

Finding Community: An Exploration Into an Induction Support Pilot Project

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This induction support pilot project involved 22 early childhood educators in the interior of British Columbia who had a range of experience, from just beginning to 29 years in the field. Participants in the project were offered opportunities for peer mentoring, professional development, access to university faculty, visits to early learning programs, and online support. The results from the study include greater awareness on the part of participants of the value of peer mentoring and connection to community, increased knowledge, and increased sense of efficacy. At the end of the project, participants reflected on their experiences in semistructured interviews and focus groups. They also shared ways the pilot project could be improved, and the project is being revised based on their feedback.

Key words: *induction; peer mentoring; early childhood education; professional development*

The teaching profession, including the profession of early childhood education (ECE), has been referred to as “the profession that eats its young” (Carlson, 2012). In British Columbia, it is estimated that 50% of all early childhood educators leave the field within the first five years of work (Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia, 2012), but does this have to be? This research challenges the predominant perspective that the work early childhood educators do is simple and that experienced early childhood educators do not require additional support (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, Kocher, Elliot, & Sanchez, 2015). The purpose of this pilot project was to support the ongoing development of both new and experienced early childhood educators through a project that involved peer mentoring, professional development, online support through a WordPress site, visits to early learning programs, and access to university faculty. The project evolved out of previous research with beginning early childhood educators across BC who had indicated a strong desire for induction support (Doan, 2014). Induction refers to both the time period when an early childhood educator is first in the field, usually the first year, as well as specific induction activities, such as mentoring, feedback, observations, and professional development (Aitken et al., 2008; Winstead Fry, 2010).

Peer mentoring was a pivotal part of the project and was based on the idea that both new and experienced educators have strengths and it is not just new educators who need support. The project itself was set up to allow for as much participant input as possible. For example, professional development was organized based on what participants indicated they wanted. The project sought to increase collaboration and connection between and among new and experienced early childhood educators; educators and university faculty; and early childhood educators from a variety of workplace environments.

Context

Educators in BC are certified through the province after completing a certificate, diploma, or degree in early childhood education. In addition to completing several practica during their coursework, educators are required to fulfill an additional 500 hours of work experience. Currently in BC, when it comes to title and work assignment,

there is no distinction between a newly certified early childhood educator and an educator with significant experience. In other words, the ratios (number of educators to children) are the same, the expectations are the same, and the shifts are the same, with little time for transition. For example, the educator-to-child ratio in a program for 3- to 5-year-olds in BC is one educator to eight children, regardless of the educator's level of experience. Contrast this perspective of being fully certified with the theory of professional identity development, which rests on the idea that it takes time for professional identity to develop (Katz, 1972; Vander Ven, 1988). For example, Lilian Katz (1972) describes the first year as being one of "survival." Given this reality, is a new early childhood educator fully ready to take on all of the demands of the job? And if not, are there supports in place to help them? Currently in BC there are no such formal supports. A review of the literature suggests that while some new early childhood educators receive support, it is haphazard and not something they can count on (Doan, 2014).

Previous research

The support early childhood educators receive as they enter the profession varies and the literature for Canadian programs is shallow. Recent analysis of online data showed that there is very little formal support for new educators in Canada. In Prince Edward Island, the Bridges program is mandatory for all "designated early years centres" (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2017). Its purpose is to support planning and successful implementation of curriculum and the program; it "supports supervisors, staff, administrators and owners of early childhood development centres to enhance learning environments and provide training and mentoring" (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2017, para. 2). In BC, the Community Early Learning and Child Care Facilitators Pilot Project, which emerged out of the Investigating Quality Project, involved learning circles, critical reflection, and learning how to do innovative work, including the creation of pedagogical narrations, which were shared in the learning circles and with families (Mirau, 2015). The learning circles acted as forums where educators had opportunities to "share their established and emerging practices" (Unit for Early Years Research and Development, n.d., p. 6). The facilitators' project was not specifically directed at beginning educators because it was assumed that both new and experienced educators would benefit. In Ontario, the Mentoring Pairs for Child Care program paired experienced and inexperienced supervisors and offered training sessions on facilitation and coaching skills and how to implement the occupational standards (Doherty, 2011). However, the program, which was funded by the provincial government, has not run since 2011.

Induction support has a more robust presence internationally. In New Zealand, for example, early childhood educators are assigned a mentor who provides professional development, observation, feedback, and assessments during a two- to five-year period prior to educators applying for fully registered teacher status (Aitken, Ferguson, McGrath, Piggot-Irvine, & Ritchie, 2008). Early childhood educators viewed the program as being valuable to the profession and helpful in becoming fully registered. In the United States, the Kentucky teacher internship program offers a one-year mentoring program for new teachers to support them as they create their professional identities (McCormick & Brennan, 2001). In this team-based approach, teachers are supported through observation, self-reflection, and feedback on areas of strength and growth. A mentoring program in Worcester, England, is based on the premise that mentoring supports adult learning in the workplace by facilitating experiential learning (Murray, 2006). Recognizing the shortage of mentors, the organizers of the Worcester program identified the role of a "professional critical friend" who may be a peer with the same qualifications. While New Zealand has an induction program available to all early childhood educators, in contrast, in Canada, where education is a provincial responsibility, there is no defined structure to support early childhood educators at the beginning of their careers, a time when they need it the most (Rodd, 2006). This, however, does not mean there is a lack of interest in supporting new educators. For example, the Early Childhood Educators of BC reported that "a mentoring framework is needed to help people to take steps to be mentors" (Gay, 2007, p. 18).

While there is little in the way of consistent support for early childhood educators working in either provincially regulated K–12 schools or nonprofit early learning programs in Canada, there is considerably more induction support for teachers, including programs in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Ontario, Alberta, and BC. The Northwest Territories has a teacher induction and mentoring program to support new teachers in their first year; it involves an orientation to the community, the school, and the role; mentoring, which includes time for observations and meeting together; and access to professional development (Government of Northwest Territories, 2017). A similar program exists in Nunavut, with an aim to increase teacher retention while supporting the teacher in understanding Inuit culture (Government of Nunavut, 2017). In Ontario, the Ministry of Education has a New Teacher Induction Program that involves both mentoring and professional development for a full year (Government of Ontario, 2017). The Alberta Teachers' Association (2017) also has a mentoring program to support teachers that involves pairing the new teacher with an experienced teacher who is teaching the same grade level. In BC, the provincial teachers' federation and the University of British Columbia, with support from the Ministry of Education, have partnered to create a mentoring project for school districts across the province who do not have a structured mentoring program (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2014; University of British Columbia, 2017).

While there are many induction programs in Canada for teachers in the school system (Kutsyuruba, Godden, & Tregunna, 2013), there is a distinct lack of support specifically for early childhood educators. In BC, since there are no formal ways to support new early childhood educators, there is a paucity of research in this area. The research from this pilot project contributes to the induction research, as well as to research into professional identity development for early childhood educators.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws on current theories of learning in professional workplaces as well as general theories of learning. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson's (2012) adult learning theory provides a theoretical context to how adults learn and, more specifically, what motivates them and how professional development can be structured in a way that is responsive to their needs. The theories of professional identity development put forth by Katz (1972) and Vander Ven (1988) are pivotal to this work, because the study participants are in varying stages of their career and are developing their professional identities. Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's (1991) community of practice concept fits well given the ECE workplace and educational context, where educators do not receive consistent professional development and/or ongoing training. Lave and Wenger asserted that practitioners within communities were at work helping to bring more practitioners into the community by way of apprenticeship. Their research was based on the premise that practitioners are naturally drawn to communities of practice, and their work came out of the apprenticeship experiences of tailors who became skilled master tailors through informal learning within communities of practice. Wenger and Snyder (2000) defined communities of practice as "groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise" (p. 139). This concept provides a theoretical base from which workplace support can be considered. Teacher efficacy, which comes from Albert Bandura's (1997) work, is a term that refers to a teachers' belief in their own ability to carry out teaching tasks with success (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). It informs the study in a variety of ways, including understanding why some educators remain in the profession and why others choose to leave (Doan, 2014). This research challenges the traditional discourse of training and delivery, where educators are viewed as passive vessels waiting to be filled (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015), and views the educator as an active, contributing agent, participating in the coconstruction of knowledge. This perspective on continued learning within a community of practice supports the image of the educator as being "in process" (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015, p. 64), which

challenges the current notions of professionalization and competencies.

Research design

The overall purpose of this research study was to create a pilot induction program based on what new early childhood educators in BC had previously indicated they wanted. It was hoped that the pilot project would support early childhood educators in their development of professional identity (Katz, 1972). The research questions were as follows: Is it possible to design a project that supports the development of both new and experienced early childhood educators? What (if any) aspects of the program are most effective? What changes need to be made to improve the effectiveness of the support program? These questions were answered through participant feedback by way of interviews and focus groups.

Components of the pilot project

As mentioned previously, the pilot project was based on research with beginning early childhood educators in BC (Doan, 2014). The project had five components: peer mentoring, professional development, access to faculty, online support, and visits to early learning programs. Participants could access what they were interested in throughout the project. They were supported in finding peer mentors through an introductory meeting, an email listserv, a peer mentoring café, face-to-face meetings, and individual support. Participants were invited to share their ideas for professional development and from there, workshops were organized. Topics included supporting children and families experiencing separation and/or divorce; how to mentor new students/staff; how to give feedback; leadership: how to be a team leader; and how to support toddler development. Like other aspects of the project, visits to early learning programs were participant driven. Online support included a WordPress site and an email listserv.

Methods

Participants

The pilot project involved 22 early childhood educators with varying experience, ranging from being a beginning educator to having 29 years of work experience. The educators were from eight different early learning programs. All of the participants were BC-certified early childhood educators with a certificate, diploma, or degree in early childhood education. Participants heard about the pilot project during professional development opportunities and/or through their colleagues and self-selected themselves to participate.

Interviews

Individual semistructured interviews took place with 12 participants at the end of the study. The interview questions were based on previous work with beginning early childhood educators (Doan, 2014). In addition, the questions focused on the experiences of the participants in the pilot project. Examples of questions include: Tell me about the support you received. What activities did you take part in? What was most helpful? How can the induction program be improved? All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed in full. Participant summaries were completed.

Focus groups

Eleven participants chose to take part in one of two 2-hour focus groups that took place at the close of the study. The principal investigator facilitated the focus groups, while the graduate research assistant video-recorded and

observed. The questions were focused around the five components of the pilot project: peer mentoring, professional development, online support, access to faculty, and visits to early learning programs. The focus groups were transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis

The 12 interviews were transcribed in full by the graduate research assistant. In addition, participant summary sheets were completed for each interview. The two focus groups were 120 minutes each and the transcriptions totalled 56 pages. The interviews and focus groups were analyzed separately using a robust coding process to identify key themes. In qualitative research, coding involves a process of seeking out concepts, ideas, themes, and categories for the purpose of organizing and interpreting the data, and this takes time. The process of coding is dynamic, where the researcher is involved in the process of grouping similar and different experiences shared by the participants (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The principal investigator and the research assistant worked separately to analyze the interview questions, coming together to review the codes and the analysis process. The initial process of coding the data resulted in many different codes because the researchers were open to what the data was saying and did not want to miss anything. Additional codes emerged from the second level of coding. The focus group data was analyzed in a similar way.

Findings

Of the five kinds of activities participants took part in—peer mentoring, professional development, online support, access to faculty, and visits to early learning programs—peer mentoring and professional development were ranked the highest, followed by visits to early learning programs, online support, and faculty support. Four themes emerged from the data: awareness of the value of peer mentoring, connection to community, increased knowledge, and sense of efficacy. What follows is an in-depth look at the themes.

Awareness of the value of peer mentoring

Participants indicated that through participating in the project, their awareness of the value of peer mentoring increased, as did their awareness of the needs of new educators. For some there was also a recognition of their own need for peer mentoring. Participants realized that they could both call on their peers for help and act as a mentor to those around them. In one situation, after realizing her workmate was in the same pilot project, a participant saw her colleague in a new light and realized that she too was interested in peer mentoring:

I often feel like I don't want to bother people because usually those extra things have to be done on our own time, and getting to know those people [in the pilot project] and knowing they were all interested in mentoring and being mentored helped me to feel more confident to reach out.

This quotation speaks to the reality of the ECE field, where there is little time in the work day for connecting with colleagues, asking questions, and discussing the day. In contrast to school teachers, early childhood educators may not even get regular breaks. Despite the fact that having collaborative time to plan is considered highly valuable, it is not something early childhood educators can count on. Participating in the project allowed this participant to feel like she had “permission” to ask a colleague for support. One can assume that new educators want to appear competent and knowledgeable, but according to Katz (1972), the first year is considered “survival.” How will one be perceived if they need help in the beginning? The culture of an ECE workplace is such that one is doing the same work as everyone else, despite one’s novice status. One week you are being interviewed and are trying to

demonstrate your skills and abilities, and the next week you find yourself working in a position that is no different than what is expected of experienced educators. For example, in one study a new educator was put on the opening shift on his second day on the job, meaning he was responsible for opening up the centre, starting the morning routines, and greeting families and children, whom he did not yet know (Doan, 2014). The ECE field is one where educators often find themselves in a “sink or swim” type of situation (Nicholson & Reifel, 2011), which is in direct contrast to what Katz suggested as necessary for new educators: “During this period the teacher needs support, understanding, encouragement, reassurance, comfort and guidance. She needs instruction in specific skills and insight into the complex causes of behaviour—all of which must be provided on the classroom site” (1972, p. 4). Given this need, one can understand the significance of peer mentoring.

Another participant shared how her confidence as a mentor changed as a result of the project:

In my own personal situation now that I'm a little bit older and more experienced, I'm realizing that, you know, I can be a mentor, but I can also be mentored, and I like that. We can learn from another, and I think that is something to be really intentional about.

Results from this study demonstrate that it is not only new educators who can benefit from mentoring and support. Experienced educators may find themselves in a new position, perhaps working with unfamiliar age groups, and they may have mentoring needs related to these new areas of challenge. For example, educators in this study had various roles, including leadership within early learning programs as well as in the profession. Furthermore, some of the postsecondary educational experiences that experienced early childhood educators took part in were very different than what new early childhood educators learned and/or experience. For example, the BC Early Learning Framework, which was published in 2007, supports the practice of pedagogical documentation, so while it is assumed that most beginning early childhood educators are well-versed in creating pedagogical narrations, this practice may be unfamiliar to some experienced early childhood educators who were trained in traditional methods of observation. This difference can result in a lack of shared understanding among educators, and may create tension when it is assumed that the experienced educator should know more than the new educator. Projects like this one, which included both new and experienced early childhood educators, recognize that the professional development needs for educators are ongoing, just as they are for teachers in the public school system.

Connection to community

Participants in the study talked about their increased connection to people, knowing they could call on others for help, and feeling part of a community of support. One participant shared the perspective that it was important to connect and hear from others, beyond the workplace: “I think that in our field it's really important to have connections with other educators, and especially outside of your workplace. I think it's important to have other perspectives and opportunities to connect with people.” And it was not just new educators who appreciated the connection to community. Experienced educators spoke about the importance of having someone to call on in situations such as being in a new role. One participant said: “I was opening my own business and [through the project] had the support from other more experienced directors or administrators.”

This connection to community is highly important given the nature of the work. The ECE workplace can be one where isolation exists due to several reasons. Sometimes new early childhood educators are viewed as being “licensed and ready to go” (Doan, 2014). Other times, early childhood educators are so busy that there is little time for interaction or planning among educators. This kind of pace can result in burnout if the needs of the educators go unnoticed (Manlove, 1993). The work of an educator is both rewarding and incredibly taxing, and the work itself is always changing in its complexity (Urban, 2010). This constant change is a rationale for the need for

support. Feeling a part of something, that one is not completely alone, can do a lot to sustain individual educators, as well as the ECE field. This is a case of value. In one study, an educator recognized a system of “triage” where children’s and family’s needs are first and educators’ needs are last (Doan, 2014). While one can understand the importance of an ongoing commitment to meeting the needs of children and families, when are the educators’ needs met? Who addresses their need for professional development?

Being part of a community of support is hugely important, especially when one considers the reality that some workplaces are not places of support. Some participants spoke about their experiences in workplaces that were anything but supportive. Some participants described managers who reportedly did little to build up the staff, relying instead on belittling and negativity. While schools within a community are connected through the school system, which includes a particular school district, many early learning programs operate independently, so where does an early childhood educator go if there is an issue? Add the complexity of educators living in a small community and there can be worry about the educator’s reputation. Additionally, the wages are low and the cost of education is high, all of which can add up to pressure to either stay in a challenging situation or leave the field.

Increased knowledge

As mentioned previously, the professional development that was offered in the pilot project was based entirely on what participants said they wanted. This included topics such as how to support children and families experiencing separation and/or divorce; how to be a mentor to new students/staff; how to give feedback; leadership: how to be a team leader; and how to support toddler development in a safe environment. This responsiveness of the professional development was something participants reported as important and appreciated. I think there is something significant about the way the professional development was chosen and offered. In a field where early childhood educators do not have a lot of power or control due to regulations, government, licensing, parent perceptions and societal expectations or perceptions, this project indicates the importance of valuing their expertise and recognizing their ability to determine and ask for what they need and want with regard to professional development.

The participants identified practical needs, and through the professional development, new knowledge was learned that could be applied directly. One participant described it this way: “The professional development and especially the group discussions are resulting in talking about and implementing more positive ways of guiding certain behaviours.” Another participant spoke about the importance of the professional development being responsive to what they wanted: “I really enjoyed the professional development because she really listened to what we wanted and she followed through on what we were asking.” Malcolm Knowles and colleagues (2012) advocated for learning to be offered at a time when people are motivated to learn, and this seems to have been important to the participants in this study. Further, the project itself was with a closed group of educators who had agreed to conditions of confidentiality, something that was in place to ensure a sense of safety for educators and allow for open sharing of opinions. Moreover, the structure of the project was intended to ensure the educators felt both respected and connected, which is important in terms of adult learners’ motivation (Wlodkowski, 2004).

One participant shared her experience of working at a grocery store, where she received five full days of training and support. She contrasted this with her experience in her first days on the job as an early childhood educator, where she was left on her own to do the job, with little support and no on-the-job training to speak of:

I am working at grocery store, too. I get five orientation trainings. I have orientation, then I have five shifts for my training, right? But here, when we go in the field, we are not getting any training. They orient us on the first day that this is the system. This is the opening. This is closing. This is going like this, follow this. And you need to learn every kid’s name, you need

to talk to their parents, you need to make relationship with those kids, and then you make relationship with them, you move to another room, and make relationship with them. So this is like this, this is ongoing process.

This participant's experience speaks to the overwhelming nature of the work with early learning programs. This finding resonates with a study by Shelley Nicholson and Stuart Reifel (2011) where educators were left to figure things out on their own. New educators are rarely given the opportunity to ease into the workplace, nor are they provided with a mentor. While every province is different, in BC, once an early childhood educator has completed the required postsecondary training and completed 500 hours of work experience, they can apply to receive their early childhood educator certificate. This title is the same as what an experienced early childhood educator will hold. Therein lies the difficulty: According to the province and licensing requirements, the new early childhood educator is "licensed and ready to go," but looked at from a perspective that professional identity development takes time, the new educator is "qualified" but still needs support. In New Zealand, for example, before receiving their full licence, new early childhood educators receive their "provisionally registered teacher status," at which time they are also assigned a mentor who is charged with supporting them in meeting all of the expectations to enable them to receive their "fully registered teacher status." This process takes two to five years. While I would argue for the need for more support from the province for new early childhood educators, induction projects like this one make a difference for new educators who continue to have learning needs while stepping into full-time positions of responsibility.

Teacher efficacy

Participants identified isolation and/or a negative work environment as factors related to teacher efficacy, and they spoke of the importance of having a community of support that can offer different perspectives. One participant shared her view about the importance of educators feeling valued: "One of the reasons why ECEs burn out so quickly [is] they are overworked and they are not valued. And I think that peer mentorship will, having those constant valuing comments and support, it would sustain us a lot in this field." Participants also spoke about the way a negative work environment can lower educators' confidence, but that being part of a community of support can make a difference: "You can become very, feel defeated after a while ... it begins your burnout. It eats away at your confidence as an educator ... so I think having a community like this ... having a place on Facebook you can go to and say 'I really need an online hug today.'" The results of this study suggest that participation in a community of support has the capacity to impact educators positively. Self-efficacy is related to an individual's beliefs about their own power to create change (Bandura, 1997). Teacher efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their own ability to carry out teaching tasks with success (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Early childhood educators who have a strong sense of teacher efficacy are open to new ideas, are better able to plan, demonstrate greater enthusiasm for teaching, have a strong commitment to teaching, and are more likely to stay in the profession (Ozgun, 2005). Bandura (1997) claimed that mastery of an activity is one of the most powerful influences on efficacy because it provides "authentic evidence" about whether the person has the skills necessary to be successful or not (p. 80). This finding concurs with a study by Knoblock and Whittington (2002) who found that beginning teachers who received "positive feedback, support, guidance, and encouragement" were more confident and had higher efficacy (p. 332). Further research into this impact would be useful. For example, do teacher efficacy, mentor efficacy, and community connections help to sustain practice and avoid burnout?

Recommendations for Improvement

Participants offered many suggestions for ways the project could be improved. These included such ideas as

increasing the online support through the use of a closed Facebook site, using a private platform for discussion, and using Facebook Live to video professional development, which would allow participants to access when and where they are able. In addition, it was suggested that the project be opened up to the wider ECE community in the area, including those in management. Finally, participants shared a desire for a more structured setup for peer-mentor matches. The project is currently being revised to include all of the above suggestions.

Limitations of the Study

Because this study investigated a small pilot project, the findings, while useful, are not generalizable to other contexts. Furthermore, this study used a small number of participants who self-selected themselves for participation. Further research is advisable.

Discussion

The results from this study suggest that both new and experienced early childhood educators can benefit from a peer mentoring program of support. Similar findings were shown in a program in Worcester, England, where participants were supported by critical friends (Murray, 2006). Furthermore, the professional development offered in this pilot project was successful in part because it was chosen based on what participants wanted. This is significant because it shows the importance of the program being responsive to individuals. This demonstrates the importance of ensuring adults are motivated to learn, as articulated in Knowles et al.'s adult learning theory (2012), where adults "become ready to learn when their life situation creates a need to know" (p. 192). Moreover, this professional development happened within the context of an induction program, so the people attending the professional development opportunities continued to be involved with one another in what could be described as a community of practice. The professional development opportunities allowed the participants to form a community of practice outside of the workplace where they gained competence in the ways of acting, speaking, and being in the community. Rather than taking part in a workshop with educators one is unfamiliar with, all of the components of the pilot project took place with the same people, and relationships developed over time. Some participants shared examples of how they took the learning from a particular workshop or discussion to the workplace for further dialogue. The same occurred for visits to early learning programs; in one case participants shared how coworkers talked about the ideas they saw on the visit and then made changes to their outdoor environment because of it. This result supports the notion that professional development should not be a stand-alone event, but may be more effective if it is revisited over time with colleagues (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2015). In this project, the community of practice was modelled after an apprenticeship model (Lave and Wenger, 1991) where early childhood educators could learn what it means to be a practicing early childhood educator. It was hoped that through participation, educators would develop their professional identity and gain a sense of belonging. Communities of practice like the one that developed in this pilot project are described as being participant driven, with educators choosing to participate. This approach contrasts with top-down approaches often found in professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004). In this project, the participants were the ones who suggested the professional development, and they were in the driver's seat in terms of what was discussed. The structure of the project was built on the premise that early childhood educators know what they need and should be valued, and, as mentioned previously, are seen as active, contributing agents participating in the coconstruction of knowledge.

Another implication from this study is the concept of increased teacher efficacy and mentor efficacy. Both of these concepts, which originate from Bandura (1997), have to do with one's beliefs about one's abilities to teach or to mentor. Participants spoke about their confidence increasing as they participated in the peer mentoring project: confidence in their role as an early childhood educator and confidence to both ask for and give peer support.

Further research into the effects of teacher efficacy and mentor efficacy on educator retention is advised, especially given that participants suggested the importance of being connected to supportive educators in a profession that can be isolating due to working independently and/or in an environment where they do not feel supported. The results from this project indicate that it does not take a lot to support educators. Early childhood educators need time and space. This is not complicated, nor does it have to require a lot of money. But sadly, it is not something that early childhood educators can assume they will receive. While school teachers receive time to plan and have access to paid professional development, early childhood educators typically do not. While much needs to change, not a lot has to change to make a big difference. One participant said it this way:

I am very grateful for this project. You know, I feel from my perspective it's kind of a bit of a catalyst perhaps to bringing some change into our practice, as far as mentorship goes and supporting new educators and students, whomever, one another.

Conclusion

Research into the continued professional development of early childhood educators is of value to new and experienced early childhood educators. Within a work environment where one cannot assume access to professional development or adequate support, a pilot project like this demonstrates a way to make a positive difference, which is particularly important at this moment in BC given that the new provincial government is on the cusp of providing “additional investments in the early childhood educator workforce through training, education, and fair wages” (John Horgan, personal communication, July 18, 2017). More work is to be done in this area, and I hope to replicate the project in a larger community. Collaborative work like this, among early childhood educators, university faculty, and early learning program directors, helps to build both research capacity and connection between research and early childhood educators. I will end with the words of a participant:

I think that the experiences in this pilot project is another way to reinforce that community of educators, and the support for one another, and to be creative and talk about ways to have self-care, and have sustainability, and overcome some of those structural barriers.... I think it's a very valuable project.

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