or what types of factors influence teacher wages. Using path analysis, the finding of teacher wage as relating to quality becomes dynamic and multi-directional. To illustrate: Doherty et al. found that higher paid teachers tended to work in centres that had some external funding or subsidy for rent and other expenses (making centre auspice important) and could hire more teachers (making ratio important). Earning a higher wage in turn influenced teachers' attitudes and job satisfaction (a process variable), and perhaps led to more positive teacher-child interactions (also a process variable). Therefore, quality in ECEC is a complex and includes a host of variables for teachers and children.

1.2.3 Teacher Education and Quality Teacher-Child Interactions

Recent research (e.g., Lobman, 2004; Mashburn et al., 2008) has focused on teacher education as an important predictor of quality in ECEC environments. It has been documented that classrooms where teachers have higher levels of education (at least some specialized instruction in ECEC) rate higher in process quality than classrooms where teachers have little or

no ECE specific education (see for example, Doherty et al., 2000; Saracho & Spodek, 2007). As Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) illustrate, rich teacher-child interactions are an important aspect of process quality as these interactions support the social-emotional, linguistic and cognitive growth of young children. Comparatively, in their study of quality and teacher education Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, and Howes (2002) found that teacher-child interactions in centres where teachers had little or no education in ECEC were characterized by low sensitivity, less complex use of language and activities that did not challenge children developmentally.

These findings have led some researchers (e.g., Whitebrook, 2003) to call for a four year BA education requirement for ECEC teachers. As Fuller (2007) and others (e.g., Early et al., 2007) point out however, requiring a BA degree for all ECEC teachers does not automatically guarantee quality across the board. Quality is complex and multi-faceted, with teacher education being just one facet.

Therefore, while the level of education that ECEC teachers achieve is certainly important, perhaps more important are the types of experiences pre-service teachers have in education programs. Lobman (2004) concludes that an understanding of the relationship between teacher education experiences and later practice is a missing link in the ECEC research. In their study of ECEC teacher beliefs and behaviours, McMullen et al. (2006) suggest that future research focus on pre-service ECEC teachers' experiences in their education programs in order to understand how teacher beliefs develop and how these beliefs translate into practice and quality. This study aims to better understand this facet of quality practice: the experiences pre-service ECEC teachers have before they start teaching.

1.2.4 Lack of Research on Pre-Service ECEC Teachers

There is a substantial body of research on early childhood and quality ECEC programs that spans disparate disciplines including medicine, economics, sociology, gender studies and others. Examples of both quantitative and qualitative studies about early childhood can be found relatively easily. What is lacking in this body of research however, are studies of any type that directly examine the experiences and ideas of pre-service ECEC teachers as well as teacher education environments and how these impact pre-service teachers.

Many quantitative studies (e.g., Whitebrook, 2003) examining child care quality include teacher education as a variable, but it is only the level of teacher education obtained, not the experience of this education, that is studied. Again, amongst the qualitative studies about ECEC there is little to be found about pre-service teacher education, with a few notable exceptions. In a longitudinal qualitative study entitled *Becoming, Being and Unbecoming and Early Childhood Educator*, Sumsion (2002) observed one ECEC teacher as she completed her ECEC education, transitioned into the workforce and eventually made the decision to leave ECEC. Through the use of in-depth interviews, the teacher's personal writings and drawings and examples from the literature on teacher attrition Sumsion provides a very detailed look into one ECEC teacher's experiences of teacher education and working in the field of ECEC.

Langford (2007; 2008) also conducts qualitative studies which focus on pre-service ECEC teachers. Through the analysis of written student assignments, textbooks used by pre-service teachers in their courses and interviews with students and instructors, Langford examines how pre-service teachers conceptualize their role as ECEC teachers and what constitutes a "good" ECEC teacher.

While the examples presented are helpful to begin learning about the experiences of pre-service ECEC teachers they are only a few in a large body of research and leave many questions about pre-service teachers unanswered. In addition to a lack of research about the experiences of pre-service ECEC teachers, there is also little known about the transmission of government publications and other resources to pre-service ECEC teachers. The current study aims to answer some of those questions, including what experiences and resources are most useful to pre-service ECEC teachers and how pre-service teachers utilize government resources.

Throughout this thesis, the decision was made to write about participants as “pre-service ECEC teachers” as opposed to “students” because this study addressed the emergent practice and professionalism of the participants. Similarly, rather than refer to the ECEC programs the participants were enrolled in as “training programs”, the term “teacher education program” was used. Again, this decision was made to respect the professional role of the study participants, as well as to recognize the educational aspects (i.e., theoretical and academic) of their ECEC education.

1.2.5 Summary

The research presented in this section has shown a number of things. Firstly, dynamic changes to ECEC have been instituted in the province of BC. Coupled with these potential changes is the fact that that pre-service ECEC teachers are an important, yet under researched, stakeholder group in the province’s early childhood strategy. Further, teacher education was shown to be a vital component of quality in ECEC.

1.3 Research Questions

The preceding literature review has demonstrated ECEC to be an important area of study. In particular, some studies contend that the pre-service education of ECE teachers is of utmost

importance. The ideas and opinions of pre-service teachers, though not always documented, constitute an important contextual facet of ECEC in BC. Therefore, this exploratory study aimed to provide a forum for discussion and documentation of a select group of pre-service ECEC teachers' beliefs and utilization of resources through small group interviews. Specifically, there were two research questions that guided this study:

1. What types of experiences and resources facilitate these pre-service ECEC teachers' beliefs about:
 - a) Children?
 - b) Their role as an ECEC teacher?
 - c) Professional ECEC practice?
2. How are these pre-service ECEC teachers using BC provincial government ECEC publications to inform their practice?

Using these research questions as a framework, a qualitative study was designed that addressed the relative lack of literature about the experiences of pre-service ECEC teachers in their education programs and how these experiences later influence their work with young children. The primary goal of this study was to ensure that the pre-service teacher participants would have ample opportunity to share their ideas and experiences as people about to embark on a career in ECEC. A second goal was to gather this information from pre-service teachers in British Columbia.

This study contributes to the field of early childhood education research by identifying several factors that one group of pre-service teachers have found useful in their emergent practice. In addition, this study produced several other findings in the areas of professional

development and challenges of working in ECEC that have implications for the field of ECEC and for other pre-service ECEC teachers.

CHAPTER 2: METHODS

This chapter describes the study participants and their demographic information. As well, instruments used in data collection, study procedures and data analysis are discussed. Data analysis strategies are addressed in this chapter, setting the stage for results in the following chapter.

2.1 Participants

Participants in this study were recruited from the early childhood education program at a small urban university in BC. The institution, which had recently achieved university status, offered a diploma program in ECEC and a BA program in ECEC. Initial recruitment took the form of an informal presentation about the study by the researcher during scheduled instructional time for both the diploma and BA students. Pre-service ECEC teachers were invited to provide their email address if they were interested in receiving more information about participating in the study. After these presentations, those who had expressed interest were emailed and a total of five pre-service ECEC teachers were recruited for study participation. Criteria for recruitment were English language competence and willingness to be interviewed in a small group. Two interview groups were created from the recruited students: one group of students from the diploma program in early childhood education (n=3), and a second group comprised of students from the BA program in early childhood education (n=2).

2.1.1 The Two Pre-Service ECEC Programs

Although all participants were students registered in the Early Childhood Education department at the same university, the differences between the diploma and BA programs impacted the study and warrants explanation. Students registered in the diploma stream complete a 2 year program of study and graduate with the basic ECEC certification required to practice as

an Early Childhood Educator in BC as well as a certificate that qualifies them to practice as an educator for infants and toddlers. Students in the BA stream by comparison, earn both the certificates described above but also earn a certificate that allows them to practice with young children with special needs. Once these three certificates are completed students in the BA program spend a further 2 years studying advanced ECEC theory and practice for a total of 4 years in the BA program and are granted a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education upon completion. It should also be noted that the BA program in Early Childhood Education is new at this university and one of only a few in Canada. The students that participated in this study from the BA program are members of the first ever graduating class for the BA in ECEC at this university. The differences between the diploma and BA programs are outlined in table 1 below.

Table 1: The Two Pre-Service ECEC Programs

Program Title	Program Duration	Certificates Earned
Diploma	2 years Full-time	1 year Basic, Infant & Toddler
BA (Bachelor's Degree)	4 years Full-time	1 year Basic, Infant & Toddler, Special Needs, coursework in critical ECEC theory, Bachelor of Arts degree

2.1.2 Participants from the Diploma Program

Three students were recruited from the diploma program for this study. All three of these participants were female and all were in their second year of the diploma program at the time of

data collection. The members of this group are: Mira¹, age 21; Stella, age 20; and Aya, age 38. Mira and Stella grew up in the same city where the university is located while Aya is originally from Korea and immigrated to Canada as an adult. Mira and Stella entered the early childhood education diploma program shortly after high school. Stella took a year off after high school to work and travel and it was during this time, while she was working as a nanny, that she realized she would like to be an early childhood educator. Mira was studying sociology at the university when she realized through volunteer work with children that she would like to pursue early childhood education instead. Aya, on the other hand, worked as an engineer in Korea before pursuing early childhood education as a career. Aya completed her ECEC education in Korea and practiced there for several years. She is currently working to become certified to practice ECEC in Canada. Once they have completed the diploma program, Mira, Aya, and Stella plan to enter the BA program at the same university. Other than practicum, the participants in this group are not currently working in the field of ECEC. Information about all participants is summarized in table 2.

2.1.3 Participants from the BA program

Two students from the BA program were recruited for this study. Both students were female and both were in the final months of the BA program and graduated shortly after data collection. The members of this group were Lillian, age 24; and Kat, age 30. Lillian completed a diploma in ECEC and worked in several preschools before entering the BA program at the university. She decided on ECEC as a career after high school when a favourite teacher reminded her she had always talked about wanting to work with children. After high school, Kat had

¹ All names are pseudonyms to protect privacy

planned on entering an audiology program at the university in her home country of Sweden, but when she was not accepted, moved to Canada and completed a diploma in ECEC at a college. She has been working at a daycare centre for several years and returned to the university to pursue the BA program. Both participants in the group were working full time in daycare centres at the time of data collection. Also, at the time of data collection both Kat and Lillian had been accepted into graduate programs in ECEC.

Information about all participants is summarized in table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Study Participants

Name:	Age:	Program:	Currently working in ECEC?	Planning to pursue further education?
Mira	21	Diploma	No	Yes, BA in ECEC
Stella	20	Diploma	No	Yes, BA in ECEC
Aya	38	Diploma	No	Yes, BA in ECEC
Lillian	24	BA	Yes	Yes, MA in ECEC
Kat	30	BA	Yes	Yes, MA in ECEC

2.2 Instrument and Procedures

Data were collected for this study through one semi-structured interview with each of the two groups. Interviews took place at the university the participants attended and each lasted approximately 90 minutes. At the end of the interviews, participants were paid \$10 in appreciation of their time and participation. During the small group interviews, the interviewer posed three main questions to both groups:

1. Can you share the time you first felt you would like to pursue early childhood education?
2. What made you feel that early childhood education was a good fit for you personally?
3. What types of resources (i.e., books, government publications etc.) are you using in your practice?

Interviews were audio taped with participants' permission and transcripts were created from these tapes. Copies of the transcripts were emailed to all participants with the request that participants 1) check to ensure their comments were captured accurately, and 2) that they choose a pseudonym to be used in the research paper.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this qualitative study began with a systematic reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts. Rather than analysing these data based on a priori codes, the transcripts were carefully examined for emerging themes and patterns, an inductive technique in line with grounded theory. Cresswell (1998) explains, "The intent of the study is to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation" (p. 56). In other words, analysing these data was an iterative process, more concerned with observing the phenomenon of being a pre-service ECEC teacher than applying preconceived codes to the participants' statements. Based on this observed phenomenon and the themes related to it, some preliminary codes were created and applied to the transcripts. Basit (2003) draws on Miles and Huberman (1994) to define the term "code" as it is used in qualitative research:

Codes or categories are tags or labels for allocating units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study. Codes usually are attached to chunks of

varying-sized words, phrases, sentences or whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting. They can take the form of a straightforward category label or a more complex one, for example, a metaphor (p. 144).

In this case, the method of applying codes to the data involved highlighting sections of text that fit with a specific code and later grouping data by copying and pasting from the original transcripts so that the relevant portions of the text became divided into coded sections consisting of prevalent themes from the data. As more themes became apparent, so too were more codes created. The table below lists the codes that were used to categorize these data.

Table 3: Codes Used in Data Analysis

Code Number	Code Title
[1]	ECEC is a temporary career
[2]	Desire for professional community
[3]	Implications of BA program
[4]	Making a difference
[5]	ECEC is not babysitting
[6]	Emergent curriculum
[7]	Personal and professional growth
[8]	Freedom vs. Rigidity

Although some sections of texts could be seen to fit under more than one code, generally data were straightforward and codes were treated as mutually exclusive, meaning that text sections were sorted under the code that most fit the text rather than being sorted into more than one category. In some cases, students in the BA group spoke about issues that were specific to

being in the BA degree program and hence, did not apply to the diploma group students. When these topics arose in the transcripts they were coded as relating to the BA program, although other codes could have applied to these sections as well. An example of the need for this coding decision occurred when participants spoke about the BA degree (code 3) allowing them to leave ECEC after a short time (code 1). While this example could be filed under both codes 1 and 3, code 3 was applied since in this case it is specifically an implication of the BA program that it allows student to leave ECEC for other careers. Other than discussions about the implications of the BA degree, both interview groups had similar ideas and answers to the interview questions. Therefore, for ease of data management, participants were treated as a group of five participants, rather than two separate groups in the data analysis and subsequent discussions.

2.4 Description of Themes

The themes derived from the codes used in data analysis are described in more detail in the following section.

2.4.1 ECEC is a Temporary Career

The majority of participants in this study expressed that while they are passionate about ECEC and enjoy being ECEC teachers, the practical realities of the field of ECEC such as low pay, lack of benefits and low status will likely prevent most participants from working as ECEC teachers long term. There was strong agreement among participants that ECEC is an enjoyable job to have while they are young but that it is wise to have a “backup plan” for the future. Therefore, this code was used when participants discussed financial issues in ECEC and their plans for pursuing other education and careers in the future specifically because ECEC was not an adequate career to support themselves and their future families.

2.4.2 Need for Professional Community

Participants spoke at length about their desire for a professional community with whom to engage in reflective practice. A perceived lack of community was cited by participants as one reason why ECEC teachers may burn out and leave the field. This code was applied to the data when participants spoke about creating community with co-workers, feeling isolated due to a lack of community and speculating that strong community improves ECEC practice.

2.4.3 Implications of the BA Program

For the participants in the BA program, discussing the BA program and the implications of the BA program for them and the field of ECEC comprised most of their interview session. Therefore, this became an important code for the transcripts for their interview and was used whenever participants mentioned the BA program and an effect the BA program had on their practice or them personally. An example of an effect of the BA program is participants stating that experiences and coursework in the BA program have led them to engage in critical ECEC practices such as examining their personal cultural biases and assumptions.

2.4.4 Making a Difference

Participants cited making a difference to children and families as well as to the field of ECEC as the main reason that they are pursuing ECEC as a career. Hence, this code was used for examples of participants believing they could make a difference to children and having the desire to be a positive role model.

2.4.5 ECEC is not Babysitting

Participants were adamant that they be seen as professional and that ECEC not be seen merely as babysitting, but rather as an educational field. This code was applied to text whenever participants made the point that they are teachers, not babysitters.

2.4.6 Current Curriculum Practices

Participants were highly enthusiastic about modern ECEC practices such as emergent curriculum and pedagogical narration, for example, and were critical of what they perceived to be outdated and stagnant practices, such as teacher-directed activities. Hence, this code was used when participants spoke of their preferred ECEC practices and when they spoke of practices they did not like.

2.4.7 Personal and Professional Growth

Participants spoke enthusiastically about their respective university programs providing them with numerous opportunities to reflect upon their personal ideas and beliefs both in their private lives and at work and practicum.

2.4.8 Freedom vs. Rigidity

Participants stated that they perceive the public and private kindergarten-grade 12 school systems to be more rigid than teaching in ECEC programs, and that they have more freedom as ECEC teachers than if they were public school teachers. An example of this is when participants spoke about being able to pursue children's interest at preschool without worrying about meeting provincially mandated curriculum requirements.

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented participant demographics, interview questions used in data collection, the qualitative methods used in data analysis and a description of the codes used in this analysis. Chapter 3 will address the results of this study.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Two research questions were posed at the outset of this study. The first question was what types of experiences and resources facilitate these pre-service ECEC teachers' beliefs about:

- a) Children?
- b) Their role as an ECEC teacher?
- c) Professional ECEC practice?

And secondly, how are these pre-service ECEC teachers using BC provincial government publications to inform their practice? Both research questions will be addressed in this chapter in relation to the codes applied to the data collected.

3.1 Research Question One

Several of the codes detailed in the methods chapter related to the themes addressed in research question one. These are presented in Figure 4 below.

Table 4: Research Question 1 Supported by Codes

Research Question 1 what types of experiences and resources facilitate these pre-service ECEC teachers' beliefs about:	Codes Addressing Research Question 1
a) Children	[4] making a difference [7] personal and professional growth
b) Their role as ECEC teachers	[5] ECEC is not babysitting [8] freedom vs. rigidity
c) Professional ECEC practice	[2] need for professional community [3] implications of BA program [6] emergent curriculum [7] personal and professional growth

3.1.1 Pre-service ECEC Teachers' Beliefs about Children

The themes *making a difference* and *personal and professional growth* were contained in text addressing the question of what influenced participants' beliefs about children. When participants spoke about wanting to be a positive role model for children, or a desire to be a resource for families, they were expressing an implicit value system that sees children as worthwhile and deserving of sensitive, supportive caregiving. Regardless of why participants are motivated to make a difference to children, their expressing this notion during interviews suggested that it is tied to their personal beliefs about children. As Stella comments:

And it's important because it's not always going to be in your family. There's not always somebody there for you. So, just being that person for a child and being there to like, have fun with them, and be a positive role model, and kind of just learn with them, is really interesting to me.

In addition to making a difference, participants spoke explicitly about their beliefs about children in some of the text under the *personal and professional growth* code. Most notably, participants detailed their image of the child, and how this image had changed through the process of coursework in ECEC and practicum and work experiences. Discussions about cultural constructions of childhood, beliefs about capability, nurturing and gender roles also provided an idea of how participants drew on experiences and resources from school and work to form their ideas about children. Stella elaborated:

I think most of it [one's image of the child] comes from school and your...and like from what we're learning in school and different stories and just meeting children. I think that's where the biggest image would come from. When you're with children, that's when you're seeing examples of why they're, when you're there, you're always learning. Oh

and for me, in the summer I actually was nannying for a family and I looked after a little boy, um he's 7 now with Autism and for me when I came into the program I already strongly felt that children are capable and that they can be role models for you too.

In this vignette Stella is describing the interplay of her own beliefs about children's capability with the experiences of learning in her education program and applying her beliefs and learning in practicum and work settings.

The idea of children as capable made up most of participants discussion about their images of the child. Although participants did not draw on the Early Learning Framework to discuss their image of the child, it is interesting to note that the ELF also promotes an image of a child where children are capable and active in their own learning processes. Mira expanded on her image of children by describing the learning process she engages in as an ECEC teacher to allow children to act on their capability:

We talk so much about the image of the child. So many times we have that instinct to say something seems unsafe but then it's learning to stop and catch yourself like 'why am I having this gut reaction to leap over here or to save them or help them with something when they're totally capable?'

Again, participants seemed to be melding their own ideas about children with what they were learning in their education programs and experiencing in practicum and work sites.

3.1.2 Pre-Service ECEC Teachers' Beliefs about their Role as Educators

Evidence of what the participants believed about their role as educators was documented under the codes *ECEC is not babysitting* and *freedom vs. rigidity*. Under *ECEC is not babysitting*, participants addressed the misconceptions and biases they encounter in the public sphere about what their role is as educators. Participants also addressed the fact that there is more

awareness recently of what early childhood educators do and that this is encouraging to them.

Aya shared her views on this:

I'm interested in early childhood education because it's, I'm really happy that people think it's an education field, yeah, there is something behind this playing.

The second code that related to themes of participants' view of themselves as educators, *freedom vs. rigidity*, had to do with how participants saw their role as ECEC teachers in contrast to elementary school teachers. Specifically, there seemed to be a belief among participants that the school system is very rigid compared to ECEC teaching environments and that ECEC teachers have more freedom to explore and develop curriculum than school teachers. Lillian elaborates:

But from outside the school system it always looks like there's so much more restrictions in the school system, whereas we can really, like, we're not imposing a curriculum in a way, and so to really value children as, to really explore what they bring.

This identification as educators, but as educators with more freedom than those in the school system provides an interesting look at how these participants conceptualize their professional role. This is addressed more in the discussion chapter.

3.1.3 Pre-service ECEC Teachers' Beliefs about Professional ECEC Practice

Four codes provide examples of themes that relate to experiences and resources influencing participants' beliefs about professional ECEC practice. They are: *need for professional community*, *implications of BA program*, *emergent practice* and *personal and professional growth*. In *need for professional community*, participants felt strongly that creating professional space to explore practice and recharge themselves was vital to their success as educators, and also to the field of ECEC. Lillian spoke about this topic:

I think it needs that kind of rejuvenation, like it is, like how, how do we keep questioning what it is to work with children? Because I think it's, it's not easy to do that when you're everyday just, and the children sort of questioning you, sometimes when it's just those children's questions coming to you, you feel like they keep hitting you and you don't quite know where to take them and you absolutely need to have this kind of, somewhere for conversations.

In this vignette, Lillian is demonstrating that she views professional ECEC practice as critical, reflective and a collaborative experience. The other participants corroborated Lillian's view with their comments.

Secondly, participants in the BA program expressed the idea that the experience of pursuing longer education in the field of ECEC was impacting their views of professional practice. It should be noted that students in the diploma program also identified their schooling as influencing their ideas about professional practice; this is discussed under *personal and professional growth*. Perhaps the most profound effect of the BA program on the students in it was the opportunity to read broadly across the discipline of critical and post-structuralist ECEC theory and in turn be challenged to examine themselves as educators and the work they do with children. The participants in the BA program noted that this experience had changed their view of professional ECEC practice. Another way the BA program was impacting the participants' view of professional ECEC practice was in questioning whether education requirements should be raised to be BA in ECEC for all educators. Kat considered this:

I think everyone should have a degree. It's not a thing that everyone, the standards should just be a little bit higher for everyone... Everyone in the field should have a degree. And then... I think everyone should have a degree in early childhood education."

For the participants in the second group, being in the BA program provided rich fodder for their thinking about professional ECEC practice.

Discussions about certain practices in ECEC and regulations for ECEC teachers were categorized under the code *emergent curriculum*. This code relates to participants' view of professional practice in general, as well as their own emergent professional ECEC practice. To illustrate, participants spoke enthusiastically about practices such as emergent curriculum, in which children's interests and curiosities direct a centre's curriculum, and pedagogical narration, in which educators document children's learning and activity with photographs, words and the children's own questions and thoughts. As Mira stated:

It's so amazing to see, there's no themes it's completely guided by children and also the teachers collaborate and they go and spend so much time in documenting and going back to the children's words and back to the conversations and having meetings with them [the children].

By contrast, practices seen as outdated and traditional by participants, such as centres having monthly themes (i.e., 'ducks' in April), were spoken of much less favourably. This sentiment can be noted in the quote from Mira. This pattern throughout both interviews suggests that these pre-service teachers are embracing a different view of professional ECEC practice than has perhaps been taught at education programs in the past, but is however, very much favoured by a significant sector of the ECEC field including Montessori and Reggio-Emilia teachers, as well as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Professional development education requirements for ECEC teachers was another topic that generated rich discussion in both groups, thus demonstrating that participants have strong ideas about what professional ECEC practice looks like to them. In particular, participants seem

to feel that the number of professional development hours currently required for ECEC license renewal in BC (40 hours over 5 years) is insufficient. The main concern cited was that 8 hours per year amounts to only a few workshops or perhaps one course and that this is not enough to keep practice current and progressing, in the view of participants. Kat elaborates:

The professional development for teachers for us that went up from maybe 12 or 15 hours to 40 I believe, every 5 years. And 40 hours, people were outraged and so much, but it's just, like, it's one course in university or like random two hour courses, it's nothing if you think about... and over five years. It's almost nothing. So maybe that's something that needs to be looked at that teachers need to do more of that so that there can be some freshness that comes in.

Kat's sentiments were shared by all participants in the interviews, which suggests two things. Firstly, it is possible that as students, participants are idealistic about their chosen field and very motivated to improve it. In this case, it might seem disheartening to them that some of their colleagues do not share their vigour. On the other hand, this vignette also seems to demonstrate that participants are adamant that ECEC teachers professionalize themselves by raising education and recertification standards. In this second case, participants are taking a strong position on what professional ECEC practice is; if they wish to be viewed as teachers and not babysitters, ongoing professional development is needed both for individual teachers and the field of ECEC.

Lastly, the code *personal and professional growth* is once again applicable. Participants cited many instances in which being part of a teacher education program for ECEC was helping them form their beliefs about professional practice. Mira comments:

I definitely feel that, like being an educator that you go through that process and you're always developing and changing and be thinking and reflecting especially these courses at school and we've had the opportunity to do that a lot of that and to know that everything's a process and where you are at each point in time will always be different but you're always changing and evolving. It's really nice too, not many professions you get to say that, that your own development too as a person.

This section has demonstrated that themes were present in the interview data from this study and that codes were created to organize the data by these themes. These themes addressed research question one: Participants draw on various experiences and resources, but namely the experience of attending an ECEC education program to form their beliefs about children, themselves and professionals and professional ECEC practice.

3.2 Research Question Two

Research question two asked what types of BC government publications participants were using in their emergent practice. While research question one was answered with the codes used in analysis and further supported with examples from the interview transcripts, research question two was not explicitly answered by participants during the interviews. Although participants spoke keenly about various books and theorists (such as Maxine Green or Vygotsky) they were reading in their classes, they never mentioned any BC government publications. The absence of discussion about government publications however, most notably the Early Learning Framework, is an interesting though unexpected result of this study and will be addressed more fully in the discussion chapter.

3.3 Chapter Summary

Chapter three has demonstrated that research question one was addressed by participants and the interviewer during both group interviews but that research question two was not addressed by participants. The codes used in data analysis were explored in more detail in this chapter, and context was provided for the next chapter which will further discuss these findings.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

4.1 Results of Research Question One

4.1.1 Participating in an ECEC Education Program

The main finding for research question one was that being part of an education program in ECEC significantly influenced participants' beliefs about children, themselves as ECEC professionals and their thoughts on professional ECEC practice in general. Participants commented frequently throughout both interviews that they were very happy they had decided to take their respective diploma and BA programs in ECEC at the university and that they had made valuable friendships and professional connections through their classes and practicum sites. Aya explained how her image of the child has developed:

My image of the child has tremendously changed since I started taking this program. It was like, we had presentations at the end of the semester, last semester, and we had to present how it [image of the child] changed and everything I think being with children too, but then from September to December we did three weeks with children maybe five weeks but not all the time where we were with children umm did every day for 2 weeks and then practicum site but other than that we were sitting in a classroom talking about it but we weren't seeing it. When I studied this before [in Korea], I didn't really think about it [my image of the child], I didn't really make connections but now since I'm studying here [at this university] I do that more often.

Lillian offered a slightly different perspective on why participating in an ECEC program was important to her:

It's sort of something that strikes me as being really important about what I do, and just like the idea of community, and that space of education as a community. Because I think,

um, that's not, that's not how I always thought of my education, like it, it was more, I thought of going to school to get information, to learn, but I think early childhood's really like a different space and that's, because it has, like it has that sort of lived education, and that's something I really, really value about it. Yeah. And I think even, like, like the way I think about education has just evolved as something, like now, in particular, it's just this, this space of inquiry and that's like, to be able to live and work in a space where you're constantly kind of exploring the world, that's, that's just so important and that's, that those differences coming in, those questions from sort of, in all the ways they take shape in our classroom.

The participants in this study also spoke at length about how valuable they found it to have the opportunity to immerse themselves in practicum sites where they could see curriculum in action and work firsthand with children and experienced ECEC teachers. Practicum offered a chance for participants to apply knowledge they had gained in their classes and in turn bring back experiences they had in practicum to debrief with classmates and professors. The experience of having a practicum mentor teacher was also viewed as very valuable by these participants. Stella describes this experience:

Our sponsor teacher, when she emailed us her evaluation wrote a lot about thinking about who you are as an educator and like what you value and when things that happen that you feel uncomfortable about you have to think about that as well and why is that making you feel uncomfortable and you have to think about because culture plays such a big importance and why you've come to thinking that and the lens that you're looking at the problem through rather than, so it's so much analyzing of the before and the things that we make assumptions about, right?

The interview data suggested that practicum mentor teachers, along with professors from the ECEC programs and classmates, played a role in encouraging participants to think about their emergent practice.

4.1.2 Participating in a BA Degree Program in ECEC

A second finding related to the importance of ECEC teacher education was participants' views and experiences of the new BA program in ECEC at the university. As stated in the methods chapter, the participants in the second interview group were members of the first ever graduating class from the BA program in ECEC at this particular institution. Hence, they felt keenly that they were a part of something new in the field of ECEC. Three main themes that emerged from the participants' discussions about the BA program were: a) taking the BA program has deepened the participants' ECEC practice and helped them be more reflective practitioners; b) the BA program has the potential to raise practice standards in the field of ECEC, and c) having a BA degree may qualify participants to work in careers other than ECEC, thus acting as a "backup plan". The latter two themes will be discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

4.1.3 Deeper, More Reflective Practice

Participants in the BA group provided numerous descriptions of what they saw as the quality academic content and practicum opportunities they had encountered in the BA program. In particular, participants stated that being in the BA program had encouraged them to deeply and critically examine pedagogy, the science of child development and what it means to work as an ECEC teacher. Lillian elaborates on her experiences in the BA program:

Well, even the idea of thinking about early childhood, I think, it's not a new idea but it's, like, the, the basic[1 year ECEC] program there's so much focus on the practice that there isn't, there isn't that focus on why it's important to think about what you're doing."

* * *

I think that's one of the biggest things that's come for me out of the degree is that this idea, just complexity, that, and, when you think about it, it's, like I can't believe how much I didn't think about it before, just, but the world is like, the way we put it into binaries and, and reduce it so much, and the science of it, and the science of the child and that kind of image, and instead of this complex and anything is possible, and every day is so different, and it's, you know, it's this kind of abundance that it, I don't know how you could not have thought about it so much and not even seen it before in some ways.

This example captures participants' perceptions of the world of ECEC as complex and full of potential for both children and teachers. It would seem that, at least for these participants, being a part of this BA cohort has been a crucial experience in the formation of their professional identities. As Lillian mentioned in this vignette, the 1 year certificate program in ECEC focuses heavily on the practical, day to day skills for working with young children, such as health and safety and developing activities. While this focus only makes sense for a short program aimed at getting pre-service ECEC teachers ready to work with children, the question arises whether there is a place for the theoretical in the field of ECEC and if so, if longer teacher education programs are an ideal way to introduce these theoretical aspects to ECEC teachers.

4.1.4 ECEC Teacher Education Programs and Quality

A number of studies (e.g., Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford, & Howes, 2002) have argued that there is a relationship between the amount of time pre-service ECEC teachers spend in their education programs, the type of program they attend and quality in the centres in which they later work. These studies suggest that longer education programs with curriculum focused specifically on early childhood better prepare pre-service teachers to be high quality educators than shorter, more general programs. Some studies (e.g., Ritchie & Howes, 2003) also found that in centres where ECEC teachers had BA degrees quality indicators rated higher than other centres overall, with the caveat that the BA degrees teachers held included some ECEC specific coursework.

The minimum program requirement to practice ECEC in BC is a one year college certificate program. The participants in this study were all taking longer programs than the one year minimum, in this case, the two year diploma program or the four year BA program. Also notable is the fact that every participant in this study stated that she was planning to attend more ECEC specific education: Kat and Lillian had both been accepted to MA programs in ECEC and Mira, Aya and Stella were planning to enter the BA program in ECEC once they completed their diplomas. Participants appeared to believe that one year of education did not provide sufficient time in which to explore the world of professional ECEC practice or to form their professional identities.

The finding that participants attributed their education programs with helping them to form their ideas about ECEC practice combined with the fact that all participants are planning on pursuing further education in ECEC suggests that studying the ECEC teacher education environment is an important piece to understanding the experiences of pre-service ECEC

teachers. The perception that spending a longer time in ECEC specific education programs was supporting participants to be better teachers lends credence to researchers such as Burchinal et al. (2002) and Ritchie and Howes (2003) who call for longer education times. Although this study cannot comment on the quality of participant's teaching since participants were not observed at their practicum sites or workplaces, the finding that the education program environment was so important to participants suggests that there is a link between teacher education environments and quality of teaching. Certainly, as other researchers (e.g., McMullen et al., 2006) have noted, far more research is needed to understand the specific relationships between teacher education programs and teacher practices and beliefs.

The current study extends the existing research literature on pre-service ECEC teachers through the use of open-ended questions pertaining to pre-service teachers' use of experiences and resources in their emergent practice. While experiences and resources could have been anything that participants were using in their emergent practice (i.e., newspaper articles, the experience of being a nanny, etc.) they almost always answered with examples of materials or experiences from their education programs and explained how these things were influencing their work with young children. Therefore, this study provides additional information about specific experiences (i.e., working closely with a practicum mentor) and resources (i.e., reading critical ECEC theorists) that pre-service ECEC teachers found useful in their emergent practice. Were this research to be continued, it would be useful to study whether or how pre-service teachers continue to use experiences and resources from their education programs as they transition into full time work in ECEC and how they integrate new experiences and resources from professional development and other sources.

4.1.5 ECEC Education Programs Provide Professional Community

Closely related to the findings about ECEC education programs was the finding that participants felt a very strong need for a professional ECEC community. For participants, being part of their ECEC programs at university provided this community. Kat elaborates:

I'm still thinking about the community and at first when I started here I really felt like I needed to have some, the support at my work, and I didn't feel like I was getting it. I couldn't get the co-workers, or ask the others to talk about it, and I felt then like 'oh, I just wish someone from my work would go to school with me and then we could talk about this!' And I thought, just, and if I step back, I'm going to school with all of these amazing people, there is a community, It's right there, but it's, and I can somehow bring it to my work in one way or the other, but just to see the community that we do have was, it took me like, years, or like, the whole year to figure out that we do have a community.

Participants' desire for a space to debrief, share ideas and get feedback from other ECEC teachers constituted a major finding for this study. Coupled with this was the recognition that without the opportunity to debrief being an ECEC teacher can be very isolating. Participants shared examples of teachers they knew who had managed to create a "community of inquiry" as Lillian called it, as well as their own examples of striving to create these communities for themselves and their colleagues. For example, Kat started a book club at the daycare she worked at and Aya started a teaching club with her colleagues in Korea. Aya describes how she came to start the teaching club:

In Korea I started a teaching club because going to the meetings, everybody talks about negative things like I don't like that, Board of Education this, they try and make us do this and blah, blah, blah, it doesn't work, and I was like 'ok I am not doing this like I am

not attending this meeting but I'm going to make another group of people getting together and talk about how we can improve teaching.'

Participants stressed that their professional communities should be there to challenge them and discuss problems as needed, but at the core, these communities need to be such that professionals enjoy taking part in them; positive places to refresh and renew ECEC practice. As Stella describes:

At our practicum the teachers were a part of this group where there was I don't know how many other schools and they would all come together and review their observing and recording and then talk about it with the other teachers from the other centres and so they would give input on what they were seeing and get new eyes on the situation and it's also really inspiring for them, it kind of connects them together and gets them excited, right, and it's kind of fun, and it's fun getting together with a group of people and talking and it's just like making it fun and enjoyable for you too and connecting the new people to the people who have been there forever, in things I've read, like looking at it [connecting with colleagues] as something fun and enjoyable works better.

Factors that prevent ECEC professionals from creating communities of inquiry were addressed by participants as well. These included low pay and long hours, teachers having their own children at home, and feeling alienated in one's place of work. However, participants concluded that having a strong community with colleagues from the beginning of one's career can combat some of the aforementioned barriers to the creation of professional communities. As Kat states:

But I think maybe if they were set up like this [scheduled times to connect], maybe people in the field, early child educators would enjoy their job more because it would be richer and maybe people would stay longer.

That these pre-service ECEC teachers considered professional connections and collaborative learning to be important to their practice yet recognized that there are barriers to these connections begs the questions whether in-service professional development sessions could fill the need for collaborative practice or whether it is imperative for participants that these communities exist outside of their workplaces. Similar to studies (e.g., Ackerman, 2005) that identify barriers such as having one's own children or other commitments outside of work to the pursuit of further ECEC education such as a diploma or BA, participants identified many of the same barriers that prevent colleagues from gathering outside of work to discuss practice and new ideas. Indeed, Kat deliberately scheduled her ECEC book club to take place during her daycare centre's nap time because she sensed that her colleagues would be unwilling or unable to attend outside of work hours. As studies (e.g., Chen & Chang, 2006; Moss, 2005) demonstrates however, while ongoing, high quality professional development is a key ingredient to quality ECEC teaching, professional development programs often fall by the wayside of the daily demands of working in ECEC.

The findings that professional community is important yet sometimes difficult to organize are represented in other studies mentioned in this section. This study, however, also shows some ways in which participants were very creative about ensuring that they were able to connect with colleagues. It is interesting that Aya and Kat found ways to work within the existing structures of their workplaces (naptime at Kat's daycare and state mandated district meeting times in Aya's home city) to take initiative to bring staff together to discuss ECEC. To

extend this finding, it would be valuable to research other ways ECEC teachers are creating professional communities for themselves and colleagues and whether these informal groups sufficiently meet the professional needs of participants.

Moss (2005) describes several regions in Europe that have made in-service education and professional reflection sessions compulsory for their ECEC teachers. While BC is far away from such tight controls over ECEC as these, mandated professional development time may be one way to ensure that ECEC teachers make time to stay connected and abreast of changes in their field. Perhaps if school-based preschool programs are implemented in BC ECEC teachers in these programs could advocate having time built into their day to debrief and engage in practices such as pedagogical narration. The participants in this study expressed strong beliefs that this time is vital to the quality of their teaching as well as their wellbeing as ECEC professionals.

4.1.6 Professional Community and Quality

Connecting with fellow ECEC teachers was something that was very important to these participants, but it is also important for ECEC teachers in the broader context as well. Feeling isolated is one of the factors ECEC teachers cite as one of their reasons for leaving the field (Sumsion, 2002). As Whitebrook and Sakai (2003) note, teacher attrition can have a negative impact on quality in daycare and preschool centres, as more experienced teachers leave the field and the children therefore can experience multiple caregivers in short periods of time. Similar to their choice to opt for longer education programs, participants have identified that professional community is another factor in ensuring quality in ECEC, not only for children, but for the teachers that work with them. For the participants in this study, there were several factors that contributed to quality ECEC practice for teachers. The first was having an intentional teaching practice that challenges teachers to connect with children about their learning and plan

curriculum and activities to foster this learning. The second factor is related to the first and involves meeting with colleagues to make children's learning processes explicit through the use of pedagogical documentation and discussion with other professionals about teaching.

Identifying a way to meet ECEC teacher's needs to connect, plan and debrief with colleagues while recognizing that it is not always realistic for teachers to meet outside of work hours appears to be a crucial task in ensuring quality ECEC practice. This study has identified that pre-service ECEC teachers feel the need to connect with other ECEC teachers even before they are engaged in full-time ECEC work. Again, further research into the ECEC education environment would help illuminate the process of creating and maintaining professional communities, as well as learning more about the relationship between professional communities and quality ECEC practice.

4.1.7 Participants' Identity as ECEC Teachers

As noted in the results chapter, participants in this study often framed their identities as ECEC teachers as unique and different than public school teachers. When describing how their identity was unique or different, participants most often characterized ECEC as more open and less rigid than the public school system. Specifically, participants stated that if they were public school teachers they would find it challenging to have to meet curriculum and testing requirements mandated by the province, whereas in ECEC there were no such restraints. In contrast, participants perceived that ECEC teachers can design their own curriculum and create a classroom schedule that suits them and their students. Mira explains:

I think just also along with the image of the child and curriculum as well, and just seeing how the school system, how rigid it is that you have to follow the K-12 system, you have

to follow a certain set, but then going on [ECEC] practicum where they do emergent curriculum.

This finding is interesting because it shows that in forming their professional identity participants identified themselves as teachers, but as teachers with more freedom and control over the way they teach than public school teachers. It seemed that this sense of freedom from rigidity was central to how participants were identifying themselves as ECEC teachers. While it is true that preschool curriculum is not legislated like public school curriculum is in BC, it seems that participants may still face constraints in their practice. ECEC centres typically employ more than one ECEC teacher in order to meet child-adult ratio requirements and it seems possible that disagreement over teaching methods or activities could arise in these teacher teams. Regardless, it seems that participants truly valued this sense of freedom and for them it was a big part of being an ECEC teacher.

Some studies have compared the views and practices of student teachers in ECEC programs to student teachers in elementary teacher programs. File and Gallo (2002) as well as Smith (1997) looked at how two groups of ECEC pre-service teachers and two groups of elementary school pre-service teachers adopted the tenets of NAEYC's developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) into their beginning teaching practice. In both studies, the pre-service teachers in the ECEC groups included more DAP practices, including play-focused activities for young children and small group instruction, into their teaching. These studies have more implications in the United States where they were conducted because, as the authors note, in some states an ECEC qualification allows ECEC teachers to teach younger grades in the public school system. This is not the case in BC at the current time; only teachers with a Bachelor's degree in education are qualified to teach in the public elementary school system. Having said

this, since school based, publically funded programs for three and four year old children are being considered in BC, the findings that pre-service teachers in ECEC programs embraced more DAP teaching methods than did pre-service school teachers could also have implications for BC. Since the proposed public school programs for young children will be preschool programs it seems likely that ECEC teachers, not school teachers, will teach these programs. However, since the programs will take place in elementary schools if they are created, it is unclear at this time whether the province will set a curriculum for the programs and whether teachers will be required to follow this curriculum. In light of how participants viewed themselves as professionals, almost as an anti-school teacher, it is interesting to consider how their professional identity may shift or be challenged were they to choose to work in one of the proposed school based programs. Further research into what influences ECEC teacher identity and how these identities do or do not shift based on workplace and role would help shed light on the issues raised by participants, particularly within the context of jurisdictions changing the modes of ECEC service delivery as BC may do.

4.1.8 Participant's Views about Professional ECEC Practice

Participants in both groups shared their opinions about educational and professional development requirements for ECEC teachers as well as their own career plans and goals. These sections of the interviews addressed the part of research question one that asked about pre-service teachers' views and beliefs about professional ECEC practice. Interestingly, although most participants were of the opinion that ECEC teachers should pursue more than the one year minimum requirement of education as well as engage in ongoing academic professional development, the participants did not plan to stay in ECEC for more than a few years after graduation. These finding will be discussed in the following sections.

4.1.9 Raising Practice Standards

Participants in the BA interview group (Kat and Lillian) were quick to state their opinion that everyone in the field of ECEC should have a BA degree in ECEC. This view seemed to stem from their beliefs that the BA program has challenged them to become highly skilled and reflective teachers as well as having had positive effects on their personal lives. Kat described this feeling:

I feel all of a sudden I'm not just a teacher and Kat, I'm like both together all the time.

It's really neat. And with my friends it's just all of a sudden I'm more myself.

This vignette captures the excitement of the participants in the BA group as they reflected on their personal and professional growth over the past few years. It was clear that being a pre-service teacher in the ECEC BA program at this university had been a rich and rewarding experience for them. Whether all ECEC teachers in the province of BC should be required to complete an ECEC specific (or any other) BA degree before embarking on their teaching careers however, is a more complicated consideration.

While at first glance it may seem logical that higher levels of education for ECEC teachers would in turn create teachers that provide higher quality early learning experiences to children, the research findings are in fact mixed on this issue. Early et al. (2007), in a meta-analysis of seven American studies examining the possible relationship between higher education for ECEC teachers and centre quality suggest that both teacher education and quality are far more complex than many researchers, and indeed policy makers, seem to recognize. For the majority of the studies reviewed, findings that ECEC teachers with BA degrees and high quality early learning and care environments go hand in hand did not stand up to the more rigorous statistical analysis conducted by these researchers. In fact Early et al. recommend that

“researchers should go beyond the easy-to-measure constructs of degree and major to more fully understand teacher quality and its relationship with classroom quality and child outcomes” (p.576-7). Other significant conclusions from this meta-analysis include encouraging policy-makers to consider more than BA degree status when hiring teachers and the creation of a better professional development system for both pre-service and practising ECEC teachers.

British Columbia finds itself at an early learning crossroads of sorts. The province may decide to continue funding a preschool system with a mixed landscape that includes both for- and non-profit centres. Or, it may decide to embark on a system of more tightly regulated, school based programs for three and four year olds. Both scenarios will involve timely debates over teacher education and program quality. Rather than suggesting outright that requiring ECEC teachers to have BA degrees is unnecessary or even unwise, this discussion aims to provide context for this debate in the specific milieu that is BC in 2011. So far BC only has one university that offers a BA program in ECEC and the province does not require a BA degree for employment in the ECEC sector. However, since this thesis has shown the issue of BA degrees in ECEC to be a prominent issue in some of the ECEC literature, and BC may begin offering school-based preschool programs, the issue of BA requirements for ECEC teachers may become more of a local issue.

While the current study did not focus on Bachelor’s degree status and ECEC quality, there are some results from the Early et al. (2007) study that do have bearing on the current study. Though all five participants in this study seemed enthusiastic and highly skilled, the interviewer observed that the BA students seemed to have an advantage in their theoretical and critical understanding of ECEC practice, as well as in their confidence for working with children. Whether this advantage translates to quality ECEC practice on the parts of the BA group

participants was not studied, however, results from this study can be seen to support longer education times for ECEC teachers. The Early et al. finding that ongoing professional development opportunities can be equally, or more important than requiring a BA degree for teacher quality are supported by the results from this study. All participants in this study stated that they felt the required hours of professional development programming in BC should be increased to ensure ECEC teachers stay up to date in their practice.

4.1.10 Professionalizing the Field of ECEC

As noted in the preceding chapter, participants in this study criticized the current professional development requirements for ECEC teachers in BC stating that not only were the number of hours required insufficient for meaningful teacher development but that not requiring more academic professional development programming hinders the professionalization of the field. Lillian commented:

I think the kind of [professional development] courses too because you can, not to say that there's not value in the sort of workshops, like the puppet making and those kind of things, but I think it's also like we also need some sort of, like, something that's asking us to think as well, like it, that we shouldn't have all our 40 hours be puppet making and songs.

Participants spoke about encountering resistance from work and practicum colleagues towards higher education as a means of professionalizing the field of ECEC. Aya described how this had happened at a former workplace:

I see a lot of people, and this is the other thing too, I see a lot of people not really thinking about it [theory] and saying oh this is what I studied and I want to try this and do into my activities to see if they can do this, then there is one or two people that have

told me that oh theory is just a theory you don't really use that in practice, oh you're in school that's why you're so enthusiastic about it but once you're in the field it's all gone you can't use it. I was so discouraged.

Lillian noted that some people seem to only want to use their 40 professional development hours for courses such as puppet making, and later, she remarked that the new BA program at the university had been criticized for being too theoretical and not practical enough. It appears that while the BA program was very important and positive for the participants in this study, the field of ECEC in general may be slower to accept that a BA in ECEC, with its focus on theory and reflective practice, may contribute to best practices in ECEC. The existence of BA degree programs in ECEC provides an interesting avenue for further research into the possible connection between teachers having BA degrees in ECEC and the quality of their teaching.

4.1.11 ECEC as a Short-Term Career

A prominent theme that emerged almost immediately in both interviews was that although participants enjoy working in ECEC and feel they are good at it, they do not plan to pursue ECEC as a long-term career. The reasons given for this decision included insufficient pay to support themselves and the families they plan to have in the future as well as a fear of burning out after several years in the field. Stella put it this way:

It's interesting I already know I don't want to be like a preschool teacher or just work in, necessarily a centre like for the rest of my life. Like I know that later, for more than 5 years max and I already know that. It comes right down to the fact I want to have children and a family and I want them to be able to do things and they can't. So I want, this is great education and training for other things I want to do that are around children but it's not like what I want to end up doing but it's also the fact that you get paid so

poorly and just the fact that I want to have a family and I want to live in a nice house and I want them to be able to do everything and take trips and realistically unless I marry a wealthy man [laughs] it just isn't possible and like I want to be able to support myself too when I'm living on my own and have to pay bills you can't I don't know you still have a life and want to go on trips and travel and you can't do that at all.

Each participant in this study had a similar plan as Stella: she would work in ECEC while she was young and then upgrade education as necessary to move into a career that would provide the resources for a middle-class life for her and her future children. As Stella touches on in this vignette, ECEC was seen by participants as good education for other careers, (in Stella's case, occupational therapy) but not as an acceptable long-term career.

The investment of longer education times (and longer tuition fee payments) into a career that participants only plan to stay in for a few years is an interesting finding from this study. At first glance this seems like a phenomenon specific to ECEC: it is difficult to think of another field where students enter their education program knowing they only want to work for a few years after graduating before moving on to something different. The question is raised why participants opted for programs as long as four years, in the BA group's case, when a one year program at a college would have qualified them to do the same work in ECEC much sooner. Certainly, it was apparent from the interviews that participants enjoy studying and working in ECEC, but why not enrol in a shorter education program?

A partial explanation may come from the demographic backgrounds of the participants. As illustrated already in this section, each participant was adamant that she wanted a middle-class lifestyle for herself and her future family and since ECEC was unlikely to provide this lifestyle, she planned to leave the field within five or so years. Since the participants themselves

all came from middle-class families, I think it is possible that they considered it important to attend a university rather than a college, since colleges tend to be regarded as less academic and lower status than universities in Canadian culture. This speculation can only offer a partial explanation however, since the university attended by participants also offers a one year education program in ECEC. Rather, it seems that this group of participants was truly motivated to learn about ECEC practice and felt that longer education programs were the venue to do this. If this conclusion is to be accepted, it still does not explain exactly why participants chose to study ECEC rather than becoming qualified in a field they can see themselves working in for more than a few years.

This finding about longer education times and shorter careers raises many questions and necessitates further study. Specifically, it can be seen as strength that students are still choosing to enter ECEC education programs despite not planning to stay in the field and it would be interesting to know how many pre-service ECEC teachers end up staying in ECEC even if they said they were planning not to.

4.1.12 Having a Backup Plan

Several participants spoke explicitly about the need to have a “backup plan”, as they called it, something to do when ECEC was no longer working as a career for them. Pursuing further education was seen as part of this backup plan in that it would make participants employable in more fields than just ECEC. Kat goes into detail:

That’s also part of the reason I’m here [in BA program] as a backup. I was thinking one day I’m tired of my job, I will have a backup and I can do something that’s not working with the kids in the day care. I don’t want to say it out loud but it [BA degree] is a backup so that one day when I’m tired and burnt out I don’t have to do just that one thing [work

in ECEC]. *It feels like everyone has quite a few years of fighting in them, and then some people have more fighting in them but if there's nothing coming back you just burn out and, like you said, you can't pay your bills maybe. But it doesn't mean we don't enjoy what we do; it's just, it's scary to think about the future.*

Obviously, it does not bode well for the field of ECEC that the highly motivated, well-trained people who are supposed to replenish its workforce do not plan to be a part of that workforce for long. As participants shared their plans to leave ECEC after only a few years, it seemed to the interviewer that not only were they thinking ahead for the material wellbeing of their families, but also they were refusing to stay in a system that they perceive as unwilling or unable to financially recognize their talents and efforts. I had the sense that these participants are part of a generation of women that was encouraged to be independent and highly ambitious in all areas. Having a career that doesn't allow for much financial independence and provides less status than other careers with children (i.e., speech therapy) might be reasons these young women see ECEC as a short-term option, regardless of how much they may enjoy teaching young children. The implications of this finding will be discussed further in the next chapter.

4.1.13 Impact of the BA Degree on the ECEC Workforce

In light of the finding that participants were taking longer education programs yet planning to exit the field quickly, one must question what the effect of requiring ECEC teachers to have a BA degree would be on a system that already has incredible difficulty retaining its workforce. Additionally, since BA programs take place at universities, which typically have higher admission requirements and tuition fees than the colleges where most pre-service ECEC teachers study, requiring a BA to practice ECEC in BC could place a career in ECEC out of reach for some students who are unable to afford the fees or time commitment that a 4 year BA

requires. Finally, it is entirely possible that prospective pre-service ECEC teachers may weigh the time and financial commitments of a BA program in ECEC against the salary, benefits and status realities of a career in this field and decide that pursuing a BA in ECEC is just not worthwhile.

Were significant improvements to be made to remuneration for ECEC teachers however, putting them more in line with their Bachelor degree holding elementary school counterparts, it may be more reasonable to expect that ECEC teachers have BA degrees in their field, and in turn this may motivate pre-service ECEC teachers to complete BA degrees before beginning to teach. The crux of this issue simply is that before conversations of BA requirements for ECEC teachers take place, policy makers and ECEC teacher alike must find a way to keep these enthusiastic, skilled professionals working in ECEC for more than just a few years after graduation.

Once again, it is interesting that the participants in the BA group had opted for a longer education program in ECEC yet still did not plan to be ECEC teachers for very long. Since they had both been accepted to Master's programs in ECEC, Kat and Lillian will have completed at least six years of specialized ECEC education by the time they leave university. This seems like a serious investment of time and money to make for a career that neither participant feels could sustain her long term. With a Master's degree however, it is possible that Kat and Lillian may have other career options working with children that offer the opportunity to earn more than an ECEC teacher's salary.

This finding lends an interesting perspective to existing research on BA degrees and ECEC. While some researchers (e.g., Whitebrook, 2003) suggest that ECEC teachers should be required to have a BA with at least some coursework in ECEC, others, namely Early et al. (2007), found that in many cases, the relationship between ECEC teacher BA status and quality

practice is not as straightforward as sometimes thought. On one hand, participating in the BA program did seem to be supporting Kat and Lillian to be talented, reflective ECEC teachers, while on the other hand, they do not plan to apply these talents to working in ECEC after graduation.

If BA programs in ECEC become more common at Canadian universities, it would be timely and informative to study what types of occupations students who graduate from the BA programs work in after graduation, and how many of them stay in ECEC. Generalizing from American data (e.g., Fuller, 2007), it seems that a BA degree in ECEC can and often does function as a gateway to paraprofessional jobs in the public school system and other positions away from ECEC for those who choose this education option.

4.1.14 BA as an Exit Strategy

The final important finding about the BA program was that one of the reasons participants chose to enter the BA program in ECEC was that having a BA degree would provide more career options than a certificate or diploma in ECEC, thus effectively making a BA in ECEC a part of the “backup” plan finding discussed earlier. For the participants in this study, having a BA was seen as important and the fact that they could earn a BA in their current field and area of passion, ECEC, was ideal for them. Having said that, both participants acknowledged that they most likely will not work in ECEC for very long and hence, their BA degree will provide an advantage when they decide to look for a new career path. Incidentally, having a BA instead of a lower qualification in ECEC may also allow participants to compete for careers in higher paying fields than ECEC. Once again, one must question the utility of education pre-service teachers at a higher level, in this case a BA, only to have them leave the field for better pay and conditions.

In his book *Standardized Childhood*, sociologist Bruce Fuller (2007) addresses the increasingly stringent education requirements for ECEC teachers in the US. Currently, many states are moving towards requiring all lead teachers to have a BA, preferably with specific coursework in early childhood development and education. Fuller observes requiring a BA for ECEC teachers can have a twofold effect: being required to complete university coursework becomes a barrier for some teachers already in ECEC or contemplating entering ECEC and secondly, if teachers do complete a BA degree, many of them leave the field of ECEC to teach in the school system. In BC, a BA in ECEC does not qualify ECEC teachers to teach in the school system like it does in the American states Fuller examines. However, a BA in ECEC does qualify teachers to leave the field of ECEC for any number of other private and public sector jobs that have a Bachelor's degree as their minimum educational requirement for employment. Indeed, Fuller's findings are supported by this study as participants in the BA group stated that they believed their BA degree would allow them to work in other jobs and sectors requiring a BA degree.

4.2 Results of Research Question Two

Throughout the course of both interviews, the BC Early Learning Framework was never explicitly mentioned or discussed by any of the participants. In fact, when the interviewer tried to ask about the publication, participants changed the subject by speaking about other resources they used, such as articles their practicum mentors lent them. Although this particular government publication did not appear to be playing a role in participant's emergent practice, other non-government resources were. Most notably, participants in both groups spoke enthusiastically about reading the works of American theorist Maxine Green as part of their required course reading and finding her work to be both interesting and useful to them as pre-

service ECEC teachers. Participants in both groups also discussed other readings required as part of their coursework. Students in the diploma interview group mentioned reading various child development theorists (i.e., Jean Piaget) and finding these applicable at their practicum sites and students in the BA program spoke about reading works by post-structuralist theorists (i.e., Erica Burman) and finding these beneficial to their learning. Thirdly, ECECBC, the website of the professional organization of ECEC teachers in British Columbia, was cited as interesting and useful for pre-service teachers. Aya described her use of ECEC theories in her practice:

Studying theories, you know, looking at idea and everything and their notions and stuff like, I, that helped me a lot to think about it so when I was on the floor I go 'Oh that's what we studied, Oh, I do that' Well, yeah, I see what's happening and I go 'Oh that's what they're talking about really, oh that, oh that's Vygotsky'. I like to use the theory's ideas not completely 100% into my practice just because I believe that's impossible, everybody's different, but yeah but then my image of the child has changed because of that too, because of philosopher's ideas and stuff too it was huge.

While all participants provided examples of print and online resources that they are utilizing as they prepare to embark upon the field of ECEC, it is worthwhile to consider why the BC Early Learning Framework was not seen as particularly interesting or useful to this group of pre-service ECEC teachers. When asked, participants did acknowledge that the Early Learning Framework was presented and discussed in their classes but that it was not something that they were personally using as they built their professional practice, mostly it seemed, because they were very engaged in their coursework and practicum experiences. Indeed, many descriptions given by participants about knowledge gained courses and practicum were the same as principles found in the ELF. For example, participants spoke about the importance of continually

examining one's image of the child and reflecting on how this affects one's work with children. Also, ELF endorsed practices such as emergent curriculum and pedagogical narration were spoken of enthusiastically throughout both interviews. Participants gave the impression that their education programs were very full and complete so it seems logical that at that time the education program was instrumental in forming professional identities for this group of pre-service ECEC teachers.

However, considering that the ELF was designed to be BC's guide to best practices in ECEC and its vision of the future of ECEC in the province, the fact that not one participant in this group of pre-service teachers found the ELF useful could be seen as problematic. As discussed in earlier sections of this paper, while pre-service teachers are an important stakeholder group in ECEC, they are, similar to other student groups, also underrepresented in research and decision making. The entire notion of best practices in ECEC and even a future of ECEC in British Columbia is predicated on having a strong ECEC workforce, something the ELF does not address in great detail. If this future workforce, today's pre-service ECEC teachers, do not connect with the government's main ECEC framework, it would seem that better implementation and further discussion with BC's pre-service ECEC teachers are needed to reap the full benefits of this document. This issue will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.3 Study Limitations

Although this study was deliberately designed to be a small scale exploratory research project, there were factors that arose from this design that limited the study and should be addressed, particularly if this study is to be replicated. These limitations include the small sample size used, the location of data collection and the research instrumentation.

The fact that this study only had five participants allowed for a very rich and in-depth perspective into the experiences of a few pre-service ECEC teachers, but on the other hand may limit the generalizability of this study because of this small sample size. This limitation could be addressed in a future study by recruiting a larger sample and possibly employing a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods to manage the larger data set.

Another limitation of this study that also limits the generalizability of the findings was the collection of data at a university instead of a college. Since more ECEC education programs are offered at colleges than universities in BC, it is possible that collecting data from students in a 1 year college program would have better represented the experiences of more pre-service ECEC teachers in BC, since many more ECEC teachers in BC received their qualifications at colleges than universities. Further, the fact that data was collected from a university that offers both the ECEC diploma and BA degree programs created a sample that is perhaps not fully representative of pre-service ECEC teachers in BC since this is currently the only BA program in ECEC offered in the province.

A third limitation of this study was the approach used to collect data. Although in this case a semi-structured group interview was an effective tool to ascertain the ideas and experiences of a small group of pre-service ECEC teachers, the interview questions were not tested or reviewed in any way, therefore compromising the validity of the instrument, and perhaps the findings of this study.

The process of coding the data was also limited in this study. All data were collected, analysed and coded by one person. Future iterations of this study would greatly benefit from a more objective reading of the data by a person separate from the interviewer, at the very least to

lend an additional perspective to the complex process of meaning making from interview transcripts.

Finally, since this study was exploratory, the findings about pre-service ECEC teachers' experiences and use of resources in their emergent practice need further research in order to demonstrate the ways that pre-service ECEC teachers draw from their experiences and the resources around them to build their own ECEC practice. Longitudinal data would be very valuable in this case as well, to show the longer-term affects of education on ECEC teachers.

4.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the research findings that participants in this study value their pre-service education in ECEC for facilitating personal and professional growth and for providing a professional community. The lack of engagement with the BC Early Learning Framework for these particular participants was also discussed. Lastly, findings about participants' perceived need to have a backup plan for when they stopped working in ECEC and implications of the BA program in ECEC were addressed.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Implications for Practice

The findings from this study support the argument that particular experiences and resources contribute to pre-service teachers' beliefs about children, themselves as ECEC teachers and their beliefs about professional ECEC practice. Most notably, for the five participants in this study, being part of their university program in ECEC and completing the accompanying practica, as well as required course readings were the main experiences that were being utilized by participants to form their professional belief systems and identities in ECEC. The findings also suggest that although participants were using many resources, they were not using the BC Early Learning Framework prior to, or at the time of data collection. This result should be interpreted cautiously, but it may suggest that this document has not been successfully implemented to reach pre-service ECEC teachers.

In addition, there were several other findings that have ramifications for the field of ECEC. These were: participants' intention to leave the field of ECEC shortly after entering it, a desire for professional community, and the impact of the BA program in ECEC. Of these additional findings, the fact that participants are planning to stop teaching ECEC within five years to pursue other careers has grave implications for the field of ECEC. This paper has cited research (e.g., Whitebrook & Sakai, 2003) showing that teacher retention is a major problem facing the field of ECEC and that therefore, participants are not unusual in their plans to leave for other careers.

Overall, this study adds British Columbia-specific context and detail to a small body of work that recognizes the experiences of pre-service ECEC teachers as important. Further, the experiences pre-service teachers have in their education programs is very important to the type of

ECEC teacher they become, for it is in these college or university programs that pre-service teachers form their ideas about children and professional ECEC practice. It is hoped that far more research will be carried out involving pre-service ECEC teachers, particularly in the specific context of BC as the province moves forward with its vision for early learning. Some possible directions for further research are outlined below.

5.2 Implications for Further Research

This thesis found that various experiences and resources were contributing to pre-service ECEC teacher's ideas about professional practice. A number of findings related to ECEC workforce issues were also identified. Questions and implications arising from this study can inform future research in several areas including quality and ECEC teacher education, quality and Bachelor degree programs in ECEC and quality and staffing and turnover in ECEC.

This study suggested that the experiences pre-service teachers have in their education programs and at practicum influence their beliefs about children, being an ECEC teacher and broader ECEC practice. Participants gave examples of books, websites and experiences at practicum that had influenced their beliefs and practice. Given this finding and the fact that some studies (e.g., McMullen et al., 2006) consider the quality of ECEC teacher education environments to be closely linked to quality teaching, this is an area in which more research should occur. Specifically, the participants in the current study explained that ECEC theories presented in their classes were useful when working with children at practicum as well as when reflecting on practicum experiences during class discussions. It seems that a knowledge of ECEC theories combined with the practice of consciously applying these theories when working with children will have implications for these participants' professional ECEC practice. Indeed, it is acknowledged (e.g., Dahlberg et al., 1999) that applying knowledge to one's work with children

and later reflecting and documenting this process is a facet of quality ECEC practice. Therefore, an aim of future research into the ECEC teacher education environment could be to elucidate precisely what elements of the ECEC theories presented in ECEC teacher education classes pre-service ECEC teachers find useful and how they integrate this information into their emergent teaching practice.

A second finding from this study that could be researched further is the importance of the BA degree in ECEC for the participants in that group. Some studies (e.g., McMullen & Alat, 2002) have suggested a link between longer education times for ECEC teacher and higher quality teaching. The participants in the BA group certainly seemed to feel that they were receiving a thorough ECEC education and that 4 years (as opposed to one or two year programs) was an appropriate length of time in which to gain a good understanding of ECEC theory and practice. This may have implications for ECEC practice if more BA programs in ECEC begin to be offered in BC or if a BA degree becomes standard for certification as an ECEC teacher. Future research could focus on the differences in beliefs and practices of ECEC teachers with BA degrees and teachers with one or two year certificates and diplomas to better understand the effects of the BA degree on quality ECEC practice.

Another finding from this study was that participants did not find ECEC a suitable long term career and that they planned to seek other education and enter another career after being an ECEC teacher for a short time. The main reason given by participants for planning to exit ECEC was the low wages generally earned by ECEC teachers. Research (e.g., Doherty et al., 2000) on the ECEC workforce confirms that ECEC teachers commonly cite low pay as their reason for leaving the field. What was unique about these participants, however, was the fact that they were pursuing higher levels of education than are required to practice ECEC in BC despite planning to

leave ECEC after only a few years of teaching. This finding seems incongruous and has implications for the stability of the ECEC workforce; if pre-service ECEC teachers spend more time in teacher education programs and enter teaching later yet only remain teaching for a few years it seems there may be a shortage of ECEC teachers. This is certainly an area that could be researched further to provide a better understanding of current teacher education trends such as longer program times but also the career trajectory of new ECEC teachers.

5.3 Recommendations

This study has pointed to several factors that should change in British Columbia to ensure that ECEC experiences for young children and their teachers are consistently of high quality and contribute to a sustainable system of ECEC in the province. These recommendations are detailed below and include suggestions for government, educational and licensing stakeholders.

5.3.1 Recommendations for the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development

Most seriously, economic circumstances such as low pay and uneven benefit coverage are negatively impacting the field of ECEC. It is highly problematic that young, talented pre-service teachers are already planning their exit strategy from ECEC, mostly for economic reasons, as was true for the participants in this study. It seems very unlikely that standards of quality will be achieved across BC if teacher turnover continues to be so high. Therefore, it is recommended that the BC provincial government make ECEC teacher remuneration a priority as it moves forward with the expansion of school based ECEC programs. Regardless of what educational requirements and other standards the government sets for teachers in its provincial ECEC programs, pay and benefits must be sufficient to attract and retain quality staff.

A second recommendation for the BC government is that more is learned about the transmission of government publications to pre-service ECEC teachers. The finding from this

study that participants were not using the BC Early Learning Framework suggests that perhaps more could be done on the part of the Early Learning Agency to present the ELF to education programs and beginning ECEC teachers.

5.3.2 Recommendations for ECEC Licensing Bodies in BC

A second recommendation comes from the participants themselves. This is that requirements for professional development increase in both quantity and quality. Seeing as a one year college program is the extent of the formal post-secondary education for many ECEC teachers in BC, ongoing professional development courses present an ideal venue for introducing new ideas and practices to teachers. Hence, it seems that participants may be correct in suggesting that ECECBC and the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development require more from ECEC teachers before their license is renewed. This is not to say that all ECEC teachers be required to partake in long hours of purely academic professional development programming, but rather, as participants suggested, that a mix of art, academic and other programs be required for recertification.

5.3.3 Recommendations for Educational Institutions

Finally, since the ECEC teacher education environment was consistently found to be of the utmost importance and value for participants, this study recommends that colleges and universities continue to strive for excellent program delivery while consulting with students and members of the field of ECEC to adjust their programs as necessary in the future. In particular, participants found their experiences at various practicum sites to be immensely useful for forming their ideas about children, themselves as ECEC teachers and ECEC practice. Therefore, practicum opportunities should most definitely continue to be provided, with an emphasis on site

placement in centres with strong ECEC teacher support, as this factor was also very important to participants.

Since the two participants in the BA degree group felt strongly that being in the BA program had had a very positive impact on both their ECEC practice and their personal growth, this may suggest that more universities should consider offering a BA degree in ECEC. Expanding opportunities to complete a BA in ECEC would serve pre-service teachers who desire more education than the basic or diploma ECEC programs while keeping these students in ECEC rather than other programs. Having said this, keeping students in ECEC for an additional two years only to lose them to another profession a few years later is of little use. Hence, the recommendation that all stakeholders work together to ameliorate working conditions is reiterated.

This study, although small in scope, has shown that the experiences of pre-service ECEC teachers matter a great deal to the field of ECEC. Seeing as this was an exploratory study, more research should be conducted to further explore this finding. However, in the meantime, government, employers and educational institutions can work to better support pre-service ECEC teachers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent Forms

Appendix A1: Director's Consent



Department of Educational and Counselling

Psychology, and Special Education
Faculty of Education
Telephone: 604-822-0242
The University of British Columbia
2125 Main Mall
Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4, Canada

Hillel Goelman, Ph.D.

Professor and Chair, *Interdisciplinary Studies*
Graduate Program (ISGP)
Telephone: 604-822-9903
The University of British Columbia
6201 Cecil Green Park Road
Vancouver, BC, V6T1Z1, Canada



October 5, 2010.

Dear Board of Directors,

This letter is to request your permission for Sarah Pawliuk, U.B.C. graduate student, to conduct research for her MA thesis study which looks at early childhood education and care (ECEC) students' development of professional belief systems and use of printed and other resources. The University of British Columbia Behavioural Research Ethics Board has approved of this study. **A copy of the Approval Certificate will be submitted on receipt for your files.**

Should you consent to Sarah Pawliuk conducting this study, she will conduct small group interviews during December 2010 and January 2011 with six ECEC students about their development of beliefs related to early childhood education, and their use of government and other publications. Students who agree to participate in this study will be divided into two groups

of three and asked to attend two interview sessions of 90 minutes each. It should be noted that the intention of the interviews is not to evaluate individual students or ██████████ University in any way. Rather, we intend to learn about the general professional beliefs of some pre-service ECEC teachers. Participants will be offered \$10 per completed interview session in appreciation of their time.

Students will be provided with a description of the study and a consent form. Participation is voluntary and students may withdraw from participating in this study at any time.

After the study is completed, Sarah Pawliuk will write her thesis. Transcripts from the small group interviews will be shown to study participants before the thesis is written, and publication will depend on participant approval of these interview transcripts. Student participants can withdraw permission at any time for any interview material to be used.

Once the study is completed, we may write articles for research journals and to present at conferences. We may include student quotations in these articles or presentations, but will not use the name of ██████████ University, or the students' names.

We enclose additional information for the study on the following pages. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Pawliuk. In order for us to begin this study, we need your signatures on the enclosed form. Please keep one copy of the form and return one copy to Sarah Pawliuk.

Thank you for considering this study,

Dr. Hillel Goelman, Ph.D.

Sarah Pawliuk, MA student, Co-Investigator.

Belief System Development in ECEC Pre-Service Teachers

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Hillel Goelman
Professor and Chair,
Interdisciplinary Studies
Graduate Program (ISGP), UBC
Telephone: 604-822-9903; 604-822-5232
isgp@interchange.ubc.ca

Co-Investigator: Sarah Pawliuk

Human Development Learning and Culture, UBC
Telephone: [REDACTED]
Email: [REDACTED]

Purpose:

This study aims to examine some beliefs about early childhood education practice, and the experiences and resources that contribute to one group of pre-service teachers forming these beliefs.

Data collection will include:

Interviews with students about their experiences and the resources that contribute to the formation of their beliefs.

Time involved:

Two interviews of approximately 90 minutes each.

Incentive for participation:

Each participant will be paid \$10 for each completed interview session, for a total of \$20 if both interviews are completed by the participant.

Confidentiality:

The identity of all student participants and [REDACTED] University will be kept strictly confidential. The only people who have access to the data will be the Principal Investigator and the Co-Investigator. Everyone involved in the study will be informed of their responsibilities regarding confidentiality at the beginning of the study and reminded as appropriate. All documents will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator's office. Computer files will be password protected. Confidential information will not be collected or exchanged via email. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study.

Communication of Results:

The results of the study will be communicated mainly for fulfillment of Sarah Pawliuk's MA thesis, but may also be shared with academic and professional audiences through presentation at conferences and publication in scholarly journals.

Contact for information about the study:

If you have any questions or desire further information with respect to this study, you may contact Dr.Hillel Goelman (Principal Investigator) or Sarah Pawliuk (Co-Investigator). Please see page 1 for contact telephone numbers, fax, and e-mail addresses.

Contact for information about the rights of research subjects:

If you have any concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Consent:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy.

Your signature on the following page indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your records and consent to participant in the research study.

Signature page ([redacted] University Early Childhood Care & Education Board)

Two copies are provided.

Please keep this copy of the signature page whether you give consent to participate or not.

Please keep the consent letter with information about the study for your records.

I consent/ I do not consent (circle one) to [redacted] University's participation in the study "Belief system development in ECEC pre-service teachers".

1) Name (please print) _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

2) Name (please print) _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

3) Name (please print) _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature page ([redacted] University Early Childhood Care & Education Board)

Two copies are provided.

Please keep this copy of the signature page whether you give consent to participate or not.

Please keep the consent letter with information about the study for your records.

I consent/ I do not consent (circle one) to [redacted] University's participation in the study "Belief system development in ECEC pre-service teachers".

1) Name (please print) _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

2) Name (please print) _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

3) Name (please print) _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix A2: Participant Consent

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



Hillel Goelman, Ph.D.
 Professor and Chair,
Interdisciplinary Studies
Graduate Program (ISGP)
 Telephone: 604-822-9903
 The University of British Columbia
 6201 Cecil Green Park Road
 Vancouver, BC, V6T1Z1, Canada

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Belief System Development in Pre-Service ECEC Teachers

Principal Investigator: Hillel Goelman, Ph.D., University of British Columbia

Student Co-investigator: Sarah Pawliuk, MA Candidate, University of British Columbia

You are invited to be a part of a research study that looks at the development of belief systems in people studying to be early childhood educators and how BC government publications can inform these belief systems. The purpose of the study is to better understand the processes pre-service ECEC teachers go through to form their professional belief systems and the role certain documents may play in this. You are being asked to participate because you are a pre-service ECEC teacher at ██████ University, and we believe your perspective would be valuable to the research.

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to participate in two (2) small group interviews at ██████ University. The interviews should each take about one and a half hours (90 mins). We would like to audiotape the interview to make sure that our conversation is recorded accurately.

The discussion topics include sharing your perspective about the process of forming a professional belief system, including discussing the experiences and resources you feels are important to this process.

We will also talk about factors that influence Pre-Service ECEC teachers to form belief systems and discuss the ways in which our belief systems influence working with young children.

If you choose to participate in this research study, you will be paid \$10 for each of the two interviews. Payment will be processed once all interview data has been collected. In addition to this benefit, we hope that this study will contribute to better understanding the experiences of pre-service ECEC teachers.

The results of this study will be published as Sarah Pawliuk's MA thesis, but will not include any information that would identify you in any way. To keep your information safe, the interview audio files will be placed in an encrypted computer folder until they are transcribed. As soon as transcription is complete, the audio files will be destroyed. The co-investigator will enter study data on a computer that is password-protected and uses special coding of the data to protect the information. To protect confidentiality, your real name will not be used in the written copy of the discussion. Once this study is complete, the data will be destroyed.

There are some reasons why people other than the researchers may need to see information you provided as part of the study. If you tell the researcher something that makes her believe that you or others have been or may be physically harmed, we are required to report that information to the appropriate agencies.

If you have questions about this research please contact Sarah Pawliuk, University of British Columbia.
[REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be part of the study. Participating in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

I agree to be audio taped as part of the study.

Signature

Date

*Important. Please keep this copy for your records.

If you have questions about this research please contact Sarah Pawliuk, University of British Columbia.
[REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be part of the study. Participating in this research is completely voluntary. Even if you decide to participate now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You will be given a copy of this document for your records and one copy will be kept with the study records. Be sure that questions you have about the study have been answered and that you understand what you are being asked to do. You may contact the researcher if you think of a question later.

I agree to participate in the study.

Signature

Date

I agree to be audio taped as part of the study.

Signature

Date

Appendix B: Interview Questions

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

3. What types of **experiences and resources** facilitate these pre-service ECEC teachers' beliefs about:
 - d) Children?
 - e) Their role as an ECEC teacher?
 - f) Professional ECEC practice?
4. How are these pre-service ECEC teachers using BC provincial government (and other) publications to inform their practice?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First Half of Interview:

- 1) Introduction. We are here to tell our stories. What is said in this room stays in this room. Outline the structure of this and the 2nd interview.
- 2) Introduction & ice breaker. Can you tell us the story of how you got your name?
- 3) Continuing with our stories. Can you talk about the time you first knew you wanted to be an early childhood educator?
- 4) What is it about this career that appealed to you?
- 5) What made you feel it was a good fit for you, personally?

Second Half of Interview:

- 1) Carry on with topics from last time, as needed to have all participants share
- 2) Resource question: Last interview, we spoke about what makes early childhood education a good career and study fit for us, personally. This time, I would like us to discuss some of the things that support us as we learn and work in ECE. Specifically, what types of resources do we use to support our practice? (examples could be textbooks, websites, government publications)
- 3) What are some of the ways we find these useful?
- 4) Any last thoughts before wrapping up interviews?
- 5) Thanks, and debrief, remind about confidentiality.