

# Advocacy: What Does It Mean? Why Engage In It? And Is It Worth It?

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## Background

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the importance of advocacy education in pre-service programs and explore the connection this has on in-service educator's (ISE) and pre-service educator's (PSE) commitment to and understanding of advocacy. As well, this study explored concepts of professional identity, professionalization and advancement of the early years' sector through an advocacy lens.

### Literature Review

Macdonald, Richardson and Langford (2015), note that pre-service training programs, focus on professionalization and that the concept of advocacy is limited. Liebovich and Alder (2009) note that ISEs and PSEs are not "armed with a sense of understanding about the need for advocacy or the fortification required to fight against government demands placed on them as educators" (p.26).

## Research Question

How does pre-service advocacy education impact educators' commitment to advocacy, professional identity, and professionalization and advancement of the sector?

## Methodology

### Research Design

This research was conducted in a qualitative manner using a phenomenological design and approach.

### Instrument

Data was collected using a 15-question online survey that asked for demographic and phenomenological data.

### Procedure

The principal researcher published the survey online and recruited participants via social media, college email platforms and in-class visits at George Brown College.

### Participants

Participants were recruited from 18 colleges and universities in Ontario. Of the 52 participants, 14 identified as PSE and 38 identified as ISE.

## Results

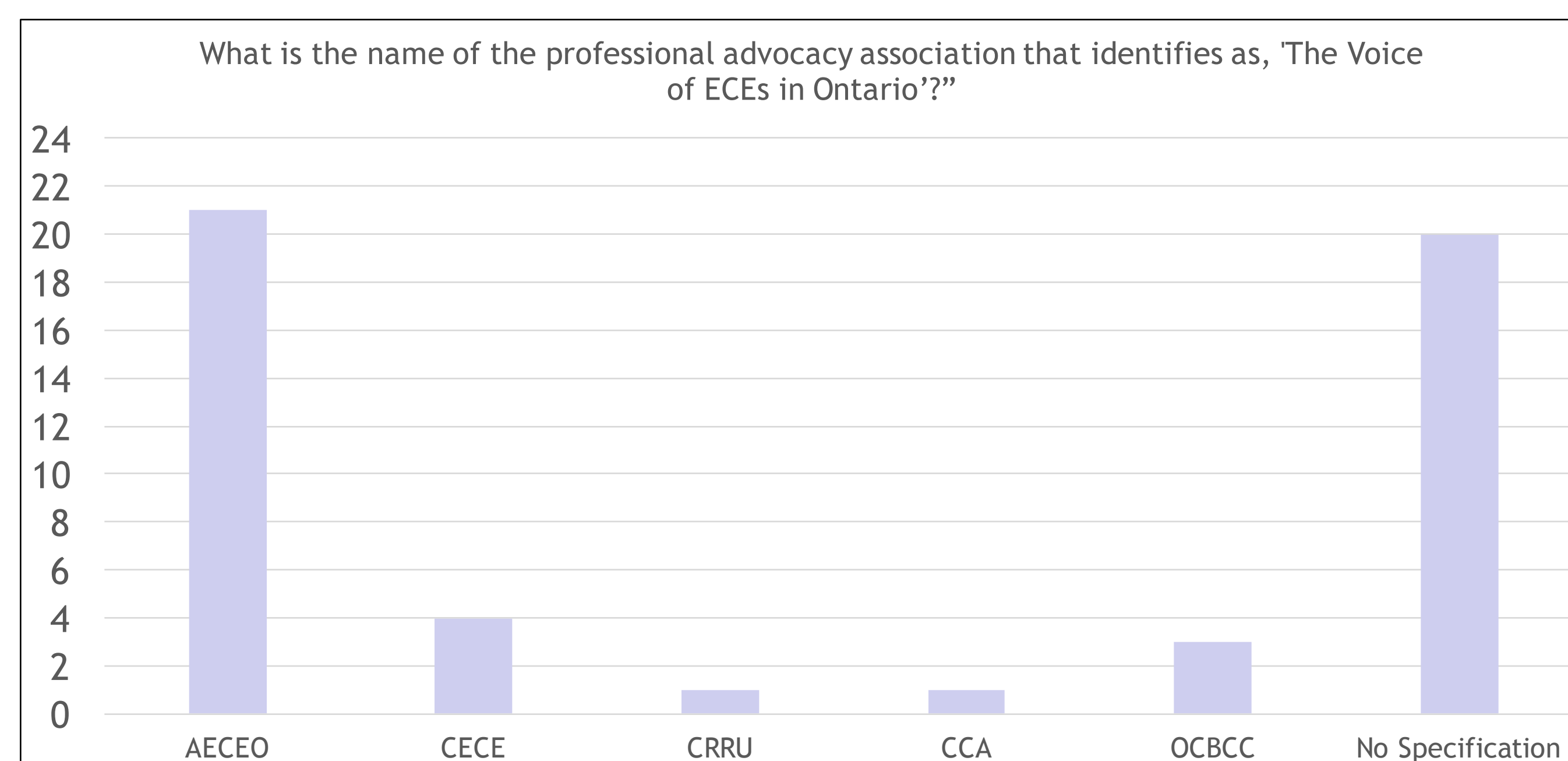
### Lack of pre-service advocacy education

Of the 52 participants, only nine indicated they believe their pre-service education has left them confident in engaging in advocacy.

Participant 19 indicated that, "there wasn't enough of it [advocacy education]. Advocacy was only briefly mentioned to me in school. It seemed like it was being downplayed, and when I was in school in 2013-2015. My professors only briefly mentioned advocacy groups to us."

Participant 2 noted that, "some of the courses touch on advocacy for a class. Some students and RECEs do not know the difference between the AECEO and the CECE. I believe I am confident because of my own interests and the time I have taken outside of my education to understand what advocacy is and why it is important."

### Misunderstanding of advocacy in the sector



### No value in advocacy and disconnect to advocacy

Twelve out of 52 participants indicated that advocacy informed their professional practice, and of these 12 participants only eight could identify how advocacy has informed their professional practice through speaking about the profession and advocating for children and families. Participant 9, who did not take an advocacy course during pre-service education, said, "I don't believe my voice makes a difference and I do not care to engage in advocacy."

## Conclusion

The pre-service advocacy education an educator receives impacts their commitment to advocacy in the early years' and child care sector on both the macro and micro levels. This is significant for educators and the sector, as the commitment and type of advocacy they engaged in supports and is necessary for the advancement of the sector, for educators, for children, and the families educators support.

### Limitations

- Participants were recruited from post-secondary institutions only in Ontario.
- The survey did not take into account professional development courses on advocacy.
- The pool of participants included an influx of participants from one specific academic institution in Ontario.
- The PR has a vested and biased interest in advocacy and may have been reflected in the ways questions were asked.

## Recommendations

The following are brief recommendations put forth by the PR:

- Have all academic institutions that provide ECE certification hold an advocacy workshop (with certificate) by the AECEO on advocacy in the sector.
- Have academic institutions take into account the ever-changing sector and place an importance on pre-service courses on advocacy, along with showcasing the "wins" in advocacy by faculty and the sector.
- Conduct further research through the CECE regarding the impacts of the CPL program and its impact on advocacy in totality.

## References

- Liebovich, B. J., & Adler, S. M. (2009). Teaching advocacy in early years initial teacher education programmes. *FORUM: For Promoting 3-19 Comprehensive Education*, 51(1), 25-34.
- Macdonald, L., Richardson, B., & Langford, R. (2016). ECEs as childcare advocates: Examining the scope of childcare advocacy carried out by ECEs from the perspective of childcare movement actors in Ontario and Manitoba. *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 40(1), 100-110. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18357/jcs.v40i1.15213>