

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF
THE COLLEGE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS
COMMUNICATIONS: HOW DO THEY SHAPE THE PROFESSIONAL
IDENTITY OF
ONTARIO'S REGISTERED EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS?

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ABSTRACT

The College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) regulates registered early childhood educators (RECEs) in Ontario, Canada. The CECE distributes numerous communications to RECEs, whereby the text (both implicitly and explicitly) works to situate ECEs within a particular professional identity. This research study applies discourse analysis to code and categorize text from 66 communications disseminated by the CECE to RECEs. I identify five key discourses as well as several discursive strategies used to reinforce the discourses that contribute to the construction of a professional identity for Ontario RECEs. This study also employs two theoretical frameworks, feminist theory and critical race theory (CRT), to examine “what is not being said” by the CECE about the realities of RECE working conditions. I offer a counter-discourse to provide a narrative account of how particular RECE working conditions and real life professional experiences collide with the five discourses, and create a professional crisis in a current patchwork system.

Keywords: professional identity, discourses, constructionism, feminist theory, critical race theory (CRT)

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In an effort to raise the professional status of early childhood educators (ECEs) in Ontario, advocates from the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario (AECEO) led a movement in the late 1990s and early 2000s to regulate the profession with a self-regulatory organization. They were successful in 2009 and the establishment of a self-regulatory college in Ontario confirmed the professional status for registered early childhood educators (RECEs) who meet “entry to practice requirements,” and “standards of practice”. The College of Early Childhood Educators’ (CECE) has a unique position as the only regulatory college for ECEs in Canada.

As the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector approaches its seventh year of the regulation and registration of RECEs in Ontario, some RECEs are still unclear about the role of the College. This research study is concerned with the role of the CECE’s professional resources in implicitly and explicitly producing discourses (reoccurring messages) that construct particular ways of being, acting and reflecting as a RECE professional in Ontario. Discursive practices are ways that individuals within discourses interact, reflect and respond to values, beliefs and assumptions of discourses (Warren, 2014). With the understanding that ECEs have a minimal role in constructing their professional identities (Osgood, 2010); this study seeks to shed light on the discursive strategies employed by the CECE in Ontario that influences RECEs towards accepting discursive practices that serve to shape their professional identity.

Background

In Ontario an RECE professional must register with the CECE and maintain a membership in “good standing” in order to use the protected titles of early childhood educator (ECE) and registered early childhood educator (RECE) (ECE Act, 2007). This title protection

authorizes members of the CECE to use these titles or abbreviations, which also include their French equivalents, “éducatrice de la petite enfance” (EPE), “éducateur de la petite enfance” (EPE), “éducatrice de la petite enfance inscrite” (EPEI) and “éducateur de la petite enfance inscrit” (EPEI) (CECE, 2014c, p.1).

To become a registered member with the CECE, an applicant must have a diploma or degree from a program that relates specifically to early childhood education, and be able to provide proof of practicum experience. Once registered, practice settings differ greatly for Ontario RECEs, they work in a number of roles within: licensed childcares (centre and home based), kindergarten and primary classrooms, special education, family resource programs and parent/caregiver drop-in programs.

A self-regulatory organization exists to protect the interests of the public and the children RECEs work with. In 2007, the Ontario government passed the Early Childhood Educators Act that mandated the CECE. The Act defines what constitutes the practice of the ECE profession, requirements for CECE membership, and responsibilities of the CECE registrar and associated committees. The Act also defines the role of the CECE as “principle stakeholder” to regulate the practice of early childhood education and govern its members who register annually to maintain certification to practice the profession. Since 2011, the CECE has released membership data annually. In 2015, the CECE’s (2014-2015) *Annual Report* demonstrated that the membership represented 47, 295 females and 823 male ECEs totaling 48, 118 members (CECE, 2015a). Also in 2015, the CECE received 5,435 applications for registration out of which 5,217 applicants became members (CECE, 2015c).

Of the strategic priorities outlined in 2015 by the CECE in their annual report, four are highly relevant to this study. Priority two articulates that the CECE will work to revise the *Code*

of Ethics and Standards of Practice; and priority three relates to the development of documents that support the Continuous Professional Learning Program (CPL). Priority four calls for the College to continue to develop member services to build on the knowledge of membership diversity. Lastly, priority five states goals to enhance the CECE's public profile to build on external relations and ensure stakeholders (such as the public and members) are aware of the Colleges regulatory mandates (CECE, 2016a).

From the establishment of the CECE in 2009 to April 2016 when this study commenced, RECEs received a plethora of print and digital communications. This qualitative research study examines a sample of these CECE communications using discourse analysis (Wetherell, 1994). Discourse analysis (DA) is the application of a critical lens that looks directly at text and language. In this study, DA is used to identify key discourses in the communications that contribute to the construction of a professional identity for RECEs practicing in Ontario. I suggest that two specific sources that contribute to this construction of a professional identity for ECEs include: (1) registration with the CECE and (2) consistent contact with and exposure to communications from the regulatory college (CECE).

To explore key discourses found in CECE communications, this study aims to address the research question that asks: what discourses are found in communications from the College of ECEs Ontario that contribute to the construction of a professional identify for ECEs in Ontario? Two additional sub-questions serve the study's focus by also asking: what are the implications of this construction for RECEs in Ontario? and What role can counter narratives or counter discourses of a professional identity play? To answer these questions, a particular analytical lens and key concepts from constructionist, feminist and critical race theory are applied.

Theoretical Frameworks

According to Gee (1999) language can be used for specific social activities and social identities, which includes membership in groups. In the process of language-use, it is everywhere and it is always social and political. RECEs are consistently exposed to influential and authoritative language, communications and discourse that can shape who they are as professionals and determine the specifics of their practice. This constant barrage of communication is hegemonic. According to Gramsci (1971), hegemony is power that works to convince individuals and social classes to ascribe to social values and assumed norms of exploitive systems. More importantly for the purpose of this study, hegemony is a view of the world that is inherited and “uncritically absorbed” which can fuel the passivity of professionals impacted by it (Gramsci, 1971, p.333).

The CECE holds hegemonic power because it assumes social power that relies on voluntary participation. The text and discourses they produce in communications appear as the common understandings that guide everyday meaning making of the world and RECE work. To explore this hegemony in relation to the College and expose taken-for-granted discourses of professional identity disseminated by the CECE, this study will utilize a social constructionist lens while applying principles from feminist and critical race theory.

Social Constructionist Theory

Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge and communication that examines the development of constructed understandings of the world (Gablin, 2014). The underlying belief in this theory is that “a great deal of human life exists as it does due to social and interpersonal influences (Gergen, 1985, p. 265). An aim of many social constructionists is to explore the current distribution of power (Diaz-Leon, 2013). A major goal of this study is to explore the

power distribution that occurs through CECE discourses that are contingent on social practices like regulation, which reinforces the distribution of resources such as CECE communications.

An underlying premise of this project is that the discourses evident in the communications are laden with power. Definitions of power usually rest on the idea that one main group can get another group to do something that they would not otherwise do because of the power that the main group holds. According to Russell (1938) who provides a basic definition of power, it is the ability to do something that produces intentional and anticipated effects. Extending Russell's definition, Wrong (1995) states, "power is the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others" (p.2).

As a regulatory organization, the CECE holds power and I will examine how particular discourses disseminated by the CECE have the power to shape RECE professional identity. The power the CECE holds supports the discourses they produce and distribute to RECEs through a range of print and digital materials. Outlined next are specific principles from feminist theory and CRT because both theories outline specific understandings of power in relation to women and racialized groups.

Feminist Theory

According to the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (2007), 96% of childcare workers (including RECEs and ECE assistants) are woman, as a group they are ethnically diverse encompassing different, cultures, languages, abilities and identities. They also receive some of the lowest wages out of laboured workers. With this in mind and equipped with motivations to seek social justice for RECEs, utilizing a feminist lens for this study provides room for a deeper analysis with regard to gender. Employing principles of a liberal feminism, this study takes on the view that men and women are entitled to equal rights however women

(particularly low waged women) are currently disadvantaged with regard to rights and respect in comparison to men (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012).

To analyze CECE communications this study employs four principles of feminist theory they include:

1. *Experiential knowledge* is a part of a women's knowledge base that in recent years is considered a critical asset. Traditionally knowledge is valuable only when it supports conformity of specific standards (Mancilla-Amaya, Sanín, & Szczerbicki, 2012). Applied in this study, the concept allows for the inclusion of reflections on how women (who make up a majority of the CECE) understand their professional identity constructions.
2. *Power* is understood to be an active resource and a beneficial social good but it is currently inadequately distributed amongst men and women and among groups socially defined by race, class, and ability. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012). In this research study, the CECE is understood to hold power but it is assumed that RECEs should also have power.
3. *Intersectionality* has become a predominant way of conceptualizing the relationship between systems of oppression that construct the multiple identities of people and social locations within hierarchies of power (Carastathis, 2014). In this study, RECEs are understood to hold multiple identities with minimal power.
4. This study also works under the assumption that *Oppression and Disadvantage* impacts all women (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2012).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) asserts that the experiential knowledge of visual minorities is appropriate, legitimate, and an integral part to analyzing and understanding racial inequality

(Munoz, 2009). Looking specifically at experiential knowledge as a concept of feminist theory and CRT, the term is often referred to as first-hand experience. In other words, "...you got tuh go there tuh know there" (Hurstun, 1990, p.111). In addition, central to CRT is the concept that "historically silenced voices of color" need opportunities to share their stories. In this light CRT gives voice to visible minorities such as RECEs, and guards against limiting scopes of understanding as resting solely on White conventions. Furthermore, "seeking the experiences of marginalized individuals on these grounds elicits information that is often lost" (Munoz, 2009, p.59).

Like feminist theory, central to CRT is a commitment to social justice and equity and this study utilizes three other concepts that are central to CRT. The first concept *assumes that racism is a regular occurrence in everyday contemporary societies* including the context for this study Ontario, Canada. Similar to feminist theory, the second concept, *intersectionality*, provides an opportunity to look deeper into data to uncover instances where sexism and/or racist discourses may intersect. The final concept employs the use of *counter storytelling*. It allows for the underscoring of racial and social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1998). For the remainder of this study this narrative is referred to as a counter discourse because it aligns with the research topic and theory. Finally, using CRT provides opportunities to challenge dominant discourses and employ counter discourses that broaden the perspectives of stories told by RECEs about who they are as professionals.

Insider Positionality

I am a registered Early Childhood Educator who graduated from college with an ECE diploma in 2009; I hold a Bachelor's degree in Child Development and will have completed a Master of Arts degree in Early Childhood Studies by the end of 2016. During the process of

conducting this study, I transitioned from one graduate program to another and I am currently pursuing a Masters of Teaching degree with Ontario Teaching Certification. As a member in good standing with the CECE with over 8 years of experience in the sector, I felt I had limited understanding of the full scope of expectations outlined for me by the CECE. Although I feel that I am a “good” and highly effective ECE, I recognize that there is a gap in my knowledge with regard to all legal and professional expectations communicated by the CECE. I am also aware that many ECEs in the province still have questions about the role of the CECE and their specific mandates. These two factors have fuelled my motivation for embarking on this particular study.

In the past, ECE professionals have struggled for recognition of the profession (Helterbran & Fennimore, 2004; Lobman & Ryan, 2007). Current literature demonstrates a growing appreciation for ECEs as professionals (Dalli, 2008) who have unique training and expertise (Brock, 2013; Happo, Maatta & Uusiautti, 2012; Langford, 2007). However, moving away from the literature to the lived realities of ECEs, there are many stories that can be found on social media venues such as Facebook, that document the challenges RECEs in Ontario face in their daily work. A compilation of stories experienced by me, read, and told to me by my colleagues, highlights professional grief experienced by RECEs working in Ontario. This story is included to illustrate how professionalization through self-regulation only addresses one of the long-standing challenges ECEs have faced historically. It also serves to underscore the importance of this study by providing the first counter-discourse that articulates an RECE professional identity.

Please imagine that you are a RECE and that you have recently graduated from a college or university ECE program. With great delight, you become a member of the CECE as you are mandated to do in order to practice the profession. With membership confirmed you make many attempts to secure optimal employment

that would include basic elements such as a decent wage, entry-level benefits etc. When you are looking for a job, what you come across is an abundance of opportunities that are embarrassingly low paying with most not including any medical or dental benefits. Eventually when you enter the workforce, you are faced with the fact that many of the remarkable things you have learned in training cannot be completely implemented. Often there is no support from colleagues and one individual faced a note in her mailbox that read “you don’t belong here”. You can ask for support from administration but often ill equipped themselves, you are told to “deal with it, it’s the job”. You are also told to pursue professional learning continuously, but there is little to no support from your employer. There are so many expectations put on you, but how can you fulfil them realistically? Imagine crying in the restroom with your colleagues due to serious occurrences that relate to instances of oppression. Imagine that you face with great expectations alongside massive challenges. Who is the good ECE I ask amongst these circumstances and how can they practice with excellence, remain accountable at all times and continue to project a professional image? How is their professional identity impacted? In scenarios like the ones described above, how long will RECEs last before the system and its “agendas” expressed most often through CECE communications, break them down?

With a counter discourse fresh in mind, the next chapter provides a review of the literature with regard to factors that contribute to an ECE professional identity. Chapter three elaborates on the methods used to conduct this research study, which includes details about the data collection process, organization and analysis of the information. Chapter four provides a summary of the findings by describing the most prevalent discourses, discursive strategies enacted by the CECE and examples of where they were found in the data. The final chapter offers an analysis and concluding discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The literature presented in this chapter highlights research that looks specifically at ECE professional work and factors that contribute to the construction of ECE professional identities. To begin, I focus on literature that seeks to define an ECE professional identity. Literature suggests that professional identities are both individually and socially constructed and closely connected to definitions of professionalism. I then describe key individual and social factors

associated with particular constructions of ECE professional identities. At a micro level, individual factors such as self-esteem and sense of expertise distinct to each ECE contribute to the construction of a particular professional identity. From a macro level perspective, the most consistent social factors found in the literature include professional training, professional experiences, professional relationships and professional learning.

As professional membership with the College continues to grow, this research studies exploration of how discourses embedded in these individual and social factors may construct the professional identity of RECEs is extremely relevant. The CECE distributes many communications to its professional members of which its text works to contextualize and construct the professional identity and scope of early childhood educator work in Ontario.

Professional Identity

The scholarly literature describes professional identity in a number of different ways. Warren's (2014) definition of professional identity is a helpful starting point. A professional identity is both a personalized and socially constructed concept that rests on a practitioner's feelings and attitudes about the job they do alongside societal views of the job. As ECEs navigate the professional landscape, their professional identity often expands to complement their growing expertise and experience (Warren, 2014). This includes having extensive working experience, completion of specialized training and continuous professional learning. Discourse is also central to this understanding of a constructed professional identity. Moss and Petrie (2002) describe dominant discourses (controlled by those with power) as having a major role in shaping and constructing perceptions of truth and knowledge and in the construction of an ECE professional identity. In the ECEC sector many discourses focus on ECE professionalism and

this is due to the close connection between the concept of professionalism and particular constructions of optimal ECE identities- those who practice with excellence.

ECE Professionalism

Described by Warren (2014), professionalism is an evolving concept that powerfully shapes early childhood teacher's subjectivities, and is explicitly reflected in professional standards. Professionalism is also closely connected to a professional's individual views, self-reflections and traditional and contemporary views on the profession.

According to Auch (2015), traditional alignments of ECEC work with mothering have hindered professionalization of the sector. In a paper probing the differences between folk/mothering and scientific concepts of ECE professionalism Katz (1985) lists eight elements of ECE professionalism: (1) social necessity, (2) altruism, (3) autonomy, (4) a code of ethics, (5) proper distance from clients, (6) standards of practice, (7) continuous training and, (8) specialized knowledge. Similarly, functionalist discourse on professionalism places high value on professional elements like qualifications, regulatory standards, professional autonomy, community status and remuneration (Kinos, 2010).

However according to Brock (2013), there is a need to build a model of early year's professionalism from the perspectives of practitioners, and this has not been completely reflected by other researchers. Uncovered in Brock's interview data collected with ECE participants are seven dimensions of professionalism which include: (1) professional knowledge, (2) qualifications, (3) development, (4) skills, (5) autonomy, (6) values, (7) ethics and (8) rewards.

Individual Factors

Individual factors are related to, and contribute to, an ECE's feelings about themselves as professionals, and how they perform their professional work. However, it should be noted,

according to theories of constructionism (Johnstone, 2015; Langford, 2007; Warren, 2014) these individual factors work together with social factors to influence ECE professional identity.

Self-Esteem

Individual self-esteem is a factor that can contribute to an ECE feeling satisfied or unsatisfied about the work they do. In one study from Ireland that identified ECE self-esteem as a factor in constructing a professional identity, data suggests some ECEs did not feel they had an identity as a professional (Moloney, 2010).

As a result of studying the professionalism of educators Harwood, Klopper, Osanjin & Vanderlee (2013) looked indirectly at self-esteem as it relates to a professional identity. The researchers found that educators might resist external constructions of their professionalism that contribute to the formation of their professional identity. According to the researchers, this takes place because educators are more aware and reflective of how they are positioned as professionals. Additionally, another study suggests ECE self-esteem is associated with practitioner expertise. When ECEs are regarded as expert professionals, (a person who has ultimate knowledge of their own field), it includes a positive underlying message that supports higher professional self-esteem (Happo, Maatta & Uuusiatti, 2012).

Sense of Professional Expertise

On an individual level the feelings an ECE has about their professional expertise contributes to the construction of a particular professional identity. In the case of Korean ECEs working with children who have special needs Heo, Cheatham, Hemmeter & Noh, (2014) concluded that those with extra training aimed at enhancing expertise in the area of special needs support were held in high regard. Practitioners were set apart from those who were untrained in

the area. This additional training helped these specific educators to distinguish themselves as experts, which enhanced their individual sense of professionalism and professional identity.

In Finland, research conducted by Happo, Maatta & Uusiautti, (2012) argues that the core strength of the Finnish daycare system rests on the high status and professional identity of educators as experts. ECE research participants identified personal life history, education, and personal attitudes about work as the most influential factors in expanding their professional expertise. The researchers also suggest that ECE expertise requires mastery of skills, but mastery of skills that is not enough. Expertise grows with professionalism and according to Caulfield (1997), “professionalism is not an end in itself- a state of being- but an ongoing effort- a process of becoming” (p. 263). During this “state of becoming” (which is not free from the influence of social factors), there is room for the constant reinvention of ECE professional identity.

Social Factors

Mentioned earlier, a number of social factors highlighted in literature have a direct relation to, and contribution to the construction of a particular ECE professional identity in addition to individual factors. Viewed as outside influences that ECEs may have less control over, the social factors include professional training, professional experience, workplace conditions (i.e. workplace environment, and wages and benefits), professional relationships and professional learning.

Professional Training

It is a clearly recognized position across different professions (i.e. ECEs, medical doctors, lawyers and nurses) that training supports the development of a professional and provides a theoretical foundation that equips a professional with work skills. According to Langford (2007)

acquisition of child development, knowledge and discourses in post-secondary ECE programs shape the construction of a good student with an appropriate emerging professional identity.

In the Irish context, there is a clear link between the construction of a professional identity and qualifications because training provides the initial foundation for the construction of a professional identity (Moloney, 2010). According to Moloney (2010) when less qualified educators or educators who are not qualified at all work in the profession, professional identity gradually diminishes because formal training is absent. Findings suggest that as professional identity diminishes individuals working in the profession are more inclined to separate themselves from the professional role. As such, lack of professional training contributes to turnover in the sector and instability in care offered to children. Moloney (2010) later argues that standards for qualifications determined by basic training legislation means that less turnover would occur and educators would be better prepared to face challenges in the sector.

Training experiences that contribute to ECE values, beliefs and philosophy can work to greatly diminish or enhance professional identity. In a study looking at educator identities and training experiences Chruvu, Souto-Manning, Lencl & Chin-Calubaquib (2015) suggest better supports should be offered to educators in training. More specifically the researchers suggest that educators who may be socially isolated (such as people of colour) deserve specific attention while attending training because it is the foundation for professional experiences to come.

Professional Experience

Professional experience plays a key role in negating, diminishing and strengthening the professional identity of ECEs. Training is an opportunity for ECEs to gain experience and direct exposure to the profession, as this occurs Gablin (2014) suggests each of us creates our own world based on our exposure and perceptions of the actual world. During this process language,

speech and communication is seen as having a principle role in the interactive processes through which we understand the world and ourselves, however there are other intersections acknowledged in research. For example, race plays a key role in the construction of a particular professional identity in early learning, it is linked in one study to a particular way of understanding everyday happenings (workplace conditions) in practice and training experiences (Chruvu, Souto-Manning, Lencl & Chin-Calubaquib, 2015).

Working Conditions

Literature consistently highlights two specific working conditions, workplace environment and poor wages and minimal or no medical benefits, as major contributing factors in the construction of a professional identity.

Workplace Environment.

The environment that ECEs work in has a direct impact on their professional identity. Looking specifically at ECEs in Greece, Rentzou (2012) found that specific variables in work environments contribute to “burnout syndrome” and influence ECE professional identity. According to the study, most explicit factors include depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. The effect of these variables was identified in the diminished professional identity ECE participants held and the reduced quality of care they then offered to children. With a diminished professional identity, ECEs face increased challenges with their work, which often results in burnout syndrome that contributes to lack of motivation to do “excellent” work.

Workplace environments that lack mentorship opportunities (Slimmer, 2012) are spaces that hinder the professional identities of ECEs. In the case of one new practitioner, Botha & Onwu (2013) found that her developing professional identity was reinforced by the support she

received from her peers in the workplace. This support consisted of time and space to engage in mentorship.

ECE survey data from a study conducted in Quebec looked closely at professional identity and focused on variables that include an educator's feelings of competence, perceived recognition and desire for involvement in relation to their working conditions (Royer & Moreau, 2016). The researchers found that the overall psychological well-being of ECEs was high amongst those working in centre and home based locations but following the first five years of service due to increased experience and pressures, a well-being decreased considerably. After 20 or more years of service well-being levels rose again substantially which was associated with better recognition. According to Royer and Moreau (2016), the overall effect of these variables on professional identity is found in their power to impact work psychology and psychological well-being. ECEs continue to be displeased in Quebec about the current landscape of the sector and inadequate wages and benefits, and this specific study serves to demonstrate the close association between ECE professional identity, professional competence and compensation.

Wages and Benefits.

Kim (2013) suggests that for both the teaching and ECE profession, constructions of what it means to be a professional as well as professional identity are impacted by the patriarchal structure of society. The central idea articulated by Kim is that women dominate early learning but the sector as a whole operates under a patriarchal system. Due to the structure of this system, society has yet to address key issues that affect women workers such as fair wages.

One recent report (Akbari & McCuaig, 2014) found that amongst full-time positions for ECEs in Canada, the average salary was \$36, 900 per year (usually without benefits) and there are major variations across Canada so that a significant number of ECEs earn less than this

average. ECEs who complete formalized training can typically expect low wages regardless of the level of training they have acquired (i.e. college, university). According to the report, about 75 percent of practitioners working in childcare and other preschool settings have post-secondary training and hold a degree or diploma, but they often earn less than the average provincial wage with little to no benefits Akbari & McCuaig, 2014). These low wages and lack of other benefits situate ECEs as “non-professionals” because teaching professionals who work in public schools (who are regulated and certified to practice) are compensated as professionals. Poor wages and working conditions construct a unique professional identity for ECEs that is dissimilar to other professions such as the practice of medicine and dentistry where they (i.e. doctors and dentists) are far better compensated for professional work.

Professional Relationships

A few studies clearly articulate how ECE professional relationships with colleagues and families influences professional identity (Peterson et al; Underwood, Di Santo, Valeo, Langford, 2016 and Walton, 2013). The most common conception in literature is that the relationship with both colleagues and families affects ECE professional identity because they consistently probe educator efficacy and challenge professional knowledge.

In a study examining the processes by which ECEs and their mentors negotiate the social and emotional aspects of their work relationship Peterson et al. (2010) gathered feedback from 25 mentors who worked with over 200 infant, toddler and preschool educators. According to findings, mentoring affected educator’s professional identity explicitly through the additional support it fostered. The mentor’s (who were also early learning educators) professional identity also benefited because they had opportunities to continually reflect on their interpersonal skills

and the growth of their colleagues. Explained in the study mentorship allows educators to positively reinvent their own practice, which works to enhance their professional identity.

Two additional studies discuss specific issues that arise in professional relationships in kindergarten classrooms that work to both enhance and hinder ECE professional identity. According to Walton (2013) several themes were noted in the challenges ECEs faced in their working relationships with teachers in Ontario (OCT) in public schools challenges include: struggles with professional hierarchy, marginalization, mismatch between interprofessional practices, barriers to communication, differences in professional knowledge and mismatch between professional learning opportunities. According to Walton, to strengthen the professional identity of RECEs working in public schools, teaching partners (RECEs and OCTs) need time and support to engage in authentic dialogue that aims to create a culture of understanding about the true essence of their particular professional roles and responsibilities.

Another study that looked at this recently crafted working relationship in Ontario found that an ideal working relationship/partnership of the RECEs and OCTs is best facilitated through co-teaching (Underwood, Di Santo, Valeo & Langford, 2016). The study explains why there needs to be appropriate balance between the duties associated with being a RECE and an OCT. Ultimately it minimizes confusion between exact professional roles and contributes to better quality teaching. In an effort to connect this concept to the next social factor it is reasonable to suggest that in managing the duties for their specific role ECEs and OCTs should actively engage in professional learning opportunities together offered by all school boards in Ontario because they often work to enhance professional identity and the resulting professional relationship.

Professional Learning

As of September 2016, continuous professional learning will be a mandated requirement for RECEs practising the profession in Ontario (CECE, 2016). Professional learning is the knowledge transfer that takes place once an ECE leaves training and engages in professional development and learning through venues such as courses, programs, on-line classes, workshops or seminars etc.). The act of doing this continuously evolves into a life-long learning commitment. According to Barber, Cohrssen & Church (2014) professional learning contributes to the ongoing development of a professional and constructions of ethical practice (Barber, Cohrssen, & Church, 2014). The nature of professional learning that rests heavily on personal development is more beneficial than not to the construction of professional identity for ECEs because professional learning is an assumed obligation (in a Western context) for those who consider themselves to be educators.

In summary, I presented in this chapter several individual and social factors that researchers conclude shape an ECE's professional identity. Inherent in these factors are powerful discourses that reiterate the acceptable ways of being, thinking, acting and in representing the profession. This study focuses on the under researched social factor of regulatory colleges, and analyzes communications produced by the CECE from 2008 and to June 2016 for discourses that may contribute to the shaping the ECE professional identity in Ontario. The next chapter describes methods applied to carry out discourse analysis in order to answer the main research question: what discourses are found in CECE communications that contribute to the construction of a professional identity for ECEs in Ontario?

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

This chapter elaborates on the qualitative design process, and the collection and organization of the data used to answer the research question. This study enacts a discourse

analysis (DA) methodological approach (Potter & Wetherell, 1994;1998) because it complements the selected theoretical frameworks: social constructionism, feminist theory and CRT. They work together by allowing the researcher to identify discourses that contain messages about power, race and gender and construct social relations like dominance and oppression. While there are several different approaches to applying DA as a research method, I will draw on Potter & Wetherell's (1994) and Gill's (2000) approaches to the application of DA in the design, data collection and interpretation of the findings. Their strategies are appropriate for this study because their methods have been referenced numerous times in scholarly literature and they are widely recognized as credible DA theorists. Their work is particularly useful to this study because they focus on the constructionist nature of discourse and the effects of discourse on social identities. This is most useful in acquiring an understanding about what discourses are in CECE communications.

Background

To strengthen my understanding of the expanding professional duties RECEs are accountable for in Ontario, I developed a study that would act as an informative process. Guided by common questions, that both the researcher and members from the profession ask about the roles of the CECE, (a specific strategy of DA methodology) this research project ultimately endeavours to examine how professional identities are mediated by reoccurring communications, public messages and professional resources distributed by the CECE. Further to that, the methods applied in this study support a discussion of the implications of discourses found in the data analysis stage.

Key Terms

Three important terms related to discourse analysis are communications, discourse, and analysis. Defining these terms offers insight into how language is used to construct meanings about professionalism and professional identity. Following that, a description of DA's enactment in this study is explained alongside all methods used to collect and organize the data.

What are Communications?

Throughout this research, study data collected from the CECE has been referred to as "communications." This term was selected because it provides a summative label for the documents that were coded. In all instances where communications are mentioned in this study, I am referring to documents that include text (with some documents including graphics and photographs). Communications represent all literary sources that have been categorized, coded and stored in a "communications binder" and represent a specific data source gathered by the researcher. Initially all communications from the CECE were considered as including potential data so documents were not ruled out as long as they were accessible online via the CECE website, or in hard copy from their head office. Once a sample size was determined (i.e. 66 different documents) I organized the communications into three categories (professional resources, professional alerts, surveys and reports). Specific communications under the categories include numerous member newsletters, guidelines, special feature articles and reports.

It is important to note that examining these communications could be considered a content analysis, which is "an approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories in a systematic and replicable manner" (Bryman, Bell & Teevan, 2012, p. 367). However, while this study does focus on identifying content that frequently reoccurs in the text, it is more concerned with how the content represents particular discourses that emphasize a version of what should constitute an Ontario RECE's

professional identity. I understand that using DA for this study could be only one interpretation of a version of a social reality being investigated.

What is Discourse in Discourse Analysis?

One argument in language and linguistic based research recommends that anyone who wants to understand human beings has to understand discourse. Discourse can refer to “actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language” (Johnstone, 2007, p.2) and discourse analysts often think of the connections made between language and other modes of meaning-making. Use of the term discourse instead of language is appropriate because “we” are not focusing on language as an abstract system. Instead, this study is interested in what happens when people draw on their knowledge of language and “knowledge based on their memories of things they have said, heard, seen or written before to do things in the world” (Johnstone, 2007, p. 3). Discourse is also explained as the source of knowledge “(people’s generalizations about language are made on the basis of the discourse they participate in) and the result of it (people apply what they already know in creating and interpreting new discourse)” (Johnstone, 2007, p.3). For this reason, the specific way discourse analysts “do” analysis is explained in more detail.

How does a more common understanding of Analysis differ from Discourse Analysis?

The most familiar application of the term analysis is for practices that may be mental or require “taking things apart” (Johnstone, 2007). During discourse analysis, it is common for analysts to divide large portions of discourse into smaller parts. At that point, analysis-based decisions are made about how a researcher may want to go about documenting specific characteristics of the data. In this study, I looked for examples of discursive strategies the CECE

employed to reiterate dominance of discourses across multiple texts. Details are recorded about who was talking, what they were talking about and why, how often and for what purpose in communications. Details were also documented about grammatical patterns, frequency of individual words, topics and phrases. The benefit of documenting discursive practices employed by the CECE to this study is its ability to demonstrate the ways in which the discourses are powerfully disseminated.

Research Design

Based on the understanding that there is a lot going on when people and/or institutions communicate than just the transfer of information, DA's application in this study is not specifically concerned with capturing literal meanings. According to Potter and Wetherell (1994) Discourse analysis (DA) focuses on saying what is implicitly said and also what is unspoken by probing and asking questions about "the purpose lurking behind the ways things are said or presented" (as cited in Bryman, Bell, & Teevan, 2012, p. 304).

Four main concepts outlined by Gill (2000) elaborate the key principles of DA methodology applied in this study, the concepts include:

- 1.) *Discourse is a topic* and thus can be the focus of an inquiry.
- 2.) *Language is constructive* and discourse is a way of constituting a particular view of social reality.
- 3.) *Discourse is a form of action* meaning that the language that results in discourse are ways of accomplishing acts or getting people to do something.
- 4.) *Discourse is rhetorically organized*. The version of events a person or institution presents intends to persuade others of the rightness of the version.

The Sampling Process: Data Collection and Organization

There were two stages associated with categorizing the data. In the first stage, all communications were grouped into like types, which included public information and policy, professional resources, member notices and communications and other CECE documents such as annual reports. Once coding began, I determined that the communications could be organized more clearly into three types of communications. The new categories represent: (1) professional resources, (2), member notices and, (3) surveys and reports. In total 66 communications were analyzed for this study and they are identified in Table 1.1. CECE Communications and Data Categories in Appendix A. According to Wooffitt (2005), it is beneficial to avoid coding an excessive amount of data sets so that ample time can be allotted to analyzing details in the text. The large number of communications was manageable because communications selected contained text that was not relevant to this study's focus. This exclusion of text reduced the number of instances in which I coded text. In addition, some text such articles that highlight changes with the College and the sector was "recycled" across communications (i.e. the same topic and content featured in *Connexions*, is also featured in a *Practice Guideline*, and an *Employer Bulletin*).

In total, there are 17 communications in category one, professional communications: three *Vignettes*, 11 *case studies* and three articles with a focus on professional learning and interprofessional collaboration. These documents were grouped together because they serve to provide ECEs with professional guidance.

Category two, member notices, consists of 35 documents. The communications under category two alerts members to important duties and responsibilities and to legislative changes related to the regulation of the sector. Member notices include the *Connexions* magazine

(member's newsletter), *Mini-Connexions*, *Employer Bulletin*, *Professional Advisories* and *Practice Guidelines*.

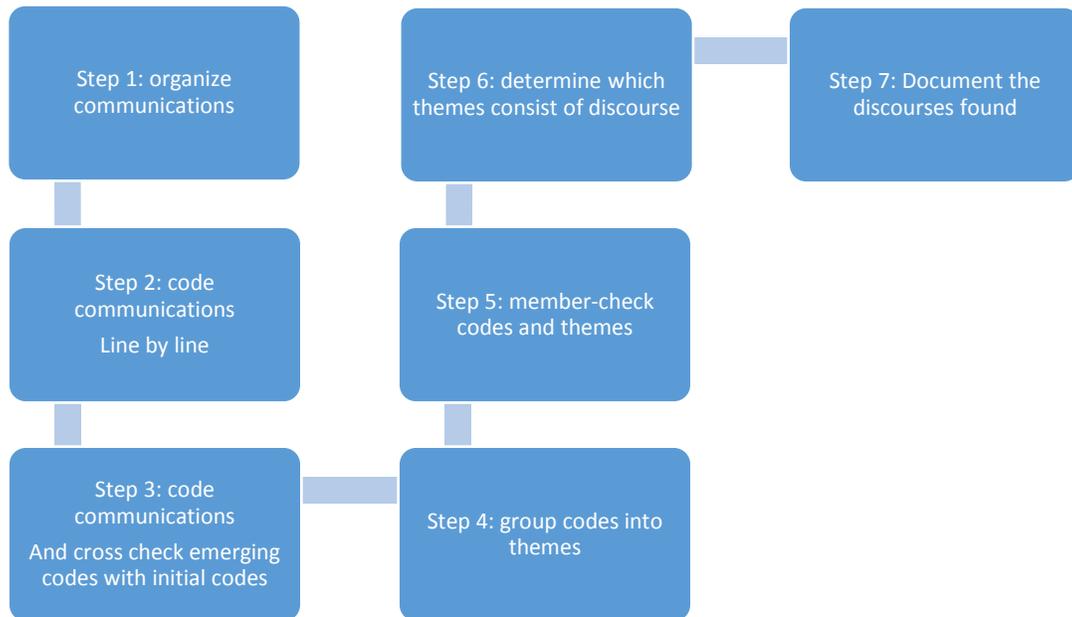
Category three, surveys and reports, includes 14 documents out of which 3 are reports, such as the *Fair Practice Report* issued between 2011- 2015 and *Annual Reports* distributed between 2008- 2015. Another report focuses on the ease of the CECE registration process and the services offered to members. The documents under this category were grouped together because they provide RECEs with detailed information about the operations of the College. This is seen in the *Fair Practice Reports*, which quantify CECE membership and the gender of members. As well as in *Annual Reports* which highlight topics like CECE finances, membership meetings and electoral results.

Data Analysis

With all of the communications grouped into appropriate categories, coding of the data took place in eight key stages. To begin details were recorded about each document in research memos. This was conducted by asking of the communications specific questions such as: does it support this study in answering the research question, when was it published and to whom was it directed at? The details recorded about each type of communication in research memos are shown in figure Table 1.2 Communication Audience and Applicability in Appendix B.

In May 2016, communications were printed and stored in a “communications binder.” Equipped with hard copies for all 66 communications, coding of the data began in mid-May. Through close reading, initial codes eventually transformed into themes, which then supported the identification of five key discourses. Figure 1.3 provides a summary of the coding steps taken.

Figure 1.3 Coding Steps



All documents were coded initially using the line-by-line method. This means I read every line of text and assigned one word in each line a summative code that referenced specific subject matter in the text. Often key words from the sentences themselves were used as the codes as they easily conveyed the ideas in the text. Text was not allocated codes if it was not connected to the research question: what discourses are found in communications from the College of ECEs Ontario that contribute to the construction of a professional identity for ECEs in Ontario? In some instances, complete pages of communications did not yield codes so I immediately ruled them out. This was the case for much of the CECEs *Annual Reports* and some *Employer Bulletins*.

At the end of June 2016, coding ceased. However, I often went back to the original communications and reflected on codes and their appropriateness in matching the text. Once I completed coding, codes were transferred into a word document on a computer. I created a basic

chart with space to document communication titles and associated codes. As similar codes were grouped together themes arose. The codes I took directly from the communications were recorded on a chart and I moved them around accordingly to match an appropriate theme. I also made connections between the various communicative documents that had the same or similar codes. Written memos were used to document instances where codes represented the same message, words, intent and descriptions, and this resulted in five main themes emerging out of this coding process (Table 1.3 Codes, Themes and the Resulting Discourse). Consistent with the definition of discourse as reoccurring messages. I interpret these themes as representing key discourses evident in the communications disseminated by CECE. The findings chapter will elaborate on the kinds of discursive strategies the CECE appeared to use to emphasize and reinforce these discourses.

Table 1.3 Codes, Themes and the Resulting Discourses

	1	2	3	4	5
Discourses	ECEs must practice with excellence	RECEs are accountable for their actions	RECEs must project a professional image at all times	RECEs are diverse	RECEs must engage in professional learning
Themes	Excellence	Accountability	Professional Behaviour	Diverse Background	Professional Learning
Codes	Values Standards, Standards of practice (SOP) Ethics, ethical, Code of Ethics (COE)	Responsibility Responsible Reflection Self-reflection Duty Accountable accountability	Image Leadership Model acceptable behaviour Inappropriate behaviour, unprofessional	Diverse Diversity Female ECE Male ECE New ECE ECE diversity Training origin	Professional learning Ongoing learning Regulated learning Continuous learning

In summary codes and themes support the identification of five different kinds of discourses: (1) RECEs are excellent practitioners, (2) RECEs are accountable for their actions,

(3) RECEs must project a professional image at all times, (4) RECEs are women and men from diverse backgrounds, and (5) RECEs must engage in professional learning. Specific attention was given to engaging in ethical research practices and acknowledging limitations in proceeding with all associated research tasks. Ethical research practices and the soundness of the analysis are discussed next.

Reliability and Validity

A final component of this study was to check for the accuracy and reliability of the findings by incorporating validity strategies discussed by Creswell (2013). I developed the codes only on the basis that they emerged from the raw data and codes were not predetermined. After coding ceased, I identified codes across different sources of communications “to build a coherent justification for the themes” (p.201) that emerged.

Step two was to conduct member checks to determine the accuracy of the findings. I did this by taking portions of the coded data and allowing ECE graduate students to create codes, some of which were similar or matched the researchers’ codes. This helped the researcher determine if codes and resulting themes matched the overall discourse. Next, “rich, thick descriptions” (p.202) of the discourses are used to convey research findings.

Step three is associated with clarifying researcher bias. I declared my position as a researcher and as an insider who is an ECE practitioner in the introduction of this study. My reflection as well as the comments I include in the findings chapter of this study demonstrate how things such as my individual culture, gender and history shape my interpretation of findings.

The last step included peer debriefing to enhance the accuracy of my recount of the data. I did this by actively participating in a small writing group of six master’s students. I also had the study reviewed by one primary supervisor and one secondary supervisor. Additionally, I ensured

reliability by making sure there was no drift in the definition of the codes applied and I crosschecked codes in the writing group to determine if codes were appropriately allocated.

Privacy and Researcher Integrity

Privacy was not a challenge during the process of this study because there were no human participants. All documents used in the study were accessed through the CECE website and available to all members of the public. I kept codes confidential as all documents were stored in a coding binder and were stored in the researcher's home office. All original notes and documents with codes will be shredded no later than three months after the study has been defended in September of 2016.

In summary, following principles of DA closely I identified codes in text in a range of CECE communications. Themes represented as discourses emerged from this coding process. With a clear picture of the methodological considerations employed in this study, the next chapter provides concrete details about the key findings.

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

In total, five prominent discourses stood out in the communications distributed by the CECE between 2009 and May 2016. This chapter works to tell a story about the CECE, and the ways in which they explicitly and implicitly construct a professional identity for RECEs through their professional communications. As will be seen, the CECE has employed several discursive strategies in their communications to establish a particular version of an RECE professional identity.

RECEs Practice with Excellence

This discourse, RECEs practice with excellence, was dominant because the codes associated with this discourse were frequently present in more than half of category one

(professional communications) and category two (member notices) documents. The discourse was present but less frequent in category three (surveys and reports) because those documents communicated less messaging relating to professional identity.

The dominance of this “excellence” discourse in communications is also evident in the frequency of language associated with excellence such as code of ethics, standards of practice and ECE values. The frequent messaging about excellence serves to reinforce this discourse.

Developed between the fall of 2009 and 2010, the CECE developed a *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* (2011). These two texts or specific standards and ethical responsibilities are mentioned in more than half of communications assessed for this study in one way or another. Examples of this can be seen in a 2014, issue of *Connexions*, in Volume 5, issue 3 in which it is stated, “One strategy that may assist you as an RECE in keeping your interactions on a professional level is to remember your responsibilities to families outlined in the Code of Ethics, Standards I” (p.3). In June of 2015, a *Professional Advisory* reads, “...early childhood educators are to abide by the Colleges *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*”. A *Practice Guideline* issued in 2016, further articulates, “Early childhood educators make the well-being and learning of all children who are under their professional supervision their foremost responsibility. They value the rights of the child, and strive to create learning environments in which children experience a sense of belonging” (*Connexions*, 2016, p1). The use of imperative language in this example, which uses verbs such as make, value and strive, reinforces the dominance of the discourse of excellence.

Practice Guidelines distributed to RECEs (in 2014 and 2016) were developed to highlight how specific expectations are to be applied in practice. They are also based on practices recommended by the CECE and part of their purpose is to support RECE self-reflection and

CPL. The two separate issues analyzed for this study demonstrate how over time the CECE has aimed to provide more resources and support for RECEs and promote high standards that require excellence in practice. In analyzing the communications, I found from 2009 to May 2016 evidence of an intensification of the discourse. Figure 1.1 (Appendix C) clearly outlines the timeline for this discourse which reveals both its consistency and duration.

Starting in 2009, in volume 1, issue 1 of the first *Members Newsletter* released by the CECE information about the Prime Minister's honoring of four ECEs is shared. The article describes the criteria for the award and states,

“For early childhood educators the committee looks for clear evidence that nominees have excelled in the following four areas: support of child development, innovation, involvement with parents, families and the community and commitment and leadership in the field. Early childhood educators are eligible for two awards: the Certificate of Excellence and the Certificate of Achievement” (p.7).

The same year in a *Members Newsletter* volume 1, issue 3, highlights an announcement about the founding of the Lois Mahon Excellence in Early Childhood Education Award. The text in the article reiterates that ECEs who practice with excellence deserve to be recognized and states, “One student graduating from each of the Early Childhood education programs at Cambrian College and College Boreal are to be granted the award each year. These are students who poses advocacy and leadership skills as well as demonstrate excellence...” (*Members Newsletter*, 2009, p.3). Furthermore, the discourse also takes into account student practitioners and prepares them for the standard of practising with excellence when they register with the CECE.

Two years later in the winter of 2011 in volume 2, issue 2 the *Members Newsletter* highlights another award and recognition ceremony that took place in St. Catherine's, Ontario. Then again, in 2012 the CECE announced in its volume 3 issue 2 *Connexions* newsletter, the

results of another annual award ceremony. The text states, "... the 2010-2011 recipients of the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education proves once again why registered early childhood educators (RECEs) deserve to be recognized as the innovative and resourceful professionals they are" (p.10).

Additionally, in the fall of 2012, issue 1 volume 4 of the *Members Newsletter* focuses on how the College has advanced the profession to date. Included in the issue is information about recipients of another provincial award and suggests that the "Premieres Awards for Teaching Excellence is meant to honor remarkable educators who help children and students realize their full potential" (p.11). The same message is reiterated to ECEs in 2014, in volume 5 issue 2 of *Connexions* where another portion of text articulates, "Through their dedication and skill, these remarkable educators are helping build the foundation young children need to get the best possible start in life." Prime Minister Harper said. "They are models of excellence whose high standards inspire both their colleagues and the children in their care" (p.9).

Overall, my data analysis revealed that the CECE consistently employed the discourse of excellence in many communications, emphasized its importance through imperative language, and since 2015 intensified its dissemination.

RECEs are Accountable for their Actions

Across CECE communications, RECEs are held accountable for their actions. Again, my data analysis shows evidence of CECE discursive strategies to reiterate this discourse. Reinforcing the discourse are frequent references to liabilities, expectations, responsibilities and duties. RECEs are also frequently reminded that should they violate a responsibility or duty they will be reported to the College, and potentially undergo the complaints process resulting in a certificate of registration suspension. The CECE is found to employ heightened language such as

“impair”, “risk”, “exploitation” and “harm” to project unquestionable truths as the following example in a (2012) *Practice Matters* article demonstrates, “Does the College have a rule against RECEs practising in the same environment where their own child has been enrolled... The Code of Ethics states that registered early childhood educators (RECEs) should avoid dual relationships that could impair their professional judgement or increase the risk of exploitation or harm to children under their professional supervision” (p.13).

The discourse of accountability was most prevalent in category one and two communications (professional communications and member notices) where the focus was on day-to-day practices. In March of 2016, the CECE distributed a *Practice Guideline* in *Connexions* that highlighted how and why ECEs should support positive interactions with children in their day-to-day practice. The first line of the guideline reads, “Early childhood educators make the well-being and learning of all children who are under their professional supervision their foremost responsibility. They value the rights of the child, respecting the uniqueness, dignity and potential of each child and strive to create learning environments in which children experience a sense of belonging” (p.1).

A closer look at other communication examples shows that the language of accountability intensified around 2014, five years after the establishment of the CECE (Figure 1.2, Appendix D). Initially communications indicate that the CECE spent a lot of time educating the public, membership and potential applicants amongst other stakeholders on what their role in the sector is. Then the CECE transitioned into holding ECEs more accountable to high practice standards. For example, in February of 2011, the CECE released an *Employer Bulletin*, which highlighted employer duties with regard to reporting ECEs under their supervision who demonstrate unprofessional practices or misconduct. One statement in the bulletin is, “The *Code of Ethics and*

Standards of Practice along with the professional misconduct regulation serve as the basis on which members of the College are held accountable for professional practice and professional responsibilities” (p.1).

In 2012 in volume 2, issue 2 of the *Members Newsletter*, text highlights the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice (2011)* for the ECE profession reinforcing the dominant discourse of accountability. The text articulates, “Upon becoming a registered early childhood educator (RECE), a member accepts the responsibility of abiding by ethical and professional standards of the profession” (p.9). In the same year, referring to the complaints process, in volume 3, issue 2 of *Connexions* text highlighted that “a complaints process is necessary because it lets the public know that the College holds its members accountable for their practice and conduct as professionals” (p.4).

Beginning in 2013, analysis of communications particularly the *Connexions* newsletter that includes *Practice Matters* articles, shows a stronger emphasis on what responsibilities RECEs are accountable for. Volume 4 issue 2 of *Connexions* includes a *Practice Matters* article that communicates, “Standard IV: Professional Knowledge and Competence of the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* states that RECEs have a responsibility to “know, understand and abide by the legislation, policies and procedures that are relevant to their professional practice” (*Connexions*, 2013, p.10).

My data analysis shows that over time the CECE provides RECEs with more directions in communications on how to reflect on their responsibilities and duties. In 2016 a *Practice Guideline* articulates, “RECEs must reflect on the many internal and external factors that contribute to how they respond to children’s behaviour. Strategies for intervening and supporting children’s ability to self- regulate are often informed by many competing interests” (p.13).

Accountability associated with reflection also appear in the CECE's eight *Case Studies* and three *Vignettes* released as resources to ECEs on the CECE website. The question and right answer structure of these documents reinforces the "rightness" of RECEs practicing in the ways communicated by the CECE.

RECEs must Project a Professional Image at all Times

In the fall of 2012, volume 3, issue 2 of *Connexions* magazine, RECEs are told what it means to "behave like a professional: When you are a professional, you never really take your hat off. Being a member of a regulated profession governs how you behave, not just in your work setting but in your community" (p.7). While this discourse is evident in several category one and two communications (professional communications and member notices), it is most explicitly stated at the end of the *Connexions* in the "investigating complaints" and "in the public interest" sections. The outcomes of the complaints and hearings serve as particular cases and narratives that work as an effective discursive strategy in communications.

For example, in the fall of 2012, volume 4, issue 1 of *Connexions* provided details about a disciplinary hearing that dealt directly with the suspension of a member's certificate to practice. The information highlights how the CECE reinforces the discourse of projecting a professional image through using a negative example. The text articulates "The College's Discipline Committee directed the registrar to suspend Tabitha Antone for repeatedly driving under the influence of alcohol and failing to comply with remedial actions...the Discipline Committee panel found Antone guilty of professional misconduct. "Among their roles and responsibilities, early childhood educators are entrusted with caring for the children of others and are to set positive examples" (p.15).

The previous example also illustrates how the CECE implicitly links the discourse of professional image to RECEs as role models in practice. Two highlights included in volume 4, issue 3 of *Connexions* (2013) refer to complaints and discipline proceedings and illustrate this focus on role models, “The College received an employer notification about an RECE who allegedly acted unprofessionally in her place of work and filed false claims with the Children’s Aid Society (CAS), the Ministry of Education and her regional police department...the committee expressed concern about the Member’s unprofessional behaviour in the centre and reminded her that early childhood educators are role models for children, families and other members of the profession” (p12). Further, in 2015 volume 6, issue 3 of *Connexions* specific expectations regarding the professional image RECEs must project and model for an audience that is wider than just the ECE professional scope is highlighted. The text articulates, “In a profession where one serves as a role model for children, the public and fellow RECEs, the Member’s harmful and undignified behaviour provided a poor example for others to emulate” (p.15).

RECEs are diverse individuals

The CECE has developed strategic goals based on expanding membership diversity knowledge, and increased personal information about RECEs that is accessible. Since 2014, the CECE has distributed *Fair Practice Reports* highlighting the gender and, what the CECE identifies as the “diversity” of the workforce. Since 2011, the CECE has reported on the number of new members with international training. In volume 7, issue 2 of *Connexions*, the *Conversation with an RECE* article highlights an RECE with international training, “Farah Ismail RECE is a supervisor at the Muslim Association of Canada’s child care centre in Ottawa,

ON. The centre provides an Islamic preschool curriculum for toddlers and preschool aged children. Formerly an engineer in Syria, Farah has been an RECE since 2011...” (p.15).

Also in the 2015 Report, the CECE reports on the numbers of female and male RECEs so that 823 males currently hold a membership with the College... and 47295 females hold a membership with the College” (p.5).

Data analysis shows that the CECE wants to discursively demonstrate to RECEs that they are represented in membership. In an article, *Conversations with an ECE (2012)* the CECE writes, “The College is made up of over 40, 000 unique members- each with a different background and story to tell” (p.9).

A *Practice Guideline* released in March 2016 provides further examples of gender diversity: One passage states, “Miya, a RECE working with infants arrives to work frazzled and preoccupied. Her personal life is affecting her mood...” (p14). Another passage states, “Leah is an RECE working in a kindergarten classroom. Leah and her teaching partner, Ms. Ho have 25 children in their classroom” (p. 15). It goes on to also state, “Hannah is relieved to find out she will be working with an experienced ECE, Cathy” (p.16). One *Vignette* entitled, Do you really know who your friends are states, “Joe is an RECE working in a before-and after school program...”. Another *Vignette* entitled, What should Lisa do describes the following scenario, “Shane is an experienced supervisor at Play Along Child Care Centre. After returning to his office from an early morning meeting, Shane notices a note on his desk from Feng, an RECE in the toddler program. She needs to speak with him urgently...Lisa, an RECE who worked with the toddlers behaving in a way the parent believed to be inappropriate”.

Also in the spring 2016 issue of the *Connexions* magazine, volume 7 issue 2, an article focuses specifically on men in early childhood education. The text reads: “In a profession

dominated by women, Ron Blatz believes gender balance in early childhood education is good for children...Blatz believes that women in the profession have a leadership role to play in ...supporting their male colleagues in building communities of practice and creating welcoming environments for men and fathers” (p.9). Combined the examples taken from communications that comprise discourse on the ‘diversity of RECEs as individuals’ serves to demonstrate the ways in which the CECE is actually sharing details about the diversity of its membership.

RECEs must engage in professional learning

Evidence of the prevalence of this discourse, RECEs must engage in professional learning, is found in all three communications categories (professional communications, professional resources and surveys and reports). In the communication, *Continuous Professional Learning Handbook* (2015), the CECE defines CPL as, “...the systematic and intentional maintenance, enhancement and expansion of the knowledge, skills, ethical values and behaviours necessary to ensure on-going, quality professional practice throughout a member’s career” (p.1). There has been more than one instance where the CECE has discussed the status of professional learning requirements for RECEs in Ontario and in 2011, this discourse intensified. Interestingly textual examples show that the discourse of CPL often intersects with the discourses of excellence and accountability so that pre-existing discourse contributes to the reader’s responses and interpretations of other texts that often read in relation to them. In this way, the meaning of one text is absorbed and becomes dependant on or transformative of, the meaning of others (Henderson & Brown, 1997). The following sample illustrates this intersection from a 2014

Practice Guideline:

“The concept that continuous professional learning is important to members of the early childhood education profession is well recognized amongst early childhood educators in Ontario. RECEs are aware of the need to enhance their own learning...RECEs demonstrate

their commitment to ongoing professional learning by engaging in professional development opportunities that are designed to enhance professional competency and reassure the public and other stakeholders that the profession undertakes and values ongoing learning” (p.2).

The CECE started to articulate professional learning plans for ECEs in Ontario in the spring/summer 2012 issue of the CECEs *Members Newsletter*. In this volume (3), the CECEs strategic priorities are highlighted for the following fiscal year. The article suggests the CECE will, “Implement a continuous professional learning (CPL) requirement that both supports member competency and encourages a culture of life-long learning. The objective of this strategy is to enable a commitment to the professional learning from members throughout their careers and to design a regulation which will fulfil the requirement for CPL” (p.5).

Starting in the winter of 2013, the CECE begins to bombard RECE with more information about CPL. In July of 2014 the CECE released a *Practice Guideline*, which articulated:

“The College has developed *Practice Guideline: Continuous Professional Learning* to support RECEs in understanding their ethical and professional responsibilities in relation to their ongoing learning. A *Practice Guideline* assists in communicating certain expectations and duties of RECEs outlined in the *Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice* and how RECEs may apply those expectations in their practice” (p.1).

In the summer of 2015, a collaboration between the CECE and AECEO, the professional associate for ECEs in Ontario, resulted in a joint article, the *Evolution of Professional Learning for RECEs in Ontario*. Sample text reads: “Professional learning is an integral part of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) landscape. Decades of research have identified that the learning and ongoing professional learning of early childhood educators and staff is a critical element in the provision of high quality ECEC” (p.6).

Summary of Findings

Findings outlined in this chapter show that reoccurring messages evident in the coding process construct discourses that I suggest in the chapter serve to constitute and construct particular ways RECEs should think about who they are as professionals. At the same time, what stood out in the discourse analysis is what is not being said about RECEs in Ontario.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The findings chapter answered this study's first research question: what discourses are found in communications from the College of ECEs Ontario that contribute to the construction of a professional identity for ECEs in Ontario? The findings provided evidence of the dominance of particular discourses and related discursive strategies that the CECE enacted to influence RECEs to ascribe to their "truths". Textual data shows how some of these discourses have intensified over the last seven years. Textual analysis shows CECE's use of deliberate tactics to reiterate discourses across texts and reinforce the same messages frequently. This chapter offers a discussion on the potentially positive and negative implications of these findings, framed by concepts from feminist and critical race theories, for the construction of the professional identity of Ontario RECEs. This discussion addresses the study's second research question: what are the implications of this construction for ECEs in Ontario and what role can a counter discourse of professional identity play? Additionally, this chapter discusses implications for future research, the limitations of the study and provides a concluding counter-discourse that takes into account the day-to-day experiences of RECS.

I interpret the findings of this study drawing on Potter's (2012) key question about DA: What is the discourse doing? A discourse analysis of CECE communications show that particular discourses are employed by the CECE to uphold a specific construction of the RECE identity in Ontario. This means that the CECE is the principle stakeholder in determining the "right" ways

of practising the profession. In this light, the discourses aid the CECE's regulatory role in broadcasting to RECEs the ways in which they "should" view themselves as professionals and practice the profession. A key strategy for communicating these discourses is through consistency. The CECE consistently sends out communications highlighting one or more discourses that reaffirms their "rightness" and what they think ECEs should think about who they are as professionals. The discourse of accountability in particular emphasizes this "rightness" and confirms that discursive power of the CECE. RECEs are less likely to challenge this power and are more likely to ascribe to beliefs and values that are communicated to them many times.

I now discuss two implications of these findings: (1) RECEs are expected to practice with excellence, be accountable, maintain a professional image and undertake continuous professional learning regardless of their compensation and workplace conditions and, (2) RECEs are diverse but not all diversity is adequately represented in the communications analyzed. Each of these implications will serve as counter discourses to the discourses revealed in CECE communications. Arguably, each of these implications influences how Ontario RECEs construct their professional identity.

Counter Discourse 1: RECEs are expected to practice with excellence, be accountable, maintain a professional image and undertake continuous professional learning regardless of their compensation and workplace conditions

I found the first dominant discourse discussed in this study (RECEs practice with excellence) to be one of the most consistent messages reiterated by the CECE to RECEs. This was because words, phrases and large portions of text explicitly highlighted the work of excellent ECEs. The result of this discourse is the construction of an unquestionable standard of excellence for Ontario RECEs and a professional identity focused on excellence. Certainly, this

discourse of excellence is positive and important for the professionalizing the ECE field. In my view, RECEs should practice with excellence.

The CECE communicates the discourse of accountability in two specific ways. The CECE says it needs to prove its accountability as a regulatory body to the public and that ECEs who want to assume a professional identity must be prepared to be accountable to their actions. Certainly, RECEs as professionals should be held accountable for their actions because they work with a highly vulnerable population. The CECE also in broadcasting the work of RECEs highlights how their practices and professionalism rests on how they present themselves as professionals both in the workplace and beyond. Thus, the College wants the public to see RECEs as knowledgeable, competent, accountable, capable and professional. The discourse of continuous professional learning as well means that Ontario RECEs must be constantly dedicated to reflecting and revising their practices using collaboration, research and other tools.

However, in applying concepts of feminist theory identified in chapter one, I suggest that there are many things that are being “unsaid” in these discourses. Even though the Ontario ECE sector is made up of women, it was not until the *Fair Practice Report of 2015* that CECE membership was identified by gender. As findings related to the discourse of diversity show, in a surprising discursive turn, the CECE suggests that men in the Ontario RECE field are marginalized in a “female-dominated” occupation. This language serves to make invisible the historic and persistent marginalization of RECEs who are women. Moreover, the CECE further denies this marginalization by directing female RECEs to assume a leadership role in explicitly supporting their male colleagues. However, the CECE does not provide a counter-direction that indicates that male ECEs should support their female counterparts.

Further, the key discourses communicated by the CECE do not recognize that there are many barriers standing in the way of RECE practice particularly as the role and responsibilities of RECEs mount. Thus, the experiential knowledge of RECEs of their daily work and working conditions are not adequately addressed in CECE communications. Only when RECEs are subject to complaints as they appear in *Complaints and Discipline* textual samples do we see evidence of poor practice potentially related to working conditions. As Sector Council reports (2007; 2010) show, there are a significant number of RECEs working in Ontario under sub-standard working conditions with low pay, no benefits, part-time and contract positions, and low participation in unions. In reading specific CECE communications from 2009 to 2016, I could not find any direct references to the working conditions of RECEs in childcare programs, while there some reference to working conditions in full day kindergarten program (i.e. staff collaboration). Interestingly in category one communications *Vignettes* and *Case Studies*, that profiled female RECEs, did not communicate any concerns about their working conditions perhaps because they were not asked. In the case of the male RECE profiled he was asked specifically about the supports he needs (as a male) in his work setting.

The female ECEs in the margins include those who have precarious or part time work, those who have poor salaries and hourly wages and those that have little to no medical and or dental benefits. The current patchwork early childhood system in Ontario is not adequately supporting RECEs who the College expects to practice with excellence, be accountable, project a professional image, all the while learning on a continuous basis. The implications of these discourses suggests that a counter discourse that attempts to combine the ideal discourses of the CECE and the living realities of RECEs is needed.

Counter Discourse 2: RECEs are diverse but this diversity is not adequately represented in communications

The findings chapter showed that the CECE has increased in its communications its focus on the diversity of its membership. For example, the *Fair Practice Reports* provide information about the diversity of training ECEs receive (i.e. from other countries). What is not said, or even communicated clearly (based only on communication analyzed) is that RECEs in Ontario are culturally and racially diverse. The only diversity highlighted is the range of sites in which RECEs work. This indicates that the CECE operates as a hegemonic space that reinforces the convention of the Whiteness of the membership. Indeed, in analyzing the communications, I saw limited representation of African-Canadians and I did not read any case studies, stories or articles that I felt included stories about African-Canadian RECEs. Applying concepts of CRT suggests that the identities and experiential knowledge of racial minorities is not a CECE priority despite its stated aim to expand on their knowledge of the diversity of membership. In telling stories about RECEs in *Case Studies and Vignettes* the CECE renders the social context (i.e. working conditions, cultural and racial identities) invisible.

As a hegemonic White space, the CECE minimizes voices of colour because they are not equally represented. This is not to say that the CECE has made explicit that it has racist policies or practices although CRT states that racism is a regular occurrence. This is not the case, nor is it the aim of this research to minimize the importance of the work and progress that the CECE has accomplished in the sector. However, it is worth noting after analyzing an adequate sample of CECE communications that voices of female RECEs of colour (an indication of intersectionality) are represented far less than other groups such as those that identified as being: a younger female ECE, a new female ECE, female ECE in a leadership position, and ECEs who are male.

Summary of Implications

Although theorists use the term, discourse, in different ways, according to Potter & Wetherell (1994), discourse refers to particular ideas or ways of understanding. The five discourses found in the communication samples appear to construct a particular way of understanding and being an RECE in Ontario : (1) RECEs are excellent practitioners, (2) RECEs are accountable for their actions, (3) RECEs must project a professional image at all times, (4) RECEs are diverse (5) RECEs must engage in professional learning. The discourses evident in communications are seen as a result of human effort that constructs particular meanings about being a RECE in Ontario. What this means is that the CECE has been purposeful in its intentions and its actions.

I have claimed in this study that the CECE holds power and uses power through its discursive practices. Key CECE discourses communicated consistently and repeatedly work together to construct a particular RECE identity within the confines of standards of practice, a code of ethics, accountability and continuous professional learning. However, as discussed in chapter one, power as a social good that should be possessed by both the CECE and RECEs. One way for RECEs to claim this power is to create a counter-discourse to the CECE discourses. I propose the following counter-discourse drawing on the discussion of implications:

A Counter-Narrative on Oppressive Discourse

‘RECEs deserve fair wages for expectations of practice excellence’, was the first discourse that came to mind when I thought about a counter discourse. Immediately the hardship of being a professional ECE but not being able to put your own children in childcare also permeated my thoughts. It is a great expectation for the public and the sector to hold ECEs accountable to high standards, however how high and for how long can a professional hold the bar when they often have to purchase their own supplies to do the work that parents so desperately need. Therefore, lets’ get something straight. RECEs work with a vulnerable population, they are trained and have expertise in early learning, and they give medication to children across the province every day. Yet with these duties, they are compensated feverishly. It is quite absurd that as many RECEs leave work in the evening unsatisfied by workplace

conditions and environments, those issues are actually quite small compared to the “professional” hourly wage of \$16.00 many RECEs dream about receiving. “You are lucky”, some would say if you get a salary as a RECE professional. However, if that salary is low, you have student loan debt, and you are required to apply for unemployment insurance during your summers off from work is that really a professional salary? I often think to myself, “If parents knew how much we got paid they would shout from the roof tops”. Nevertheless, I also remember the CCHRC, who in their occupational standards included a component that ECEs would be advocates, advocates for their selves and their own professional needs. Even the AECEO tirelessly advocates for fair wages for RECEs. Like a snail gliding along a sidewalk, the government is moving slowly with regard to addressing the issues that they have been aware of since before the establishment of the CECE. It is not a secret after all, it is as easy as 1, 2, 3, all you have to do is Google it and you will see, many RECEs are poor, live pay-check to pay-check and work supplementary jobs!

‘RECEs in Ontario should see themselves in CECE communications’ is the second counter discourse that I present. This final narrative serves to highlight the researcher’s position as an African-descended, female RECE. I went through the 66 communications numerous times over the course of this research study. But what I never saw in the communications were images of myself highlighted in what I believe to be key articles in *Connexions*. Look in *Connexions* between 2009 and 2016 and flip to each *Conversations with an ECE* article, and other articles that highlight RECEs and their work and you will not see anyone that looks like me. Is this because our stories have yet to be shared? Or, is this because no space has been made at the table for our stories to be shared? I would like to think that this is by no means an intentional effort on the part of the CECE, to keep the voices of traditionally marginalized voices of colour out. But that is what is happening. I suggest that if the CECE would like to hold RECEs up to a high degree of practice excellence and accountability, that they too set the bar high for their role in being the first regulatory body for ECEs in Canada. Given more time I would have looked at every single publication the CECE distributed since their transitional council and maybe I would have found what I only started looking for at the end of the study- an image of myself projecting an excellent professional identity. Therefore, this is not to say it is not there, but it is most definitely not as explicit as it should be. I leave you with this final preposition; ponder what it is like to be in a childcare in a city like Toronto. You will indeed see an image of someone who has characteristics like you or has ethnic features similar to you (this is a municipal requirement). The tone is set for children to thrive in this way, so why not RECEs too? I want to open an issue of *Connexions* in the next year and I want to know that people who look like me practice with excellence and have had opportunities to provide insight to the College, which is then disseminated and shared with the broader sector.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has focused on how the CECE through its communications seeks to construct a particular RECE professional identity. However, future research needs to focus on how RECEs themselves view these communications and how they accept, ignore and/or resist the discourses inherent in the communications. In addition, RECEs' perspectives on how the CECE frames and communicates the diversity of membership would be valuable to research. Do RECEs see themselves in the communications and in particular the visual images?

Some other factors that merit consideration include the design of the study and the timeline of the study. Discussed in the methods chapter, given the time allocated, this study would have limited the number of communications coded significantly. This relates to the authenticity of the data. Using less communications would have yielded more time for rigorous analysis of individual communications. This study can instruct future research by highlighting the time-period needed to accurately code and interpret a healthy portion of data that tells an authentic story. This research can also benefit future research by demonstrating for researchers how to design a study, using sample communications to construct a map of discourse that demonstrates how they all work together. Lastly, the biggest limitation placed on this study relates to the time span allocated for conducting the study.

Summary of the Research Study

The discourses found in communications from the College of ECEs work to construct a particular RECE identity for ECEs in Ontario that is for the most part, unchallenged and goes unquestioned. This study is significant in that it begins to challenge and question the ways a regulatory body like the CECE engages in the construction of a professional identity for RECEs. I have proposed a counter-discourse as a way of uncovering what the CECE is not saying about the professional lives of Ontario RECEs. According to Osgood (2010), ECEs have minimal

power in constructing their professional identity. The counter-discourse of a RECE professional identity proposed in this study could potentially assert greater power and control for Ontario RECEs.

Appendix A

Table 1.1 Communications and data categories

Category 1: Professional Communications	Category 2: Member Notices	Category 3: Surveys and Reports
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Vignette</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you know who your Friends are 2. Conflicting Approaches 3. What to do about Lisa <p>*no date of release</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Connexions (formerly Member Newsletter and includes: Practice Matters and Professional Advisories):</i></p> <p>Volume 1, Issue 1, Fall 2009 Volume 1, Issue 3, Spring/Summer 2010 Volume 2, Issue 1, Fall 2010 Volume 2, Issue 2, Winter 2010 Volume 2, Issue 2, Winter 2011 Volume 3, Issue 1, Fall 2011 Volume 3, Issue 2, Winter 2012 Volume 3, Issue 3, Spring/Summer, 2012 Volume 4, Issue 1, Fall 2012 Volume 4, Issue 2, Winter 2014 Volume 4, Issue 3, Spring/Summer 2013 Volume 5, Issue 1, Fall 2013 Volume 5, Issue 2, Winter 2014 Volume 5, Issue 3, Spring/Summer 2014 Volume 6, Issue 1, Fall 2014 Volume 6, Issue 2, Winter 2015 Volume 6, Issue 3, Spring/Summer 2015 Volume 7, Issue 2, Spring 2016</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Annual Report</i></p> <p>2008-2009, 2009-2010 2010-2011 2011-2012 2012-2013 2013-2014 2014-2015</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Case Study</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sarah’s Confusing Behaviour, 2014 2. Accepting the Consequences, 2014 3. Getting Bumps and Taking Lumps, 2014 4. No Qualified Staff, 2014 5. Denton’s Birthday Cupcakes, 2015 6. In the Best Interest of Children, 2015 7. New kid on the Block, 2015 8. New Responsibilities and Challenges, 2015 9. Valuing Inclusivity and Privacy 10. Balancing Supervisory, 2015 Responsibilities, 2015 11. Once we were Friends, 2015 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Mini-Connexions</i></p> <p>Summer/ Fall 2014 Volume 2, #1, 2015 Volume 2, #2, 2015 Volume 2, #3, 2015</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Fair Practice Report</i></p> <p>2011 2012 2013 2014 2015</p>
<p><i>Continuous Professional Learning Handbook, 2015</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Employer Bulletin</i></p> <p>Volume 1, November 2009 Volume 2, March 2010 Volume 3, February 2011 Volume 4, June 2012 Volume 5, March 2013 Volume 6, June 2014 Volume 7, April 2015 Volume 8, July 2015 Volume 9, October 2015</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Leadership Pilot Project Executive Summary, 2015</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Exploring Interprofessional Collaboration (article), 2015</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Professional Advisory</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. January 2014 2. June 2015 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Report on Registration and Member Services, 2014</i></p>
<p>Evolution of Professional Learning for ECEs, 2015</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Practice Guideline</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. August 2014 2. March 2016 	

Appendix B

Table 1.2 Communications, Audience and Applicability

Communication	Audience	Applicability
Category 1: Professional Communications		
Vignettes (3 issues)	RECEs	Yes
Case Studies (10 issues)	RECEs	Yes
CPL Handbook, 2015	RECEs, supervisors	Yes
Exploring Interprofessional Collaboration article, 2015	RECEs, supervisors	Yes
Evolution of Professional Learning article, 2015	RECEs, Supervisors, Employers, Public	Yes
Category 2: Member Notices		
Connexions (newsletter and magazine) 2008-2016	RECEs, supervisors, employers, public	Yes
Mini-Connexions (5 Issues)	RECEs, supervisors, employers, public	Yes
Employer Bulletins (Volume 1-9)	Employers, (RECE) Supervisors	Yes
Professional Advisory (2 Issues)	ECEs, Employers, Public	Yes
Practice Guideline (2 Issues)	ECEs, Employers, Public	Yes
Category 3: Surveys and Reports		
Annual Reports (2009-2015)	RECEs, supervisors, employers, public	Yes
Fair Practice Reports (2011-2015)	RECEs, supervisors, employers, public	Yes
Leadership Pilot Summary, 2015	RECEs, supervisors, employers, public	Yes
Registration and Member Services Report, 2014	RECEs, supervisors, employers, public	yes

Figure 1.1 Timeline of Excellence

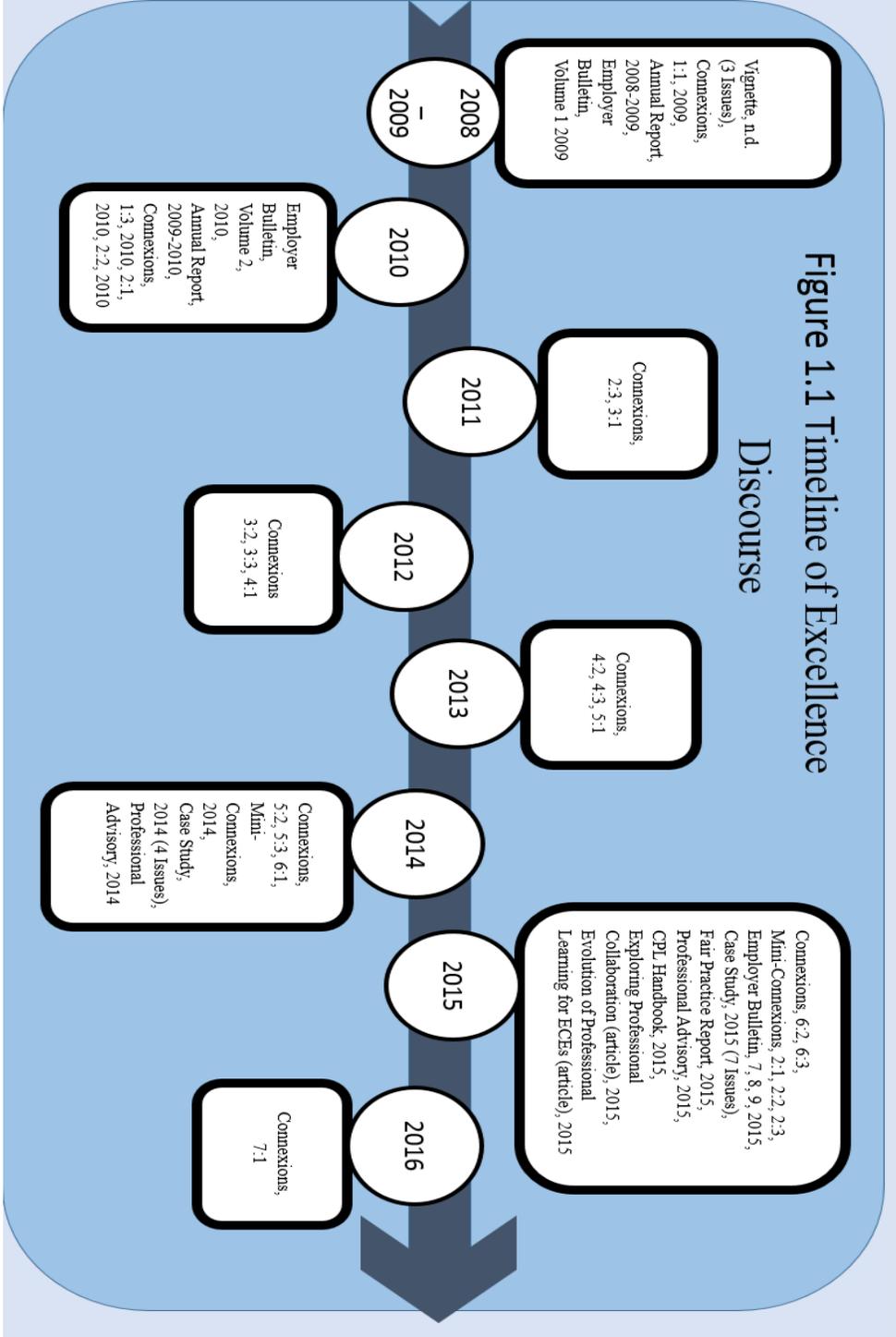
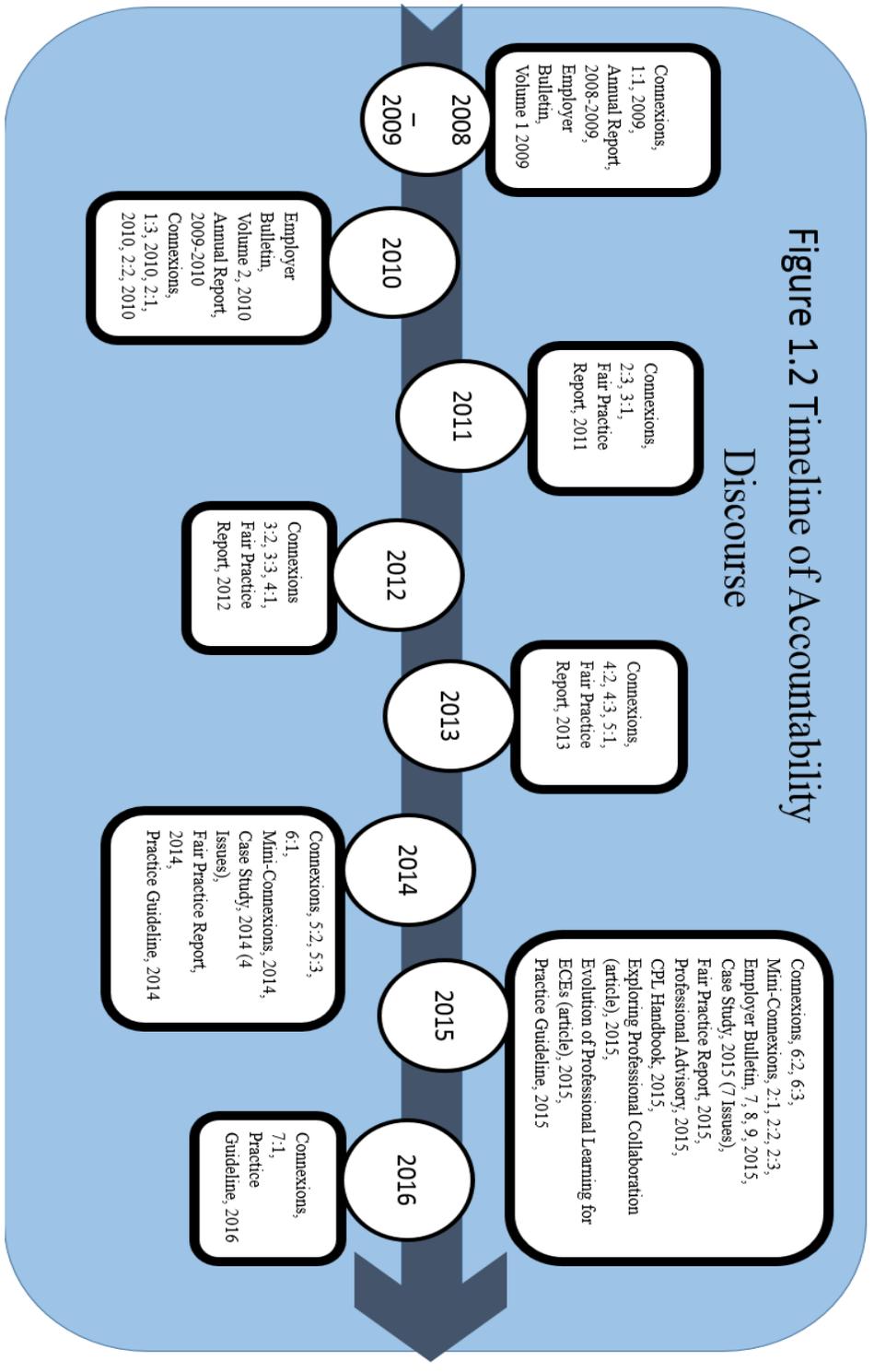


Figure 1.2 Timeline of Accountability



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