
The Evolution of Early Childhood Care and Education

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I have been doing a lot of reflection over my 47 years in the ECE profession. With the advent of the current provincial Child Care Plan and the ongoing proposal for the Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning (\$10aDay Plan), there has been both a public and professional shift in perspectives on child care. There are many issues within this topic; however, the one that is playing on my mind of late is the aspect of the jurisdictional “home” for early childhood care and education (ECCE) in BC.

When I started in this profession in 1971, those in the field were called “preschool teachers” and even as students in training, we soon learned that “preschool” was the essential adjective of this title. There was an emphatic and defiant stance in not being categorized with simply the term “teacher” as that may associate us with the confines of schools and structured educational agendas. There was also the belief that ECE practice had a deeper understanding and appreciation for child development—in terms of both its compounding importance from birth and consideration of the whole child: physical, emotional, social, and intellectual. In no uncertain terms would we “preschool teachers” want to be grouped with school teachers or be considered part of the straightjacket of the education system. Though lesser in

status, both practical and social, we had pride in our unique understanding and facilitation of child development and the translation of that into programs and practice.

Time marched on. As the profession advanced with research, training, social necessity, and advocacy, we searched for a better term to more accurately describe ourselves; we started to use “early childhood educator” to describe ourselves, and later we started to use the term “early childhood care and education” to describe our work. This seemed a definition more inclusive of the specialized training in child development, nurturing in care, facilitation of exploration of the environment, fostering of experience, and family interaction that are key factors of this career.

Since I have been in the profession, child care has been administered in the problematic jurisdiction of four provincial ministries. Currently the Ministry of Advanced Education is responsible for establishing appropriate training, the Ministry of Child and Family Development looks after the registration of credentials and funding related to the operation and subsidized use of child care, and the Ministry of Health is responsible for the licensing and monitoring of child care facilities as per provincial law and regulation. The Ministry of Education is responsible for early learning initiatives like StrongStart BC; the Early Learning Framework;



the Ready, Set Learn program; and most recently, the Seamless Day Kindergarten Pilot Project.

The last decade has seen significant progress of both ECCE and primary education approaches with an unprecedented collaboration between the two professions. This has come about due to many factors including solid scientific research on brain and child development, the Early Development Instrument utilization in school districts, and implementation of Strong Start programs. A respect and appreciation has emerged in the Ministry of Education for the science and impact of early childhood development, and positively fostered, its contribution to the child’s successful ongoing education, echoing the old ECE adage of “the child is not born in kindergarten.” Equally, primary education has advanced creative and social teaching

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strategies and curriculum changes that both complement and benefit ECE practice. Early years community planning tables usually include school district representatives and professional development opportunities, regardless of sponsorship, are often open to both ECCE professionals and school district staff; ECCE professionals work in Strong Start programs and other school district programs and projects; and early years centres are linked or in consultation with school districts. The positive outcomes of this rich partnership are just beginning to be realized.

The \$10aDay Plan, so carefully researched and planned by ECEBC and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, has proposed that the “home” for child care is the Ministry of Education. I can almost hear the veterans (and I admit the long battle for the recognition of our profession does, in fact, makes me feel like a veteran by any definition) voicing resistance to this perhaps based on the bias and diverging practice stated earlier. However, like a child that develops from the egocentric to a broader social awareness, my

perspective has evolved from one of defending my professional role to that of embracing the bigger picture of early childhood education and care functioning as the starting point in an essential, well established societal system.

It makes practical and professional sense to me that all the jurisdictional aspects of our early care and education system that are now housed in the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Ministry of Health could be transferred to the Ministry of Education. The administration of credentials and funding could be extensions of the already- present infrastructure of the Ministry of Education. Licensing and monitoring, granted, may require further development of “the healthy schools initiative” and incorporation of suitable regulations into existing school legislation related to staff practices and physical environment; however, I think the foundation is there to build upon, and may improve, existing monitoring and evaluation of the education system as a whole.

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June Maynard has been an ECCE professional since 1971, working for 19 years in a variety of child care environments, including 13 years as a licensing officer and 13 years as the manager of a child care resource and referral program.

In the 2021/22–2022/23 Service Plan, the Ministry of Children and Family Development committed to “engage with all levels of government, Indigenous organizations, school districts, child care providers and other sector stakeholders to further inform the implementation of universal and inclusive child care and transfer responsibility for child care delivery to the Ministry of Education by 2023.”

For more information, see <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2021/sp/pdf/ministry/cfd.pdf>