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Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework Professional Development

Final Evaluation Report – May 2020

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Section 1: Introduction

In 2016, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) announced plans to move forward with the implementation of an Early Learning Curriculum Framework (ELCF). The province's ELCF entitled, *Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework* was influenced by other jurisdictional frameworks and, in particular, Australia's National Curriculum Framework, *Belonging, Being, and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Nova Scotia's ELCF was designed to be consistent with the provincial regulatory framework for regulated childcare centres and was informed by current evidence regarding high quality early learning experiences and childhood development. A Guide for Educators was also created to provide a hands-on practical tool for interpreting the goals, objectives, and pedagogical principles outlined in the Framework in order to support and inform the practices of early childhood educators (ECEs) in the province.

In April 2017, after the initial Framework and Guide were developed, DEECD initiated a pilot implementation phase. Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) from 42 regulated child care centres and two early years centres (representing roughly 10% of all programs in Nova Scotia) were invited to take part in the first training sessions. The key purpose of the Pilot was to trial different models and styles of delivering the modules and determine the most efficient and effective way to pursue the full implementation of the Framework. From the outset, an evaluation of the Pilot was planned in order to identify efficiencies in the way in which the Framework modules were delivered and to generate specific recommendations for the province wide implementation of the Framework.

With the learnings from the Pilot guiding the process, DEECD began planning for the province wide implementation of this training initiative. This training initiative was integral to support the implementation of Nova Scotia's new Early Learning Curriculum Framework in the province's child care centres as it was intended to lay the groundwork for educating practitioners about the framework and to align ECE approaches with internationally recognized best practices to guide regulated early learning and child care programs. Training modules were developed to include the Framework rationale and early childhood education objectives and philosophies, pedagogical principles, and specified practices as per the ELCF. As the training modules were developed, the required infrastructure (training coordinators and venues) was also established. Site coordinators from the already existing professional development support sites across the province were tasked with the coordination of the logistics related to the delivery of training to the ECE sector. Facilitators were hired and trained to deliver the training for staff and leaders throughout the province and each site started to promote the training sessions on their related websites. In addition, the Nova Scotia Early Years Professional Development Committee (EYPDC) promoted the workshops on their website which also initially allowed for workshop registration.

In the Summer/Fall of 2018, DEECD began the roll out of the ELCF professional development (PD) workshops for ECEs throughout the province with concurrent workshops of Modules 1 and 2 being delivered in all regions of the province in the Fall of 2018. Modules 3 and 4 were delivered in the Winter/Spring of 2019, Modules 5 and 6 were delivered in the Summer/Fall of 2019; and Modules 7 and 8 are scheduled to be delivered beginning in the Fall of 2020 and continuing into Winter 2021.

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to share findings from an evaluation of ELCF Professional Development (PD) initiative. The evaluation was conducted by Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac and Dr. Christine McLean with the Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre (ECCRC) at Mount Saint Vincent University on behalf of the DEECD. The aim of the evaluation was to examine the delivery of the training as well as the extent to which the ELCF PD influenced change in early childhood education practices within the sector. The evaluation was guided by the following questions:

1. How was the training delivered to the early childhood sector?
2. How did the development of the PD influence the capacity of the system to support PD in the sector?
3. How did the PD influence the awareness, knowledge, and value of ECE in key module components?
4. How did the PD influence change in practices within early learning and child care environments?

It is important to note that the determination of if and how the PD has influenced significant changes in practice, (question 4), cannot fully be answered while the ELCF PD is still being delivered during this initial implementation. Therefore, the type of evaluation necessary to demonstrate significant and lasting changes in practices are not within the scope and timeline of this evaluation. This evaluation used a process and outcome-based approach focused on the short-term outcomes of the PD initiative to provide initial responses to this question. The processes and outcomes can be further examined in the depiction of the evaluation logic model (Appendix A: Logic Model).

Section 2: The Evaluation

What did we do? Data Sources and Methods

The evaluation involved collecting and analyzing several sources of data providing feedback on the ELCF PD sessions. Data sources include PD session evaluation forms, telephone interviews with PD consultant and site coordinators, a sector survey that included questions about the ELCF PD, telephone interviews with ELCF PD participants (Directors and early childhood educators), and a survey that asked the facilitators of the ELCF PD specific questions about their experiences, observations, and perceptions regarding the delivery of the PD. Table 1 below lists the phases of data collection, who participated in each phase, and the timelines of each research activity. This is followed by a more detailed description of each data source.

Table 1 illustrates the phases of data collection involved in this evaluation, who participated, and projected timelines

Data Collection Method	Participants	Data Collected	Timeline
Document Review of PD Session Evaluation	ECE Professionals	Completed PD Session Evaluation Forms	Sept–Nov 2019
Telephone Interviews	Consultant & Site Coordinators Directors and ECE Professionals	Interview transcripts	Oct-Nov 2019 Dec 2019-Feb 2020
Sector Survey	ECE Professionals	Survey responses	Sept–Dec 2019
Facilitator Survey	ELCF PD Facilitators	Survey responses	Jan-Feb 2020

PD Session Evaluation Forms

The first data collection method, completed in 2019 by DEECD, involved soliciting feedback on the ELCF PD sessions from ECE professionals directly after sessions were delivered. The feedback consisted of closed and open-ended questions where participants could offer opinions and ideas about their experience and perception of the ELCF PD. The ECCRC entered 2,304 evaluation forms into an excel spreadsheet which was imported into an analytical software program, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analyses. Of these 2304 forms, 2128 participants (92%) gave open-ended feedback on at least one question. The analysis focused on summarizing the closed ended questions and identifying themes in each of the open answer questions through commonalities and/or sentiments about the topics.

Telephone Interviews with PD Consultant and Site Coordinators

In the Fall of 2019, the ECCRC team conducted interviews with key "agent of delivery" informants including the Lead PD Consultant and all eight PD Site Coordinators (n=10). Interview questions for this group were circulated to informants prior to the interview so they would be able to give some consideration to their responses. (See Appendix B & C: Interview Questions for ELCF PD Lead Consultant and Interview Questions for ELCF PD Site Coordinators). The recruitment/selection process for these interviews was an email invitation sent directly to potential interviewees, all of whom participated. The

purpose of this interview was to learn more about interviewees' experiences as a consultant/site coordinator in the delivery of the ELCF PD. These interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify the categories of the topics discussed and the common themes related to the topics found among interview participant responses. In some cases, the themes that emerged informed discovery questions for the other data collection instruments (surveys and interviews).

Surveys

In the Fall of 2019, an online **Sector Survey** developed by the ECCRC was administered to the early childhood education sector which, among other topics, asked a set of questions about the ELCF PD sessions. The survey, which could only be accessed online, was promoted to all 372 regulated child care centres, 201 pre-primary programs, and 300 approved family home day cares providing regulated care to children aged 0-5 across Nova Scotia. A total of 230 ECE professionals completed survey questions of relevance to the PD sessions. The survey included closed questions which yielded statistical results as well as open ended questions where survey participants could write their own unique response/comment and give their opinion or detail their experience of the ELCF PD (See Appendix D: Sector Survey ELCF PD Questions). The open-ended questions collected contextual information about the PD and participants' overall thoughts about their PD experience. The data were analyzed to compile and summarize both quantitative data and qualitative data identified in the emergent themes among participants' comments.

In the Winter of 2020, a **Facilitator Survey** was developed by the ECCRC to gather feedback from the front-line agents of delivery with regard to their experiences and perceptions of the delivery of the training and the sector response to the ELCF PD. This survey was available online, and the link to the survey was sent directly to the facilitators via the lead consultant. In total 20 of the 33 facilitators completed the survey. Participants of this survey could skip questions they did not want to answer; however, 18 of the 20 completed all questions. Like the sector survey, the facilitator survey asked a combination of closed and open-ended questions that yielded a mix of quantitative and qualitative data (See Appendix E: ELCF PD Facilitator Survey Questions). The quantitative data analyses consisted of simple counts of answers while the qualitative data were coded and analyzed for emerging themes and connections to existing themes/codes.

Interviews with PD Participants

In the Winter of 2020, the ECCRC team conducted interviews with 13 ECE professionals (6 Directors, 1 owner of a home-based child-care program, 1 pre-primary teacher, and 5 ECEs) who indicated on their ELCF PD evaluation form that they would be willing to have a telephone interview. The purpose of this interview was to ask follow- up questions and gather additional feedback as to their experiences and perspectives of the ELCF PD sessions. These interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed to identify the categories of the topics discussed and the common themes related to the topics found among interview participant responses.

Section 3: Results

How was the training delivered to the early childhood sector and how has the professional development delivery capacity of the system been influenced by this training initiative?

The first two research questions for this evaluation focused on the delivery of the training and, consequently, the effects that this delivery had on the overall professional delivery (PD) capacity of the ECE sector. To respond to these questions, this evaluation utilized the PD Session Evaluation Forms (n=2304), telephone Interviews with PD Consultant and Site Coordinators (n=10), Facilitator Survey (n=20), and telephone interviews with ECE professionals (n=13).

Using the regional delivery design of the ELCF Pilot, the ELCF PD delivery began in the Fall of 2018. Characteristic of the regional sessions offered in the Pilot, the ELCF PD training sessions were held in central locations within each region, sessions were facilitated by local consultants (ELCF trained facilitators), and content incorporated local subject matter expertise where possible.

Findings

According to officials at DEECD, as of June 2019, the number of staff working in regulated child care by classification in Nova Scotia was estimated at 2758 in 319 child care centres. With the delivery of modules (1-6) there has been a total of 139 workshops. Modules 1 and 2 were delivered to the early childhood sector in the Summer and Fall 2018, with 500 directors/leaders and over 900 ECEs participating. Modules 3 and 4 were delivered to the early childhood sector in Spring 2019, with 379 directors/leaders and 602 ECEs participants. In the Fall of 2019, Module 5 and 6 began to be offered and the last two modules (7 & 8), are currently under development and expected to be offered in the Summer/Fall of 2020 and Winter 2021 The goal is to have 75% of the ECE workforce complete training on the Framework and related workshops that support the Framework, (Quality Matters)

Across data sources, the findings of the evaluation suggest a favourable response to the ELCF PD sessions. First, the PD Session Evaluation Forms provide an overview of the response from the PD to the sector through average ratings for various aspects of the workshop delivery (Table 2).

Table 2. Average ratings given by PD participants in the PD Session Evaluation Forms (2018-2019)

PD Element Rated	Rating *Out of 10
Session Pace	8.6
Group Discussions	9.2
Opportunity to Network	8.7
Facilitator Prepared	9.3
Facilitator Examples	9.2
Facilitator	9.1

These results are consistent with findings from both the Sector and the Facilitator surveys (Appendices D & E) that indicated a favourable response to questions related to the effectiveness of the ELCF professional development delivery. Most respondents in the Sector Survey agreed that they felt the PD

was a good complement to the ELCF (87%) and that they learned helpful information to support the framework (83%). Further, respondents in the Facilitator Survey indicated specific successes of the PD, which included hands-on activities, networking, and group work/discussions. They also cited the ability to share their experiences and personal stories as a positive outcome that facilitates their connection with participants. In addition, several of the facilitators identified the positive feedback from PD participants as indicating success. Finally, the most common answers to the question, "what would you like to know more about/what would you like more of", demonstrated that participants enjoyed or were interested in real life-examples, ideas for ELCF applications, hands on activities, documentation, networking, and discussions.

Factors influencing delivery of the ELCF PD initiative in Nova Scotia

Across the data collected for the evaluation, we identified themes that related to the delivery of the training and the capacity of the system for this PD initiative. These themes are comprehensive in that they relate to the delivery of the ELCF PD implementation as a whole, as well as providing insight into the participant experience within the individual sessions. The themes identified include: 1) the importance of time and timing of delivery of sessions; 2) the value of regional/local facilitators with 'real-life' experience; 3) the benefits of peer interaction/discussion; 4) the strength of PD delivery capacity in the province; and 5) logistical challenges related to access.

Timing of delivery and time for each session is a consideration

The implementation plan for the province wide delivery of the ELCF PD Modules to ECE professionals involved (for some of the foundational modules) holding sessions first for the Leaders in each region, then to ECE staff in the region. The modules were rolled out in such a way as to begin from what was deemed fundamental introductory content and move along to the more specific and complex training modules. Each new PD session, which covered two modules at a time, was offered repeatedly at various locations over the course of each quarter. This allowed time for staff to complete the training and time for each centre to process and implement new learnings according to current practices, needs, and future planning. The timeframe between modules came not only from feedback from Pilot participants as well as learnings and recommendations put forth by lead personnel from other provinces and countries who have implemented early learning frameworks in their region. Given that there is a lot of information provided in each session including new information and philosophies about early childhood education and care that often promote or necessitate a substantial shift in practice, ***taking the time to roll*** out the training and allow for the implementation of ELCF learnings ***appeared to be helpful in the planning and delivery*** of this training initiative. Table 3 presents the training schedule of Nova Scotia's ELCF Modules as they have been/are being rolled out.

Table 3 illustrates how the workshops and modules were organized, who the workshops were offered to, and the timeframe/projected timelines of each workshop offering.

Table 3. Overview of workshop sessions, participants, modules and timelines

Session	Modules Covered	Participant Group	Timeframe
1	Image of the Child Pedagogical Leadership	All ECE Professionals Leaders only	Summer/Fall 2018 Summer/Fall 2018
2	Connecting Practices to ELCF and the Early Learning Environment	All ECE Professionals	Winter/Spring 2019
3	Observation for Decision Making and Reflective Practices	All ECE Professionals	Summer/Fall 2019
4	Pedagogical Documentation Building Relationships with Families and Communities	All ECE Professionals All ECE Professionals	Summer/Fall 2020 Winter 2021

Comments about the pace of the individual module sessions were fairly common among participants across the evaluation. The average rating given for "Session Pace" was 8.6/10 on the PD Session Evaluation Form, which indicates an overall satisfaction with the pace of instruction during individual sessions.

> *"I didn't leave feeling like I wasted too much of my day or anything like that it was very engaging so it kind of went super-fast the day seemed to speed by…"*
> (PD Participant Interview)
>
> *"Thanks for keeping everything on a steady pace. A lot fit in, in a short time period."*
> (PD Session Evaluation Form)
>
> *"Two days was an appropriate length - it allowed time to fully participate and it was fun! Great job!"* (PD Session Evaluation Form)

However, several participants commented that they felt that the two-day session could be condensed into one day, with the elimination of redundant material, while others, including facilitators, stated that too much information was being delivered in one day. These contrasting perceptions might be due to varying degrees of experience, education, and comfort with the new material; however, this level of analysis was not within the scope of this evaluation.

> *"Content was a bit repetitive. Would have loved to have this condensed into a shorter day."*
> (PD Session Evaluation Form)
>
> *"Whereas with the educators I feel as though it is a lot of information to digest in one day, they go the entire 6 hours and by the end seem exhausted."* (Facilitator Survey)

Regional/Local Facilitators with 'real-life' experience was valuable

There was a strong theme of **appreciation for local facilitators** with participants stating that the familiarity of local facilitators as well as their **real-life ECE experience** made for a more authentic experience. The value of facilitators having and sharing their personal ECE stories and experiences

surfaced in the statistical results of several of the PD evaluation questions participants were asked. First, in from the PD Session Evaluation Forms. The average rating for the element 'facilitator examples' was 9.2/10 (see Table 2). Second, and the most highly desired element on the PD Session Evaluation Forms

The following are some quotes from the PD Session Evaluation Forms that elucidate what some PD participants' value about local/ECE experienced facilitators - from the question 'what was most useful':

"Discussion & presenter is very knowledgeable of "real life" scenarios which makes it easy to take in her presentation."

"I really liked the personal stories, they make a great connection to the content and helped/encouraged me to try in my centre."

"*The facilitators are real life, experienced members of the field*"

"Having a facilitator that works in our field and can relate to experiences."

"Real stories from instructor and lots of knowledge from her own experiences as an Early Childhood Educator"

"Real life, local ideas from experience of the facilitators."

was "real-life examples." Furthermore, based on their experience (and sharing their experiences), facilitators appear to gain credibility and in turn, their presentation becomes more relevant and relatable to PD participants. As one facilitator said: *"Participants have time and again noted how they appreciated the stories from actual experiences. I think when you have walked the talk there is more validity for the participants. I can connect with them as I have walked in their shoes."* (Facilitator Survey)

Peer Interaction/Discussion was positively received

All those who gave feedback on the pilot said that interacting and conversing with their peers in small group discussions, as was featured in regional sessions, was valuable. Building on this finding, the **opportunity to network and have group discussions** was incorporated into the delivery design of the provincial ELCF workshops. For this dimension of the training, although some participants indicated that they thought there was too much time for networking and discussions, most participants agreed that networking and conversing with peers were valuable activities. As evidence of this, 'networking' and 'discussions' were in the top seven items identified as what participants 'want more of'.

"The instructors truly made it interesting & easy to learn. Also, I was very grateful for the group discussions at the tables." (PD Session Evaluation Form)

"I found the group discussions were wonderful. Using each other as a resource was very valuable." (PD Session Evaluation Form)

"I found the networking aspect of this conference the most informative part of the session. Being able to discuss our own issues with other directors/educators was very informative and helpful." (PD Session Evaluation Form)

In the PD Session Evaluation Forms, participants were asked to rate 'group discussions' and 'opportunity to network'. The average rating for these were 9.2/10 and 8.7/10 respectively.

Several ECE professionals that took part in a telephone interview also noted that they enjoyed the possibility to network with other ECEs. From these networking opportunities, they valued being able to gain new ideas and perspectives from one-another. For example, one participant explained that the opportunity to discuss with other ECEs during the session was beneficial to them understanding the curriculum: *"It's definitely collaboration just being able to make sure you're all on the same page and it's a reminder that you're all in the same boat... everybody's sharing that different lens so some might be struggling in that area and another one excelling in it and they have ideas. The collaboration has been really helpful"* (PD Participant Interview)

Capacity for Professional Development delivery in the province has been strengthened

Building capacity within the sector to both receive and deliver professional learning is reinforced through the establishment of formal and informal ***communities of practice, the support for pedagogical leadership, and the engagement of learners***. All of these are fundamental components of the ELCF PD initiative, and all were highlighted in the responses from interviews and surveys.

Feedback received from facilitators, PD participants, and Site Coordinators indicated that the PD sessions help to create a community of practice that was new to some participants and welcomed by many. While a community

> "Pedagogy refers to the holistic nature of an educator's professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building relationships... Pedagogy informs curriculum decision making, and the facilitation of learning in a rich and inviting child centered environment." (Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework, p. 10)

of practice is defined in different ways[1], it seems that this PD initiative helped to create an emerging community or practice through the engagement of participants in collective learning with a goal to find ways to improve their practice. Several of the Site Coordinators also talked about the need/utility of developing online supports such as forums and blogs to support and strengthen these new communities of practice and extend PD in the sector. In addition, a few recommended or mentioned the need/utility

> *"I think it's important, especially in our field, we tend to burn out a little bit and especially when you work alone, it's important to have a support network and to have people to work with and to throw ideas off of and that kind of thing. I think it's really important."* (PD Participant Interview)
>
> *"...over the 30 years that I've been in the centres I knew who these people were, just like 'Oh, you're from here and you're from there' but we didn't get to know each other, so this gave us time to do that and connect as personalities and it was awesome. We got to share our ideas with being around people, or we felt comfortable with it. We were able to be honest with each other and work through things and we developed friendships that from now I'll keep forever."* (PD Participant Interview)

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[1] Wenger, E., Trayner, B., & de Laat, M. (2011). *Promoting and assessing value creation in communities and networks: A conceptual framework.* Open University of the Netherlands. Retrieved from: http://wenger-trayner.com/resources/publications/evaluation-framework/

of mentors or coaches to help guide practitioners and centres in the planning and implementation of ELCF inspired changes.

As a result of the ELCF PD initiative, several ***tangible supports have been created to enhance the capacity within the province to support ongoing professional development***. These include the development of the actual modules used to introduce the ELCF, as well as online resources such as the online facilitators' forum and some online introductory modules related to the framework. Perhaps most significantly, a pool of specialized ECE facilitators has been created. These now experienced facilitators are not only a PD delivery resource for the sector; but they also add to the existing number of developed ECE professionals with advanced skillsets who also act as mentors to ECE professionals around the province. The ELCF facilitators received very favourable feedback from the ECE participants, who made special note of the ability of the facilitators to ground the information from the modules within 'real life' practical scenarios as previously noted. As well, the ECE participants also remarked favourably on the ability of the facilitators to engage the participants in discussions and allow time for networking to occur. The facilitators, themselves, made note of the feedback that they have had received which indicated that their experiences in early childhood education were fundamental in the success of the PD delivery. The feedback they received was also useful as they moved forward with the module delivery, emphasizing which approaches worked best and which ones needed revision.

> *"I thought the presenters were fabulous, there was lots of time for group discussions and sometimes it was even intense discussions. It wasn't all smooth sailing, sometimes there was really good intense discussions and I can't...I know they brought up that there might be more modules...I'm excited for the new modules."* (PD Participant Interview)
>
> *"...I know our lives are busy and we don't like to go to work stuff at the end of the day, we're tired. But when we got there is was amazing and I learned so much."* (PD Participant Interview)
>
> *"I'm learning from participants how to best present the information as well as gaining knowledge from how others are implementing the framework."* (Facilitator Survey)

Pedagogical leadership, which can be defined partially as the ability to "encourage educators to ask questions about what they do and why" (Capable, Confident, and Curious, p. 10), does not end once the modules have been delivered. The ***need for ongoing pedagogical leadership*** to initiate, sustain, and reflect on pedagogical changes within the programs themselves was highlighted by both the ECE participants and the facilitators. Both spoke of the need for time and opportunity for pedagogical leadership to take place on an individual program level and several suggested a coaching/mentoring model would be a recommended follow-up to the delivery of the modules. However, several participants noted that the sector is currently undergoing strain due to the lack of available, qualified staff, which was felt to influence pedagogical leadership. Related to that is the shifting ECE landscape in the province. The simultaneous introduction of Pre-Primary Programs, the Early Learning Curriculum Framework and other provincial initiatives has, in some cases, disrupted the status quo and has impacted individuals working within the sector. This has practical implications related to the ability of individual ECEs to consolidate the knowledge received during the module sessions and, more importantly, put this new knowledge into practice on a program level.

> *"However, I also hear from some staff that there can be a disconnect when some leaders do not discuss the training sessions or framework with their staff. Even if staff have also had the training, they may not feel supported in learning to apply it in their daily practice. I don't know how common this is but I've heard it from a few participants."* (Facilitator Survey)
>
> *"...so it really made me take a step back and reflect and then it helped me to reflect on who I am as a (director) and can I motivate the staff and motivate the (other) directors to motivate their staff to think in a different way about why they do what they do so that then their practices can become better."* (PD Participant Interview)
>
> *"The challenge in itself is just having the staff – the time to even sit down and reflect to myself because I'm on the floor most days too, so just trying to be a pedagogical leader in itself. It's hard when you're by yourself in a class, it's hard to get around to all the staff. It's the time."* (PD Participant Interview)
>
> *"...I don't even have time to reflect myself, let alone help others. I'm there and I feel like I'm trying to make a difference and help them but it's very hard*." (PD Participant Interview)

Logistical challenges related to issues of access such as travel, time, and timing

The sessions had open, voluntary registration which was promoted on the EYPDC website and the supporting facility/organization websites and, to a lesser degree, via posters, newsletters, and mail outs. The workshop sessions were offered at no fee for any ECE employees and professionals working in licensed/regulated child care centres and included lunch and refreshments. Initially perceived to be mandatory training, the initial response within the sector was significant and registration for the first two modules was higher than with subsequent modules. Registration was originally completed and managed on the EYPDC website. Due to emerging ***administrative challenges*** associated with the website's registration process and issues with site coordinators and facilitators accessing registration information, online registration was moved to Eventbrite in the Fall of 2019, which was perceived by site coordinators as a more efficient registration process. Aside from the initial challenges with registration, participants noted other challenges that had an impact on their ability to access the modules. These challenges included a need for additional or repeated sessions, travelling distance (particularly among the Francophone community), and personal time competing with professional development time. There was also some recognition from participants that this is a ***time of change for the ECE sector*** and that this can be challenging for individual ECEs. Several participants provided suggestions on how obstacles to attending sessions could be overcome. These suggestions focused predominantly on the fact that the modules were offered during the evenings or on weekends which was described as challenging for ECEs after a full day or week of work. Participants suggested that the professional development could be offered during the week with close-out/in-service days being provided

similar to the public-school system model, or that casual staff cover for ECEs during the week to allow regular staff to attend training sessions.

Noted challenges from participants:

- *"I wish there were more opportunities for the PD. I currently have employees looking to start Module 1, for example, and there were no available dates for HRM. I believe this PD is extremely important moving forward, and the need is there for them to occur more regularly."* (Sector Survey)
- *"Then there's Cape Breton which I have not yet been able to offer the francophone educators and directors from Cape Breton who really want to take the training in French and had been traveling to Halifax to do it. Everybody's two hours away so it's been difficult to pin point kind of a time and a way to organize the PD for the French Cape Breton educators"* (Site Coordinator Interview)
- *"Saturday classes continue to be difficult and takes away from family/personal time. Daytime, weekdays, paid time needs to be addressed in this field."* (PD Session Evaluation Form)
- *"Then sometimes things get rolled out and it's a little messier than need be, change is challenging at the best of times but when it's all kind of plopped on (the) sector that can be a bit ugly. But what we have been doing is really reminding people that it's okay to be gentle with yourself, it's not going to happen overnight, nor does it need to"* (Site Coordinator Interview)

Suggestions for overcoming challenges:

- *"Having access to casual staff would be ideal for myself and all staff to attend training sessions"* (Sector Survey)
- *"Maybe it could be delivered during working hours and centres could close for 1 full day? I can't send staff due to staff coverage/weekends are busy with other commitments."* (Sector Survey)
- *"Having it on a weekday, if every center could close early to attend would be great so you're not using up your weekends"* (PD Session Evaluation Form)

How did the PD influence the awareness, knowledge, value and changes in practices within early learning and child care environments?

The final two research questions focused on how the professional development experience might have influenced the participants in terms of their awareness, knowledge, and value they have for early childhood education and how their practice might have been influenced by their participation in the PD sessions. To respond to these questions, this evaluation utilized the PD Session Evaluation Forms (n=2304), Sector Survey (n=230), and telephone interviews with ECE professionals (n=13, 6 Directors, 1 owner of a home-based child-care program, 1 pre-primary educator, and 5 ECEs).

Influences on awareness, knowledge and value

As noted in the previous section, there were many reported learnings from the PD. The majority of Sector Survey respondents agreed that the PD was a good complement to the ELCF (87%) and reported

learning helpful information and practices to support the implementation of the ELCF at their centre (83%).

The interviews with ECE professionals also provided further understanding into how the PD influenced changes to awareness, knowledge and value. Some found that it ***altered their own awarene**ss* (3/13), while others found the sessions to be ***beneficial in clarifying what they were already doing*** (3/13), either to themselves or to parents. For example, when asked about what they have learned so far from the PD sessions, one participant explained that while they used provocations before, they are now much more intentional when creating them and have the proper terminology for it. Although it was a part of their practice before the sessions, their awareness changed in the sense that they were more *aware* of what they had been doing. Another participant explained their heightened awareness of community when asked what about some valuable things they had learned from the sessions: *"I did have good relationships with the families but it's more like reaching out into our community and bringing actually the community into the program and using the resources I had around me. It's something I just never thought of before which is really cool…"* (PD Participant Interview).

Some participants indicated that the sessions ***cleared up misconceptions*** by making them more aware of what is required/expected of them with ELCF (2/13). They felt that the sessions allowed them to see that their philosophy and practice was already similar to the new curriculum. For example, one participant described their feelings when they first heard about the new curriculum saying: *"when we first heard we thought we had—the next inspection had to have all this done? We were in a panic and we were all—you know anxieties beyond"* (PD Participant Interview). However, at the sessions, the facilitators emphasized that all participants were at different stages of implementation and practice, and, in fact, what they were currently doing was not too different from what is expected of them with the new curriculum. *"I didn't really have a clear understanding of play-based curriculum, I didn't understand my role and I found that after completing the modules I had a better understanding of my place in them…"* (PD Participant Interview).

Although many participants indicated a change in awareness and knowledge, some felt that although the information was relevant and enjoyable, it was **repetitive of what they had already learned** and/or were already using it in their practice (5/13). Often, these reminders to practice were still appreciated by the ECE professionals. Further, one director, who has been in the field for quite some time, explained that at first, they were *"very reluctant about the whole thing."* (PD Participant Interview). When questioned further they explained that by the third and fourth session they began to buy-in to the idea: *"I mean, I heard all about it. I read articles, I saw other centers—they were in the pilot, I went to see that I just wasn't getting it but then when I actually did those modules they grounded me so I was very pleased, excited—I came back from them very excited and then continued with that."* (PD Participant Interview) Another director who spends most of their time in the classroom explained how something they learned at one of the sessions helped extend some ideas with what they were already doing. For example, they explained that they had incorporated loose parts in their curriculum, and the ideas from the session also helped them to support increased understanding by parents in the benefits of loose parts to children's development.

"I found it relevant but it was basically all information that I already had access to and that I already had in practice." (PD Participant Interview)

"Even though it's stuff I already knew it was a good reminder that I need to take a step back and look at why I do what I do and at the end of the day realizing that I do it because children [are] in our care and because at the end of the day I want to keep everybody safe and engaged so it really made me take a step back and reflect…" (PD Participant Interview)

"…my staff learned to look at things when they went out and they were like of do you know what this could utilize for a bridge, this could utilize—they could use this as a road." (PD Participant Interview)

Influences on practice

Overall, results from the Session Feedback Forms and the Sector Survey indicated that the vast majority of participants expected they would use the information gained through the PD in their daily practice. For example, 84% of respondents that completed a Session Feedback Forms indicated they would use 61-100% of the content from the PD. In the Sector Survey, the majority of survey respondents agreed that they would use what they learned at the PD in the future (85%). Most respondents also indicated that there had been centre/program wide changes in practices directly related to the PD (67%).

The interviews with ECE professionals also provided further understanding into how the PD influenced changes to practice. Some participants explicitly noted **changes in practice in relation to elements of programming in their centers** (5/13). For example, one participant explained that the PD helped to encourage planning for children in their program: "… *I'm integrating a lot of risk play in programming and you just see certain days that, okay, this is what their interest is today…. okay, well what can we do to make this work inside with this group of children?"* (PD Participant Interview). Other participants spoke about challenges of changing routines in their program but that the PD helped them to be more intentional in their practice and think outside the box.

"the biggest challenge was changing the routine of our—we were very routine, so we changed. We got out of that doing the same thing every day you know the same thing that way and being led by the children so that was the biggest change for us…" (PD Participant Interview)

"I used provocation a lot in the classroom now where I—and I did—I shouldn't say I didn't before, but it wasn't intentional if that makes sense…" (PD Participant Interview)

Two specific changes that ECE professionals discussed in relation to the PD were **changes to the environment and use of documentation**. For example, after speaking about scaffolding toddlers' desires to engage in gross motor play indoors, one participant explained that they use equipment such as play-mats, climbing cubes and scooter boards to assist the children in their gross motor play: *"Yeah, the scooter boards… we don't even put them away anymore. There's always scooter boards out."* (PD Participant Interview). One ECE described how they enjoyed one of the activities at the session where they had to write down their hopes and dreams for their centre and staff and hang it on a tree. They indicated that they planned to do this same activity with parents and children to support changes in their program: *"I really did like a lot of the conversation that was around having centers have more of a home feel to them—being inviting, so I have made some changes here and even room layouts, like when children are coming in… what are they seeing first…"* (PD Participant Interview)

Changes to documentation practice were also mentioned by many participants in relation to how they create and/or present their documentation (6/13). One participant explained the changes their program made in relation to visible displays: "…*before we had a bulletin board by the door where the program plans were posted and now I still have it, our daily one, and I do—I'll call it like 'the intentional teachings'—and I have that so that I can expand on it throughout the whole week next to the programming…"* (PD Participant Interview). Another participant spoke about using documentation as a tool for observation with infants. Another participant indicated their program used floor books but they made some changes following the PD sessions: *"instead of just doing the floor-book and how it flows from one thing to the other, following the child's lead we are now putting the four-domains and all of that—all the framework into it now. How we're meeting the child's needs, how we're meeting the relationships, and all of that stuff, like we have kind of changed how we do our floor books due to the framework type."* (PD Participant Interview). Further, another participant commented that although many ECEs were using pictures in their documentation, the facilitators gave them more ideas of how to document.

However, some participants felt that **not much had changed** after the PD sessions, as they felt that the **information provided was already held as a part of their program's philosophy** (4/13). For example, one participant indicated that they have been using an emergent, play-based approach for years, and

they also have a co-worker who teaches the PD sessions. Because of this they said there hadn't been much changes to their practice regarding child-led/emergent play: *"we're already a Reggio and play-based themed centre we're … ahead a little bit but I mean we're always going to … learn something new there's always something you can learn—you learn something new every day."* (PD Participant Interview). Several other participants agreed, with one indicating that because they had a strong background in play-based learning, they find other programs reaching out to them for help: *"I know some of the other directors so they have been reaching out…So kind of also mentoring somebody that they can brainstorm with…I've been doing a lot of that as well and love it."* (PD Participant Interview).

Some participants typically those with director roles, spoke about implementing a ***more team-based approach to their practices*** (5/13). This included giving their staff information before the PD sessions, waiting for them to catch up on the PD sessions before implementing large changes or supporting them in their everyday practice by valuing their ideas. In one case, a director felt that it also helped them to reflect on their role as a pedagogical leader: *"…it helped me reflect on how I am as a [director] and can I motivate the staff and motivate the directors to motivate their staff to think in a different way about why they do what they do so that then their practices can then become better."* (PD Participant Interview). Another director, who had been reluctant about participating in the PD, explained how the sessions influenced her to include her team in planning changes in their program: *"mainly just working more as a team instead of—like say at a staff meeting - we've had a couple - and it's more their ideas instead of my agenda and we've let them come up with—at our last staff meeting we gave them a week and asked them what ideas they want to see changes in the center… it was a big thing for us to hear some of the things. So, we worked together, we made a goal list of how we were going to do it and what we were going to do to make those changes happen."* (PD Participant Interview) One participant noted that all of her staff were in a different place regarding how many sessions they had attended so they were giving "tips and tricks" to their staff while trying not to overwhelm them. This director was trying to work with each of their staff to encourage their development.

"I know one of my staff - the one's that's in our mixed age group with the toddler/junior preschool, she has come back and said even attending the session five and six she really took away…I've really pushed her and herself to really continue with that because it tugged a string with her type thing. She wanted to pursue that, so I've been really trying to encourage her and help her do that." (PD Participant Interview)

"then our preschool teacher - at the moment she's newly graduated and in that mode where she's scared of doing something wrong, so I'm trying to get her more comfortable with the position she's in and her being at our center and then, this is all the framework "let's get in a session let's get comfortable with it" so I'm trying to lean towards how their comfortability is before I go forward." (PD Participant Interview)

A few of the participants (directors/assistant directors) also expressed that their biggest **challenge** with the PD was trying to keep up with changes and **implement ideas from the sessions when their staff was not up to date with courses and they were experiencing staffing shortages**. One participant explained that attending more of the PD sessions was difficult due to limited staff: *"it's been challenging because of staffing on site and then the rest of my directors are doing modules five and six because they can't get into three and four right now but I have to cover one of them so she can do it. So, I will eventually take them all."* (PD Participant Interview).

"I want us to learn together that way instead of me coming back and pushing it and not putting them where I was, I don't want them to be like overwhelmed with it. So, some of them—now because of the weather and because of everything we're all on different schedules but hopefully by the end of this spring we'll all be caught up to where everybody is. So, there's some missing three and four and whatever but once we get all together then we'll be able to work as a team and start to make our positive changes that we want to make and understand why." (PD Participant Interview)

That kind of thing at the moment is the biggest hurdle, because I don't even have time to reflect myself let alone help others… I'm there and I feel like I'm trying to make a difference and help them but it's very hard—also most days I'm in the class and I get a couple—maybe an hour, hour and a half if I'm lucky in the morning to do office work and by that time it's you know "here we go breaks needed" type thing." (PD Participant Interview)

Section 4: Moving Forward

Overall, the ELCF PD was well received by the early childhood sector. Through the evaluation, we heard that there was value in the time that was taken to roll out the training to allow for adaptations to the process. There was a strong appreciation for the local facilitators and the real-life experience they were able to bring to the workshops. It was clear that the time that was invested in training competent facilitators was worthwhile.

Although there were some logistical challenges noted, PD participants valued the face-to-face format of the PD as it provided an opportunity to network and share their experiences with others. This opportunity to build an informal community of practice was noted as a strength of the PD design to engage participants in collective learning and identify ways to improve their practice. Across the data sources in the evaluation, many PD participants indicated that they learned something from the PD and that the workshops were beneficial in clarifying or providing reminders for best practices for the ELCF framework. Many participants also indicated that they expected they would use what they learned in the future and some provided examples of changes to practice that had already happened as a result of the PD (e.g., documentation and changes to environments). However, participants also noted the challenges of implementing new ideas given the broader changes to the ECE sector, including the shortage of staffing.

The following section outlines the potential areas that could be strengthened as the sector moves forward with the implementation of the framework.

Opportunities moving forward

The ELCF Professional Development Initiative has set the stage for ongoing professional learning within the Nova Scotia ECE community. There is a need for continued support for the emerging communities of practice that have been established throughout the province as a result of this initiative. Participants in this evaluation have indicated that one of the most valuable aspects of their participation in the PD sessions has been the opportunity to meet with other educators to discuss practice, share ideas, pose questions, and voice concerns. For some, this is the first time they have had the chance to do so. This informal network could be considered a first step in building a community of practice that invites reflection and transformation of practice. Methods to sustain this valuable networking could come in the form of an online connection via social media or an online portal available for the 'graduates' of the module sessions. As well, regional email lists could be generated for those who are interested so that resources and updates could be shared amongst the participants/members.

Participants (facilitators and ECEs) also spoke of the need for ongoing coaching or mentoring as they implement changes in practice initiated by their participation in the ELCF PD. The modules provide information for participants but putting these new ideas into action requires ongoing reflection, feedback, and pedagogical leadership. Ideally, directors/leaders would provide this pedagogical support but, in many cases, this is not possible. The ECE landscape in Nova Scotia is shifting and one of the outcomes of this shift is a more pronounced shortage of qualified early childhood educators. In practical terms, this means that directors either spend more time working directly with children (counted in ratio) due to staff shortages or cannot find or afford staff who can provide relief time for staff planning and reflection. In addition, the Early Learning Curriculum Framework provides new information for directors

as well as for educators, so the leaders are, in some cases, facing the same learning curve as their staff. In the face of these systemic challenges, alternative approaches for coaching and mentoring could be considered. Regional ECE consultants, community pedagogical leaders, or ELCF PD trained facilitators have the skills, knowledge, and experience to provide ongoing mentoring support to child care centres. This is happening already, however, it could be bolstered through formalized online options or in-person/on-site visits. There would be, of course, costs associated with the extension of mentoring and professional learning support beyond the module sessions, however, the impact that this service could have on the implementation of the curriculum framework and the associated improvement in quality on a centre and program level would more than justify the cost.
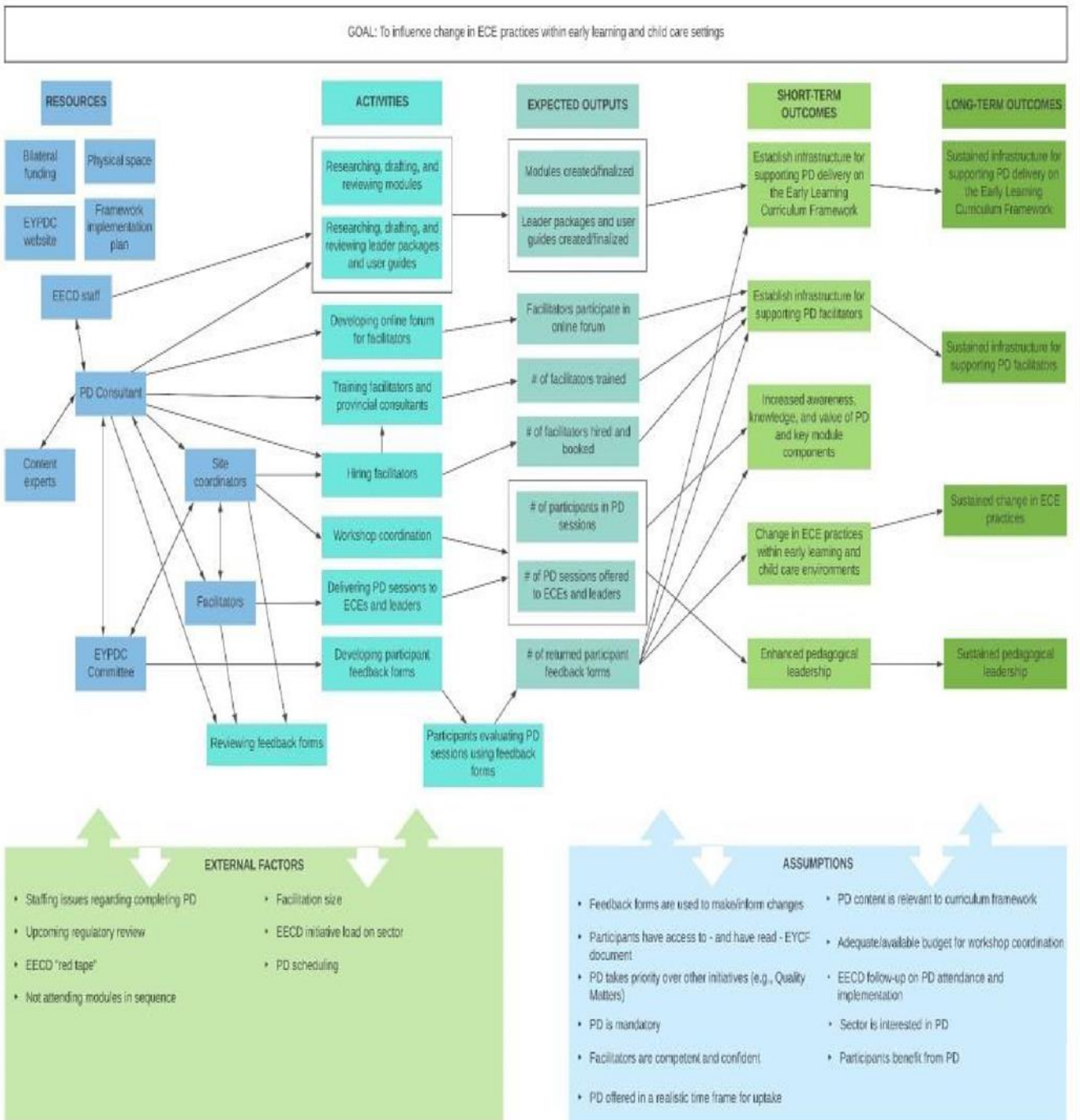
The proposed system of coaching and mentoring could be viewed as an interim measure as directors of early learning and child care centres begin to take their place as pedagogical leaders within their own programs. The ELCF PD initiative has reinforced or, in some cases, introduced, the concept of pedagogical leadership on a program level. The choice to have separate sessions for educators and leaders has reinforced the notion that directors have a separate and integral role related to the pedagogical practices within their program. Participants have expressed varying opinions on the decision to hold separate rather than blended PD sessions, but they agree that it is essential that directors lead the team in their pedagogical journey. The ELCF PD initiative could evolve to strengthen pedagogical leadership, providing directors with explicit and ongoing support and information about why and how to connect with staff around debriefing, reflective practice, program planning, and implementing changes in practice. The previously mentioned systemic challenges in finding the time and resources for planning and staff support are broad in scope and cannot be solved through professional development alone. However, a growing awareness on the part of directors of the importance of pedagogical leadership within a centre or program may instigate a shift in focus of the director's role from being predominantly administrative to one that is more supportive of and responsible for quality programming and practice.
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Acknowledgements

Appendix A: Logic Model

GOAL: To influence change in ECE practices within early learning and child care settings

RESOURCES
- Bilateral funding
- Physical space
- EYPDC website
- Framework implementation plan
- EECD staff
- PD Consultant
- Content experts
- Site coordinators
- Facilitators
- EYPDC Committee

ACTIVITIES
- Researching, drafting, and reviewing modules
- Researching, drafting, and reviewing leader packages and user guides
- Developing online forum for facilitators
- Training facilitators and provincial consultants
- Hiring facilitators
- Workshop coordination
- Delivering PD sessions to ECEs and leaders
- Developing participant feedback forms
- Reviewing feedback forms
- Participants evaluating PD sessions using feedback forms

EXPECTED OUTPUTS
- Modules created/finalized
- Leader packages and user guides created/finalized
- Facilitators participate in online forum
- # of facilitators trained
- # of facilitators hired and booked
- # of participants in PD sessions
- # of PD sessions offered to ECEs and leaders
- # of returned participant feedback forms

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES
- Establish infrastructure for supporting PD delivery on the Early Learning Curriculum Framework
- Establish infrastructure for supporting PD facilitators
- Increased awareness, knowledge, and value of PD and key module components
- Change in ECE practices within early learning and child care environments
- Enhanced pedagogical leadership

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES
- Sustained infrastructure for supporting PD delivery on the Early Learning Curriculum Framework
- Sustained infrastructure for supporting PD facilitators
- Sustained change in ECE practices
- Sustained pedagogical leadership

EXTERNAL FACTORS
- Staffing issues regarding completing PD
- Upcoming regulatory review
- EECD "red tape"
- Not attending modules in sequence
- Facilitation size
- EECD initiative load on sector
- PD scheduling

ASSUMPTIONS
- Feedback forms are used to make/inform changes
- Participants have access to - and have read - EYCF document
- PD takes priority over other initiatives (e.g., Quality Matters)
- PD is mandatory
- Facilitators are competent and confident
- PD offered in a realistic time frame for uptake
- PD content is relevant to curriculum framework
- Adequate/available budget for workshop coordination
- EECD follow-up on PD attendance and implementation
- Sector is interested in PD
- Participants benefit from PD

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Lead ELCF PD Consultant

1. Can you clarify your role? ...tell us about your duties and responsibilities as consultant for the DEECD on The Early Learning Curriculum Framework professional development initiative? Were you involved in the Pilot of the ELF?

2. Tell us about your experience in the role as the consultant with this work? Did you face any challenges in the development of the PD? Can you think of any way that the development of the PD influenced the capacity of the system to support PD in the sector?

3. Can you describe the process relating to the implementation of the ELF PD?

4. What have been some successes? What, if any, elements may need some additional support in order to become a success?

5. What have been some of the challenges?

6. What, if anything, is missing from the PD plan?

7. What are your thoughts on the timing and time frame of PD implementation? *(Rushed/ satisfactory, Will it be finished in the expected time frame?)*

8. What are your thoughts on future directions for the ELF PD? (*ECE PD more generally*)

Appendix C: Interview Questions for ELCF PD Site Coordinators

1. Can you tell us about your role and responsibilities as a "Site Coordinator" for X [institution]? How does Early Learning Curriculum Framework professional development fit into you work?

2. Can you describe any logistical challenges that occurred during your role as site coordinator for the Early Learning Curriculum Framework professional development? *(i.e accommodating large groups/scheduling venues, resource issues)*

3. What, if any, other challenges have you experienced in your role/with the Early Learning Curriculum Framework professional development? (*Is there anything related to coordinating ELF PD initiative that is making your job more difficult on a day to day basis?*)

4. From your perspective, what has helped to create success for the Early Learning Curriculum Framework professional development? (*Why? What indicates success? Attendance, feedback forms, facilitator feedback?*) If 'not successful' what were the elements that you would change in order for the next ECE PD to be a success?

5. Do you read/hear about the PD feedback forms? If yes, what have you learned from these?

6. Did you attend any of the PD sessions? If so, did you think the facilitators, topic, and activities of the PD were effective? Can you elaborate on this?

7. If you were able to provide advice for future implementation of PD for the Early Learning Framework – what would it be?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a site coordinator for the Early Learning Curriculum Framework?

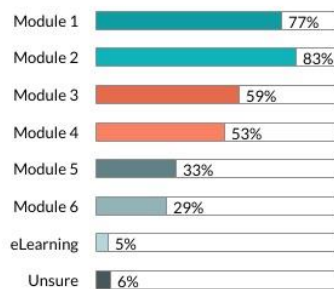# Building Policy-Relevant Early Childhood Research in Nova Scotia

Sub-section: Early Years Curriculum Framework Professional Development

This survey was administered to the Early Childhood sector across Nova Scotia and included various topics. Just over 220 participants (of a total of 315 respondents in the survey) indicated that they attended the Early Years Curriculum Framework Professional Development sessions and completed the following section.
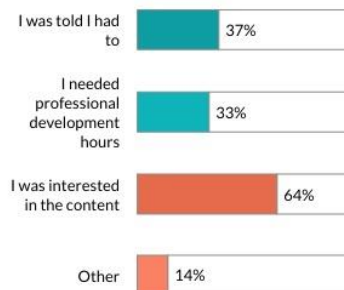
The respondents to this section included early childhood practitioners with a variety of experience and roles, including early childhood educators, owners, directors and inclusion coordinators.
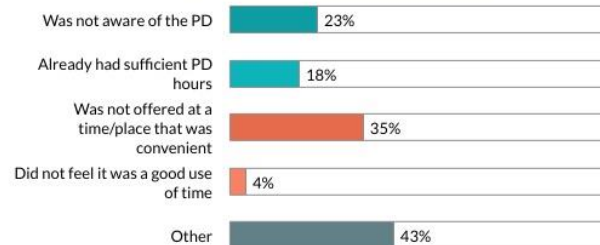
What Modules did you attend and why?
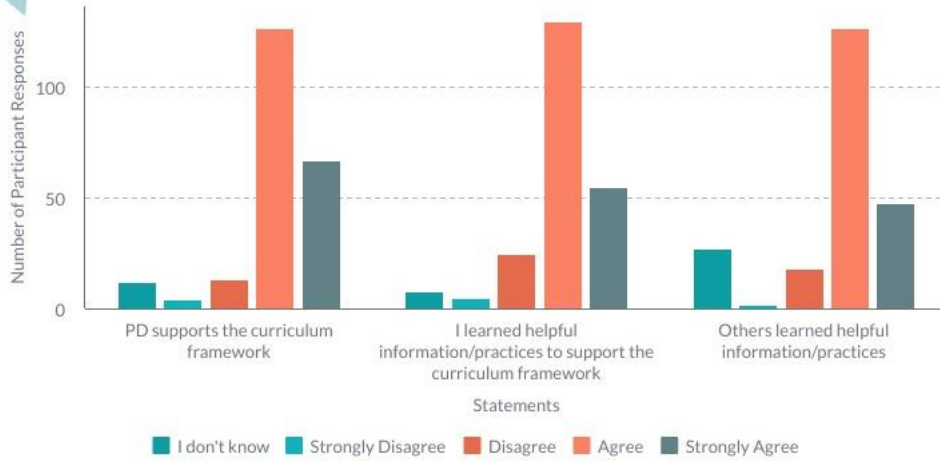
Which Modules have you recieved PD for?

- Module 1: 77%
- Module 2: 83%
- Module 3: 59%
- Module 4: 53%
- Module 5: 33%
- Module 6: 29%
- eLearning: 5%
- Unsure: 6%

Why did you attend the PD?

- I was told I had to: 37%
- I needed professional development hours: 33%
- I was interested in the content: 64%
- Other: 14%

Why did you not attend the PD?

- Was not aware of the PD: 23%
- Already had sufficient PD hours: 18%
- Was not offered at a time/place that was convenient: 35%
- Did not feel it was a good use of time: 4%
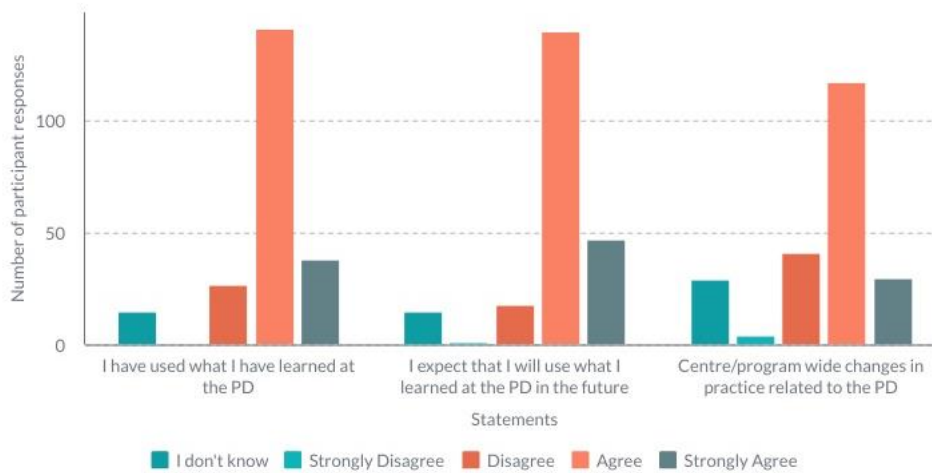- Other: 43%

Please rate your level of agreement on the following statements.

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding changes following the PD session(s).

Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre

eccrc

MOUNT SAINT VINCENT UNIVERSITY

Appendix E: Survey Questions for ELCF PD Facilitators

1. Please tell us about your formal (post-secondary) education.

2. Please tell us about your ECE classification:

3. Please indicate your preferred role (lead or assistant facilitator).

4. Please comment on your previous experience with facilitation and training.

5. Please estimate how many PD sessions you have facilitated.

6. Is there an area you believe the sector needs additional training and/or support? Please specify.

7. Please comment on the value of having separate training sessions, specific to Leaders and ECE staff.

8. Do you read the feedback forms that the participants complete at the end of each module PD session?

9. If you answered yes to the previous question: How do you utilize the feedback from the delivered PD sessions? Do you adapt your delivery based on the feedback from participants and how so?

10. Please comment on the successes and/or challenges with the PD facilitation:

Appendix F: Initial Interview Questions for ELCF PD Participants

1. Could you tell us a bit about your current work and your role in the early childhood sector?

2. Which ELCF modules have you attended? (When and where?) Could you share some comments about your experience so far, what are some things that you have learned? *From your perspective how useful, relevant, engaging...is the content/training?*

3. *For Directors Only: Have you been able to lead your staff through changes in the program and apply the information from the modules?*

4. Do you expect you will use what you learned at the PD? *(Yes – how?) (No – why not?) (Already doing it – can you give me some examples?)*

5. Could you give us examples about if/how the information at the PD has influenced your practice?

6. Have there been centre/program wide changes in practices at your centre that you feel are related to the Early Learning Curriculum Framework PD? Can you provide an ex.?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of the training on the Early Learning Curriculum Framework?