Professional Development: Early Learning Workforce Member Insights

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Research Question

• In the renewal or maturity stages of their professional practice, what meaning can be made of early childhood educators’ experiences navigating Oregon’s professional development system?

• What have been the experiences of early childhood educators in identifying themselves as early childhood education professionals?

• How do early childhood educators identify their experiences of professional engagement?
The dilemma unfolds between the day-to-day experiences of having to act concretely, spontaneously and autonomously in ever-changing, uncertain situations which, to a large extent, are determined by factors beyond the practitioners’ control, and the pressure that arises from increasing socio-cultural and socio-economic expectations to produce predetermined outcomes in this complex work context (Dalli & Urban, 2010, p.5).
Methodology

Theoretical Lens
Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Data Collection
Prescreening
Collage
Collage by Researcher-Participant

Recruitment of Participants
Stage of Renewal & Maturity
Metro area
Work with children 3-5 year

Data Interpretation
Bridling
Knots in the web of experience
Cross-hatching & a/r/tography

Interview
The Intertwine of Personal and Professional Self

Representing professionalism: Collage as a way to make meaning of professional identity and personal experience
“A reporter asked Pablo Casall’s, “Why do you keep practicing your cello everyday? You are in your eighties.” He shared, “I think I’m making progress.”

And that’s how I feel now, now after 11 years, I feel like I kinda get this. I speak preschool, but my learnings not close to being done.”

~ Early childhood Educator, 11 years in the field
“I started thinking about my journey in the context of the provocations like those kinds of themes kind of came out, like the isolation, but wanting to be part of the community and not quite feeling like I’m really part of it.”

~ Early Childhood Educator, 5 years in the field
The Emotional Labor of the Work

What if this becomes my career?
“I feel like my family is cheated in this job because it’s way more than a full time job and it’s still not done. Take my weekends, I buy the food for the week, on my weekends, prepare the activities, clean and vacuum. So it’s not done, it’s never done.

If a parent picks-up their child late, then I miss time with my own children, I go upstairs and there is no one to have dinner with. So, I don’t see anybody and ask them how their day was. Sometimes, I don’t get to see my family until the next day.”

~ Early Childhood Educator & Licensed K-6th teach, 3 years in the field
“I’m learning how to do this!”

“Super interesting.”

“I’m good at this.”

“Families and children...”

“Learning is an incredible...”

“Let’s move to Portland!”

“OK! Never been there!”

2008

2007

2006

2005

“what if this becomes my career?”

“I had other plans...”

“The pay is terrible.”

~ Early Childhood Educator & Licensed K-6th teach, 11 years in the field
“The hard part is going out into the world being a teacher. Asking yourself, what is your teaching philosophy – it’s tough when you start because you don’t even have one yet – you don’t know what side of the issue you stand on because you never have been faced with really thinking about those issues or actually know people in those situations.”

~ Early Childhood Educator, 5 years in the field
“So now I feel like I am in a place that supports what I believe in and it really makes the way you feel about your work environment significantly different, especially with all of the issues in our field.

We are so hard on ourselves, and it often feels like our work is made small. If we don’t make connections – to remind ourselves at the end of the day and force yourself to think about how you made a difference – well then you feel alone in your work.”

~ Early Childhood Educator, 5 years in the field
Individual Journeys in Early Childhood Educator Preparation

Rivers, Roads, and Pathways
“This is the river, the river of my career...I don’t know if we really even call it my career, my passion, so, it doesn’t really have an end to it because it’s also my life, so I don’t really know where one begins and one ends.”

~ Early Childhood Educator, 4 years in the field
“I always ask people when I have the opportunity like how did you start working with kids? Because people either start working with children and they stop...it’s like the classic. Teachers either are new teachers, like 1 to 5 years, or like 10 years or more.

So within that first 5 years something happens and you either keep going or something happens and you stop. And so those teachers that have come past 5 years like this are pretty interesting stories because you’ve got to have some reason to make you want to do it better, cause it’s really hard in the beginning.”

~ Early Childhood Educator, 10 years in the field
Asynchronous Journeys in in Synchronous Systems

It’s like finding your people
“I had never been a preschool classroom before in my life. I was hired [at a program] and they said, “you will learn this part.” I spent the whole summer in the Library reading every book I could find on early childhood.

It helped that I was willing to learn...and then I found this community and I talked to a lot of great people, mentor teachers, who were willing to share what they knew.

It is such a homecoming, when the last pieces fall into place, it’s like you find your people.”

~Early Childhood Educator, 8 years in field
“I am beginning to see myself as a mentor. It is not my only role. I feel like it is a balance – learning from people all the time much younger than me and also the opportunity to mentor and share some things I have learned. I put it down here, I’ve worked with over a 1,000 preschool age children, I think I added it up and it was 1,006.”

~ Early Childhood Educator, 20 years in the field
“So, I really wish we had a community, where we didn’t get lost in the system.

The personal connection. Much of our professional development is like adding oil to our car. It’s something you do. But it is confusing and not always aligned.

So you become afraid, of what follows because there is no real path, it’s a scary time- trying to feel out your way---but if you know---then you can make better choices in choosing work and with the children.”

~Early Childhood Educator, 8 years in field
‘What makes me feel part of the early childhood education community? It’s the process of being a life long learner. A big part of being part of my community is finding other people who are interested in this field.

And, I really gravitate to the people who don’t just come to work and go home, but the people who want to talk and think about ideas. The people who are engaged in higher level thinking are the ones that really keep me engaged in my profession and challenged.”

~ Early Childhood Educator, 20 years in the field
Implications for Essential Themes

• The intertwined personal and professional self
  • Creates strength and vulnerability

• The Emotional Labor of the Work
  • Knowledge of the cost to self in working in early childhood

• Individual Journeys in Early Childhood Educator Preparation
  • Individualized understandings of professional practice

• Asynchronous Journeys in Synchronous systems
  • The complexity of the system – ultimately leads to the bifurcation of us/them
Impact of Individualized Professional Development

Continuum of Professional Preparation

Individualized journeys of professional development

Intertwine of personal and professional self

Subjective professional identity
Early childhood educators are relationship based individuals.

- **Life Skills**
- **Reflective Practice**
- **Emotional Supports**

Supports for the emotional lives of early childhood educators
Early Childhood Professional Trajectories with State Professional Development System Structures

- Center Based Program Individuals
- Family Child Care
- Systems Individuals

Katz's Stages of Professional Development:
- Survival
- Consolidation
- Renewal
- Maturity

Continuum of Professional Preparation

Leave within one year
Leave between 4-7 years
Leave after 10 years
“Preschools need their teachers to find them interesting and engaging and care about them deeply and want to have relationships with them. They need their teachers to be highly skilled, highly intentional curious thinking persons themselves and they need them to have compensation that provides them a quality of life to stay in the field.”

~ Early Childhood Educator, 11 year