

Exploring the experiences of internationally educated professionals in early learning

In this research study, we explored the career paths of graduates from the ECE Bridging Program co-sponsored by the Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario, George Brown College and Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office. Findings from this study demonstrated consistent themes across participants that are noteworthy. The study consisted of 25 participants who successfully completed the Bridging program between 2006-2010. All participants were female and most are recent immigrants (i.e. they have been in the country for less than 5 years). Almost all participants are Registered Early Childhood Educators in Ontario and their education credentials vary from diplomas, undergraduate degrees and graduate degrees. Many participants held a variety of teaching positions before immigrating to Canada. Most spoke English as a second language.

When asked about experiences in the bridging program, most participants stated that it was extremely helpful and opened a door to many more opportunities. Courses related to the Canadian ECE context such as legislation and the Day Nursery Act were seen as most informative and beneficial. Instructors in the Bridging Program were seen in high regard as being knowledgeable, supportive and friendly. Some improvements suggested include more placement experience, more networking opportunities after completing the program and making course work more manageable (e.g. work load and mobility). Many also suggested that the program be made more accessible through a wider marketing campaign and should continue to be implemented.

Participants had varied experiences applying for jobs in Canada prior to completing the Bridging Program. Some participants stated that they did not seek ECE employment whilst others stated that they volunteered at early learning centres or worked at a job unrelated to the early learning field. Many felt that it was difficult to obtain a job with foreign credentials and never knew about equivalency programs in Canada; most heard about the program through friends or when applying for jobs they were told to get their equivalency or be registered with the College of ECE.

Since completing the ECE Bridging program, most participants are working in early learning environments. However, many are concerned with insufficient wages, hours and benefits. Many participants are still seeking full-time, permanent positions and are particularly concerned with not having a sense of security to support their families. Others, attributed their employment satisfaction with their current positions to luck; the staff they work with and their passion for working with children. There were many barriers to achieving their full potential in Canada that the participants identified including their English language skills (and accent), discrimination and a lack of recognition for their international credentials or experience. Other issues the participants raised was the process of the job search being difficult and that they hoped for greater assistance with networking. Most participants said they hope for higher wages, greater access to funding (for doing further schooling), more acceptance and recognition from employers as competent and capable in the field of early learning. Almost all participants stated that they hope to get better positions (e.g. in full-day kindergarten, supervisory roles, consulting or in policy). There were several participants that enjoy their current positions but others who have sought work elsewhere unrelated to early learning because they have been unsuccessful in seeking employment in the field of early childhood. Almost all participants are still in pursuit of their employment goals in Canada and are hoping to achieve them soon.

Mehta, S., Janmohamed, Z. & Corter, C. (2011). *An investigation of the career paths of internationally trained early childhood educators transitioning into early learning programs*. Toronto: ON: The Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, OISE/ University of Toronto.