



BELIEFS ABOUT WORKING WITH FAMILIES

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Why is this worth looking at?

- ECEs are increasingly expected to work in collaboration with children's families (Birbaum, Russell & Clyne, 2007; Kaga, Bennett & Moss, 2010; McCain, Mustard & McCuaig, 2011; Pascal, 2009)
- There are a numerous benefits associated with family involvement in children's education (Corter & Pelletier, 2005; Pelletier & Brent, 2002; Seefeldt, Denton, Galper & Younoszai, 1999)

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Why is this worth looking at?

- Many studies have examined pre-service teachers' preparation to work with families but few have looked at ECEs (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hollingsworth, 1989; Leonard, Barnes-Johnson, Dantley, & Kimber, 2011; Pajares, 1992; Tatto, 1996; Wideen, Mayer-Smith & Moon, 1998)
- Students' prior beliefs appear to play a significant role in their learning system (Pajares, 1992; Richardson, 1996; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, & Moon, 1998)

The Importance of Beliefs

“The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows; ascertain this and teach him accordingly.”

–David Ausubel, 1968

Influence of Beliefs

- filter information
- provide a foundation when new information is congruent
- can create impediments to information that is inconsistent with previous experience

Beliefs & Previous Experience

- Graue & Brown (2003) observed that pre-service teachers' biographical memories of their own parents' involvement in their education influenced their conceptualizations of the teachers' role in family involvement
- Pre-service teachers own experiences may constrain their ability to collaborate, learn from and support a variety of families
- Beliefs need to be made explicit and examined

Study Design & Participants

- **Cross sectional design**
- 432 ECE diploma program students
- **Single publically funded college program in southern Ontario**
- 215 first year students – surveyed 1st semester week 2
- 217 second year students – surveyed 4th semester week 14
 - 95% female
 - 67% born in Canada
 - 69% spoke English as their first language
 - 74% attended elementary school in Canada
 - 8% were parents
- first and second year groups were comparable except for: age, working with children in part time jobs, **previous post secondary**, proportion of males

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Cautions

- Limits of cross sectional design – differences between beginning and graduating students may be due to factors unrelated to ECE diploma program
- Participants from this program may or may not be similar to students in other 2-year ECE diploma programs

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Beliefs about....

Motivation to Enter the Field:

- What attracted you to the field of early childhood?

Qualities & Characteristics of an Effective ECE:

- In your opinion, what qualities and characteristics make an early childhood educator most effective?

Beliefs about....

Parent & ECE Knowledge:

- Parents and teachers have unique knowledge about children. Please rate how often parents have excellent knowledge in the following areas (16 items related to child development & learning)
- 5 point Likert scale (0=never; 1 rarely; 2 = sometimes; 3 = frequently; 4 = always)
- Second scale - same as above but rating the frequency of ECEs excellent knowledge
- Examples of areas: *curriculum/program, ways child learns best, socio-emotional needs, academic strengths, disposition, developmental history, family cultural practices*

Beliefs about....

Importance, Feasibility & Preparedness for Family Involvement

- 5 point Likert scale – 19 family involvement activities
- rated all activities in terms of their importance
- rated all activities in terms of their feasibility (**realistic**)
- rated all activities in terms of their how prepared they felt to engage in
- *Examples of activities: ask parents to describe child, ask parents for input on child's program, engage parents in daily conversation, meet with parents to set goals, communicate with parents electronically, conduct home visits, ask parents for input into the curriculum*

Beliefs About.....

Barriers to Family Involvement:

- In your opinion, what barriers might families face that would prevent them from being involved in their children's early education?

Concerns About Working with families:

- What concerns or worries you about working with families?

Biographical Memories of Family Involvement

- 13 item index created by Graue & Brown (2003)
- 5 point Likert scale (0=never; 1 rarely; 2 = sometimes; 3 = frequently; 4 = always)
- Used as a comparative anchor for examining differences between those with lower and higher PI
- Possible range of scores ranged from 0 to 52
- Mean was 31.73 and the median was 32
- scores of 31 or lower = lower PI (N = 220)
- Scores of 32 or higher = higher PI (N = 195)
- Examples of items: *agreed with teacher, attended school events, supervised homework, read to child, participated in school governance*

Coding

- the four open ended questions were coded using an open coding technique
- process of constant comparison to develop categories (random sample of 100 participants)
- focused coding
- random sample of 56% of the responses were also coded by an RA (unfamiliar with the purpose of the study and with no background in ECE)
- Percentage agreement ranged from 97% to 100%
- Kappa ranged from .77 to 1

True & False Questions

- Take a minute to complete the true and false questions

Findings: Attraction

What attracted you to the field of early childhood?

Participants' Reasons for Being Attracted to the Field of Early Childhood

Attraction to ECE	Lower PI (N = 211)	Higher PI (N = 183)	Beginning (N = 202)	Graduating (N = 209)
Enjoyment of children	65%	62%	60%	68%
Previous experience	25%	28%	32%*	22%
To make an impact	23%	22%	23%	24%
Career related	23%	25%	22%	23%
Use skills	5%	4%	4%	5%
Learn parenting	6%**	1%	4%	3%
Told good with children	3%	2%	3%	2%
To work with families	1%	1%	1%	1%

* $p = .03$

** $p = .01$

Findings: Attraction

“I love working and spending time with children. I can’t imagine myself doing anything else.”

“I’ve always enjoyed working with children and have always wanted to understand how they develop.”

“I love children and the joy they bring and how they find joy in little things every day.”

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Findings: Attraction

Only 1% of the sample or 4 respondents mentioned families in their reasons for being attracted to the field of ECE

“I wanted to work with children, their families and their communities.”

“I have always wanted to work with families and children.”

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Findings: Attraction

Desire to “learn parenting skills” was significantly more common among those in lower PI group

“My personal experience coming from an authoritarian family [attracted me to the field of ECE]. I felt my dad was very strict and was a hindrance in my development so I wanted awareness about how to deal with kids so I don’t do the same with mine.”

“I enjoy working with children and wanted to know more when working with my own child.”

Discussion

True/False

Question # 1

Most students in this study were attracted to early childhood education because they enjoy working with children but a significant proportion of students, particularly those in the graduating cohort, also mentioned a desire to support families and communities.

- a. **True (first part)**
- b. **False (second part)**

Answer

Most students were attracted to the field because they enjoy working with children. Very few participants mentioned parents and families in their responses.

Discussion

True/False

Question # 2

Students whose families were more involved in their own early education (higher PI group) were more likely than students whose parents were less involved in their own early education (lower PI group) to describe a desire to make an impact on children's lives.

- a. True
- b. False

Answer

Students whose parents were less involved in their early education (lower PI) were more likely to describe *a desire to learn parenting skills* compared to students whose parents were more involved (higher PI).

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Findings: Qualities

In your opinion, what qualities and characteristics make an early childhood educator most effective?

Qualities/Characteristics	Lower PI (N = 206)	Higher PI (N = 172)	Beginning Students (N = 190)	Graduating Students (N = 205)
1. Compassion	62%	61%	57%	67%
2. Enthusiasm	40%	58%	49%	47%
3. Patience	46%	39%	47%	38%
4. Communication Skills	32%	40%	27%	44%
5. Knowledge	32%	28%	21%	39%
6. An open mind	27%	23%	18%	34%
7. Dedication	14%	20%	13%	20%
8. Respect for others	14%	16%	15%	18%
9. Creativity	14%	17%	14%	16%
10. Flexibility	9%	7%	6%	11%
11. Honesty	8%	7%	5%	10%
12. Dependability	7%	8%	6%	8%
13. Confidence	6%	6%	6%	6%
14. Organization skills	5%	4%	5%	4%
15. The ability to work in a team	3%	3%	0.5%	4%
16. Self-awareness	0.5%	4%	1%	3%

Enthusiasm $\chi^2 (1, N = 378) = 5.81, p = .03$

Compassion $\chi^2 (1, N = 395) = 11.96, p = .001$

Communication Skills $\chi^2 (1, N = 395) = 13.19, p = .00$

Knowledge $\chi^2 (1, N = 395) = 15.06, p = .00$

An Open Mind $\chi^2 (1, N = 395) = 12.49, p = .00$

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Findings: Qualities

“The quality that makes an ECE most effective is the way they interact with children and respond to parents with kindness, consideration and generosity.”

“Personally I believe that enthusiasm and encouragement are important.”

“Having high spirits and enthusiasm.”

“The qualities and characteristics that I think make an ECE most effective is that they genuinely love the job, are comforting, have good patience, full of energy, very sociable and nurturing.”

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Findings: Qualities

- graduating students ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.49$) described significantly more characteristics $t(393) = -5.19$, $p < .001$ compared to beginning students ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.56$), $r = .25$
- effect size was small with cohort (beginning or graduating) accounting for only 6% of the variance

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Findings: Qualities

Larger proportion of graduating group mentioned:

- Compassion
- Communication*
- Knowledge*
- An open mind

Findings: Qualities

“They need to know how to provided engaging, enriched environments for learning. ECEs bring the magic to learning.”

“Knowledge to help and support children, families and communities in a respectful manner.”

“I believe an ECE needs to have interpersonal communication skills to establish positive relationships with families and children.”

“You need to be open and flexible to the opinions and needs of others.”

“You need to keep an open mind by challenging the generalizations and stereotypes you have adapted into your everyday paradigms.”

Discussion

True/False

Question # 3

The most frequently mentioned characteristics or qualities of an effective ECE described by students in this study were: dependability, creativity/problem solving & the ability work in a team.

- a. True
- b. False**

Answer

Most frequently mentioned characteristics of an effective ECE were: compassion, enthusiasm, & patience.

Discussion

True/False

Question # 4

Students whose families were more involved in their own early education (higher PI group) described more characteristics of an effective ECE compared to students whose parents were less involved in their own early education (lower PI group).

- a. True
- b. False**

Answer

Students in the graduating cohort described more characteristics compared to students in the beginning cohort.

Findings: Parent & ECE Knowledge

- Parents and teachers have unique knowledge about children. Please rate how often parents have excellent knowledge in the following areas (16 items related to child development & learning)
- 5 point Likert scale (0=never; 1 rarely; 2 = sometimes; 3 = frequently; 4 = always)
- Overall participants rated ECEs as having excellent knowledge more frequently ($M = 53.10$, $SD = 6.58$) than they rated parents as having excellent knowledge ($M = 45.73$, $SD = 7.96$).

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Findings: Parent & ECE Knowledge

Ascribing Knowledge to Parents and ECEs: Students with Average/Below and Above Average Biographical Parent Involvement

	Lower PI		Higher PI		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
ECE Knowledge	49.79	7.77	53.10	6.58	-4.52*	387	.22	.048
Parent Knowledge	39.58	8.65	45.72	7.96	-7.19*	379	.35	.123

* $p = .001$

Biographical PI (higher or lower) accounted for a small (5%) proportion of the variance in ratings of ECE knowledge but a moderate proportion (12%) of the variance in ratings of parent knowledge

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Findings: Parent & ECE Knowledge

Ascribing Excellent Knowledge to Parents and ECEs: Beginning Students and Graduating Students Perceptions

	Beginning Students		Graduating Students		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
ECE Knowledge	52.24	7.16	50.54	7.55	2.40*	394	.12	.014
Parent Knowledge	43.51	8.44	41.40	8.98	2.32*	403	.12	.014

**p* = .02

Students' cohort (beginning or graduating) accounted for a small (1%) proportion of the variance in ratings of ECE & parent knowledge

Findings: Parent & ECE Knowledge

Ascribing Knowledge to Parents and ECEs: Students with Previous Post-Secondary Education and Students with High School Only

	Previous Post Secondary		High School Only		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
ECE Knowledge	49.08	8.70	51.98	6.92	3.15*	401	.16	.026
Parent Knowledge	42.71	9.34	42.37	8.62	-3.01	391	.15	.023

**p* = .002

Students' previous education (previous post secondary or high school only) accounted for a small (3%) proportion of the variance in ratings of ECE knowledge & did not significantly affect ratings of parent knowledge

Discussion

True/False

Question #5

Graduating students ratings of ECEs' knowledge about child development and learning were significantly higher than beginning students' ratings of ECE knowledge.

- a. True
- b. False**

Answer

Graduating students rated ECEs as less knowledgeable compared to beginning students.

Findings: Importance, Feasibility & Level of Preparation

- 5 point Likert scale – 19 family involvement activities
- Importance: 0 = not at all important; 1 = hardly important; 2 = somewhat important; 3 = quite important; 4 = very important
- Feasibility: 0 = not at all realistic; 1 = hardly realistic; 2 = somewhat realistic; 3 = quite realistic; 4 = very realistic
- Prepared: 0 = not at all prepared; 1 = hardly prepared; 2 = somewhat prepared; 3 = quite prepared; 4 = very prepared
- Examples of family involvement activities: *ask parents to describe child, ask parents for input on child's program, engage parents in daily conversation, meet with parents to set goals, communicate with parents electronically, conduct home visits, ask parents for input into the curriculum*

Findings: Importance, Feasibility & Level of Preparation

Comparisons of Students who Recalled Higher and Lower Parent Involvement

	Lower PI		Higher PI		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Importance of PI	54.80	10.64	57.98	9.93	-2.99*	373	.15	.023
Feasibility of PI	48.80	11.55	50.84	10.78	-1.72	355	.09	.008
Preparedness for PI	47.24	14.07	54.34	12.12	-4.94*	341	.26	.067

* $p < .01$

Students' biographical PI (lower or higher) accounted for only a small proportion of the variance in ratings of importance (2.3%) and preparedness (6.7%)

Findings: Importance, Feasibility & Level of Preparation

Beginning and Graduating Students Ratings of the Importance, Feasibility and Their Level of Preparedness for Parent Involvement Activities

	Beginning Students		Graduating Students		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
Importance of PI	52.58	9.96	60.01	9.49	-7.53*	387	.358	.128
Feasibility of PI	48.02	11.03	51.74	11.14	-3.22*	368	.166	.028
Preparedness for PI	46.52	15.45	53.74	10.75	-5.16*	351	.266	.071

* $p < .01$

Students' cohort (beginning or graduating) accounted for a small proportion of the variance in ratings of feasibility (2.8%) and preparedness (7.1%) but the effect size for cohort in importance ratings was moderate (12.8%)

Discussion

True/False

Question #6

Being a graduating student (as opposed to being a beginning student) was a moderate predictor of higher ratings for *feasibility* and *preparedness* for family involvement activities.

- a. True
- b. **False**

Answer

Membership in the graduating cohort was a moderate predictor of higher *importance* ratings for family involvement activities (but only a small predictor of feasibility & preparedness ratings).

Findings: Barriers

In your opinion, what barriers might families face that would prevent them from being involved in their children's early education?

Student Perceptions of Family Barriers to Involvement in Early Education

Barrier	Lower PI (N = 183)	Higher PI (N = 168)	Beginning Students (N = 169)	Graduating Students (N = 198)
Lack of Time	66%	72%	71%	68%
Language Barriers	42%	34%	34%	40%
Being Unaware of Importance	24%	21%	17%	27%*
Feeling Unwelcome	8%	11%	4%	14%**
Lack of Confidence	9%	7%	4%	12%***
Lack of Effort	6%	5%	8%	3%****

* $\chi^2(1,367) = 4.85, p = .03$

** $\chi^2(1,367) = 9.78, p = .002$

*** $\chi^2(1,367) = 8.92, p = .003$

**** $\chi^2(1,367) = 4.88, p = .03$

Findings: Barriers

“Time – if parents (families) work or study full time there is little extra time for them to be involved in their child’s early education. The goal would be to provide many, varied opportunities for parent involvement so when they can participate they will.”

“Time- parents work long hours and after work they just want to take their child home.”

“Sometimes parents just don’t have time to be involved in what their kids do every day.”

Findings: Barriers

Comparisons of the number of barriers described

- Graduating students ($M = 1.64$, $SD = .90$) did describe significantly more barriers to parent involvement $t(393) = -3.04$, $p < .01$ compared to beginning students ($M = 1.39$, $SD = .52$), $r = .032$
- The effect size was small though, with cohort accounting for 2.3% of the variance.

Discussion

True/False

Question #7

Students whose parents were less involved in their own early education (lower PI) identified significantly more barriers that prevent families from being involved in children's' early education than students whose parents were more involved in their early education (higher PI).

- a. True
- b. False**

Answer

Graduating students identified significantly more barriers that prevent families from being involved in children's early education than beginning students but the effect of cohort was small (2.3%).

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Findings: Concerns

Overall:

- 62% of participants identified concerns

Subgroups:

- 65% of students with lower biographical PI
- 58% of students with higher biographical PI
- 66% of graduating students
- 57% of beginning students
- 68% students with previous post secondary
- 60% students with high school only

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Findings: Concerns

Concerns about working with families

Area of Concern	Lower PI (<i>N</i> =119)	Higher PI (<i>N</i> =102)	Beginning Students (<i>N</i> =99)	Graduating Students (<i>N</i> =132)
Personal Abilities	55%	46%	46%	55%
Parent Factor	34%	34%	35%	33%
Culture & Language	30%	21%	25%	26%
Relationship Development	17%	22%	19%	17%
Conflict Resolution	16%	17%	16%	18%

Discussion

True/False

Question # 8

Graduating students identified significantly fewer concerns about working with families when compared to beginning students.

- a. True
- b. False**

Answer

Graduating students identified more concerns about working with families when compared to beginning students; however the difference was not significant.

Summary

Prior experiences of family involvement appear to influence students' beliefs

- Attraction: Students in the lower PI group were more likely to mention wanting to learn parenting skills
- Qualities: students in the higher PI group were more likely to identify *enthusiasm* as an important quality for an effective ECE
- Knowledge: students in the higher PI group rated parents as more knowledgeable than lower PI group (moderate effect size)
- Family Involvement: students in the higher PI group rated PI Activities as more important & themselves as more prepared

Summary

Implications for ECE preparation programs

Help students to articulate and examine their prior beliefs

Recognize students' motivation to work with children while broadening their conceptualization of early childhood services to a more ecologically based system in which families are central

Explore further students' conceptualizations of parent knowledge (what do parents bring to the collaboration?)

Support the development of specific skills to help students see family involvement as not just important but feasible and themselves as prepared for it

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