

"With fear in our bellies": A pan-Canadian conversation with early childhood educators ^[1]

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Abstract

The highly gendered, classed, and racialized early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce in Canada labours under exploitative conditions: low status and pay and lack of recognition. Early childhood educators have recently faced two additional contextual shifts that further complicate their daily work and practice: the COVID-19 pandemic and the Federal announcement of funding for a national universal childcare system. This paper is the result of a broader study that set out to uncover the innovative changes and practices in ECEC policy, practice, and pedagogy enacted across provincial/territorial boundaries in diverse communities across Canada with the hope of contributing to the ongoing conversation informing the development of a new system of ECEC in Canada. Qualitative data for this paper were derived from solicited photo collages and a video-taped webinar conversation with early childhood educators, responding to the following question: "What does it mean to be an early childhood educator at this moment?" Viewed through a critical lens, the findings elucidated four intersecting narratives: loss, sacrifice, adaptation, and hope. This paper contributes to ongoing discussions about the fluid and contextual nature of professionalism within ECEC. As we attempt to mobilize for transformative change and social action in the development of a competent ECEC system in Canada, it is imperative to provide space for the lived experiences, critical insights, and interwoven story lines offered by educators and children.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: care ^[4]

COVID-19 ^[5]

early childhood educators ^[6]

professionalism ^[7]

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