

POLICY MONITOR #3

Exploring the experiences of internationally educated professionals in early learning

In 2006, The Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO) launched *The Access to Early Childhood Education Program* (also referred to as the Bridging Program) in collaboration with the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office and the School of Early Childhood at George Brown College. The project's aim was to address barriers faced by internationally educated Early Childhood Educators (ECEs) who were in pursuit of meaningful and secure employment in the field of Early Childhood Education in Ontario. The Bridging Program provided eligible candidates with the opportunity to upgrade their skills and experiences for recognition in Ontario. The program acknowledges applicants' international experience and education and is designed to integrate these skills with the new College of ECE standards of practice. The program also provides supplementary supports in job search skills, networking and employment support. Upon successful completion of the program, applicants receive an AECEO Letter of Equivalency Certificate.

Since the program commenced in 2006, just over 100 individuals with international education credentials have completed the equivalency program. The graduates from the bridging program completed post-secondary education in several different countries. Graduates' educational credentials varied with diplomas, undergraduate degrees and graduate degrees. All the candidates entering the bridging program were women and all had successfully passed the English proficiency test. Many had very diverse professional experiences worldwide, bringing varied experiences from their home countries.

The Atkinson Centre and the Jackman Institute for Child Study in collaboration with the AECEO are investigating the factors that influence employment in early childhood for internationally educated educators. The project examines whether foreign undergraduate education in early education and professional experience outside of Canada has an impact on the type of employment gained in Ontario. The study also examines what barriers and supports exist in finding employment and achieving professional satisfaction. Data is being collected through document analysis and interviews with the graduates and the findings will guide a final report to the AECEO with a goal to raise knowledge about the value that global educators bring to the Canadian early learning context.

Preliminary findings indicate that graduates of the Bridging Program find the program useful however, the quest to find secure employment in Ontario within the field of early childhood education after completion of the program continues to be a struggle. One graduate shared her thoughts on her experiences applying for jobs in Ontario in early childhood education: "Since I came to Canada, it has always been a low paying, temporary or contract or supply job, never something permanent or longer than 6 months and that is what I am looking for. I just need a better job and security and I think I don't have it because I am not Canadian." (Bridging Program graduate 2009). The Bridging Program is a stepping stone for many Internationally Trained Educators to integrate into the early childhood education field. The current research project continues to investigate these experiences and will report findings in June 2011.

Janmohamed, Z., Mehta, S., Corter, C. (Forthcoming). The Atkinson Centre and the Jackman Institute of Child Study, University of Toronto