

# Bridging the 'know-do' gap among early childhood educators in Nova Scotia to promote and sustain equity and inclusion in early learning environments:

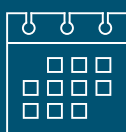
## Summary of Preliminary Findings (2023)

Milena Pimentel & Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac



### 7 EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS (ECE)

Participated in the study



### Years of Experience Ranged from 5-32 Years

Educators who completed the 'Culturally Responsive Practice in Nova Scotia's Early Learning and Child Care Settings' were recruited to participate in this study.

- Four ( $n=4$ ) identified as white; three ( $n=3$ ) identified as newcomers to Canada.
- Three ( $n=3$ ) were currently in Director roles; Four ( $n=4$ ) were working as early childhood educators (ECEs)
- Six ( $n=6$ ) were currently working in regulated child care programs (RCC); and one ( $n=1$ ) in a Pre-primary program (PPP).
- All participants were located in the HRM, except two (1 in Southern Region, 1 in Cape Breton Region).

## MODULES



### Content, Facilitation, and Function

- Participants provided **positive feedback** on the module content, especially the focus on the founding cultures of Nova Scotia.
- ECEs who attended school in Canada described the **information on the Founding Cultures** to be **critical** to their own learning as one educator noted, *"coming through school [...] what we learned about Indigenous culture was [...] not accurate."*
- For ECEs who identified as newcomers, this information was also crucial to their learning. One educator stated, *"Before I came to Canada I didn't know anything about this, so I'm still building knowledge, [and] I like to [understand] what happened in the past."*
- Having **facilitators who had diverse lived experiences** seemed to enhance the module content and learning experience of participants, *"And so that was really interesting when we went through [module content] because [they] could speak to [their] experiences."*

### Improvements

- The majority of the participants ( $n=5$ ) expressed that the **PD workshops should be a requirement for all ECEs**. This was suggested as having the potential to create consistency in knowledge and practice.
- Three ( $n=3$ ) participants specifically noted that the workshops should be held in person rather than online (see quote below).



## PARTICIPANT VOICES

[...] I do feel like it would have been really great in person just because it's such really sensitive content and people were really sharing a lot of like traumatic memories or experiences or having like difficult moments of learning.

-Director

The professional development workshop actually gave me a lot more wings.

-Early Childhood Educator

First I was hesitating [if I] can bring my culture into [the program] or not, but then after doing the modules, I was like no, you are supposed to.

-Director representing a diverse identity





## BRIDGING THE KNOW-DO GAP

- Since participating in the modules, all educators described **acquiring new knowledge** which led to a **perspective shift** in topics related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. This was often reflected when they discussed gaining **new insights** into how they offer materials and connect with families and broader communities to meaningfully enrich their early learning environments. At the same time, most educators (n= 4) discussed a desire for **more tangible examples** to support programming.
- Two educators discussed that building more community connections could support them with bringing culture into the program in a meaningful way.
- Two educators also discussed the potential of a coaching approach to better support them and their program (e.g., consultants or another coach).



## CHALLENGES

- The most common challenge obstructing culturally responsive practices (n=6) was uncertainty in how to navigate the different **values of educators and parents**: “I found [pride month] that was one of our biggest barriers with some parents scared of what we were teaching the children [and] just really worried about what extent you're going into with children of this age.”
- Some participants (n=4) also **described feeling fearful** of saying the wrong things or of cultural appropriation.
- Participants reflected on the **need for additional resources** (time, resources) to meaningfully implement culturally responsive practice.



## CRITICAL REFLECTION

*I think the biggest realization was that **it's never gonna feel comfortable and that's kind of the point.** [...] **We can't wait until we feel really confident that we're gonna get it right [...]** we have to **just be okay with making mistakes** and because I recognize that I had that instinct to kind of like read, keep reading, keep reading, keep studying and learning more and more and more until you know exactly what to do and then implement it. So what's really emerged for me over the course of the last year is that like, first of all, you never get there to a place of, like, fully knowing what to do and also that there's no, there's no time like we have to start now. **I need to just do it anyways and be prepared to make mistakes and repair and keep learning.***

## CONCLUSION

- Overall, participants in this study acquired new learnings related to culturally responsive practices through the module training. Educators felt that ongoing workshops and tangible examples are needed to support their programming due to ongoing uncertainties or fears. Educators also reflected on the importance of building meaningful relationships with communities to support practice and programming.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 Additional pre-service and ongoing professional development will allow more in-depth concentration on culturally responsive practice. These learning opportunities need to offer practical opportunities to build educator confidence, reduce uncertainty, and enable the implementation of culturally responsive practices.
- 2 To support the implementation of culturally responsive practice, module content should be more freely available to allow participants to revisit learning. Additional resource lists are also needed to assist programs with procuring the best materials to support practice. Coaching or mentorship in culturally responsive practice and anti-racism would also help to support application that is meaningful for programs and communities.
- 3 To reinforce the provincial equity and anti-racism strategy, more specific guidance on anti-racism would help to promote ongoing critical dialogue around race, racism, and oppression in early childhood. A specific focus on anti-racism is needed, as not naming race can lead to color-evasive approaches to practice. This includes ongoing monitoring to ensure accountability of culturally responsive and anti-racist practices within programs.



If you'd like more information, please contact:

**Milena Pimentel**  
[Milena.pimentel@msvu.ca](mailto:Milena.pimentel@msvu.ca)

**Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac**  
[Jessie-Lee.mcisaac@msvu.ca](mailto:Jessie-Lee.mcisaac@msvu.ca)