

**Job Title:** Early Childhood Educator**General Overview**

Early childhood educators (ECE) are professionals who specialize in the education and supervision of children in child care and educational settings (Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario, 2009). Social and language development tend to be viewed as the most salient components of early childhood education programs (Johnson & Mathien, 1998) and ECE's work closely with children to foster this growth. Activities can range from delivering learning modules, to reading stories, teaching songs, and promoting creativity and expression in drama, art, and music (Employment Ontario, 2009).

Although many work directly with children, ECEs can also hold administrative roles in their place of employment. In these cases they may work as administrative staff or supervisors.

Those interested in this career can expect to be primarily involved in interacting with and educating young children, guiding learning, and developing lesson plans (OSSFT, 2012). In some cases an ECE may be partnered with a teacher to deliver Early Learning Program curriculum in kindergarten environments within the school board (Government of Ontario, 1990).

**Job Duties and Responsibilities**

Early childhood educators have a variety of duties. They can be responsible for planning and implementing learning activities, and providing a wide range of stimulating materials (Colker, 2008). Ultimately, they are responsible for organizing the learning environment and overseeing activities that foster all areas of a child's emotional, cognitive, social and physical development (Ontario College of Teachers, 2013). This can include play-based learning programs, and small or large group instruction. (OSSFT, 2012). Beyond managing the group, ECEs must also focus on the individual development of each child to ensure their specific needs are being met. To achieve this, part of their responsibilities are to observe and evaluate children and identify those with learning, physical, emotional, or behavioural disabilities (Norris, 2013).

Early childhood educators also have administrative duties. They are required to submit written observations on children to their supervisors, attend staff meetings to discuss difficult children and areas of improvement, assist in record keeping, and help maintain the equipment in the facility (Employment Ontario, 2009)

**Typical Work Day**

A typical work day will depend largely on the place of employment and the kind of programs offered. ECE's can work in schools, daycares, part-time playschool or nursery programs, out-of-school programs, hospital or government child care settings, or in homes (Ontario Skills Passport, 2013). The majority of these jobs involve shift work anytime from 6am to 6pm. Some may work evenings, weekends, or holidays depending on the requirements of the employer.

The children and families ECEs interact with can come from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. In addition to working with children, ECEs also work closely with a diverse range of other professionals and members of the community. This can include teachers, administrators, specialized educational assistants, social workers, psychologists, language pathologists, special education coordinators, and parents (OSSFT, 2012).

In typical work day ECEs will conduct and monitor educational programs, lead activities, prepare and serve food, set up and tear down for lunch or rest periods, and assist with eating, dressing, and toilet training (Employment Ontario, 2009).

### **Educational Requirements and other Qualifications**

Early childhood educators must maintain a licence in early childhood education which is regulated by the provincial government, or an independent regulatory body, of the region where they are employed (e.g., the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario, the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia, or the Provincial Government of Alberta Human Services Department). Specific requirements can vary by region but generally a degree in early childhood education or development, and a minimum number of work experience hours are required. In most cases around 500 work experience hours are needed for licensure (Flanagan, Beach, Michal & Cromier, 2009).

There are a variety of recognized programs which teach skills relevant to ECEs at college or post-secondary levels of study (CECE, 2013). Individuals may also become certified based on equivalency criteria. For example, a diploma in psychology, nursing, or social work is sufficient to obtain ECE certification (Flanagan et al., 2009).

To qualify for a license ECEs must also hold valid first aid and CPR certificates, and have a clean criminal record (CECE, 2013).

Internship opportunities are often available which can help candidates accrue hours of experience that tend to be required for certification. Information on regional licensing requirements can be found on provincial government websites or the websites of provincial early childhood education licensure bodies.

### **Skills, Interests, and Qualities Needed for the Job**

Those who work with children should model respectful behaviour and language, as well as maintain a healthy lifestyle (Ontario Skills Passport, 2013). They should also be consistent and positive in their interactions with children (Alberta Occupational Profiles, 2012).

Colker (2008) outlines some of the essential qualities of good early childhood educators. Patience and flexibility are especially important not only when interacting with children, but also families and other staff. Not all children learn at the same pace or the same way so successful ECE's must be flexible in their approach when interacting with children. Above all, passion and drive tend to predict the most effective and satisfied ECEs.

Communication ability is an important skill because information must be conveyed accurately and directly to students, staff, parents, and other professionals in the work environment (OSSFT, 2012). Problem solving and intervention skills are also important as ECE's may be required to mediate issues that arise with children or their families (Alberta Occupational Profiles, 2012). Numeracy, writing, document use, critical thinking, planning, and memory are all essential skills for early childhood educators (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, 2012). Computer skills are also necessary as more early learning programs are beginning to use computers as teaching devices (Employment Ontario, 2009).

### **Relevance of a Psychology Undergraduate Degree**

Psychology is concerned with the study of individual differences. This concept is echoed in current learning programs which strive to foster growth in each child based on their unique needs and abilities (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007). It extremely relevant to

ECE work because Early Learning Programs focus on five fundamental areas of development that are largely derived from psychological research (Ministry of Education, 2011). Education in psychology will provide a fundamental understanding of motivational, developmental, social, emotional, and cognitive determinants of individual behaviour and development.

Understanding motivation and emotion is useful for connecting with children and maintaining their interest. Applying positive conditioning and motivation techniques can help and ensure children are engaged and happy.

Understanding development will prepare ECEs to meet the needs of children and promote healthy growth. Education in developmental psychology allows for an understanding of proactive learning strategies, sensitive developmental periods, gender differences, and exceptional children (such as those with autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and other developmental disabilities).

### **Salary Potential**

The median annual income for a full-time early childhood educator is around \$22,500 (Government of Canada, 2013). However, the actual salary of an ECE depends on several factors, such as education, experience, career path, geographic location, and type of workplace (Norris, 2013). For example, administrators and daycare directors can earn up to twice of what most ECE's earn. Entry-level positions tend to be on the lower range of the salary spectrum while experienced ECE's can expect to earn more.

### **Job Outlook**

According to the Government of Canada's (2013) review on early childhood educators and assistants, job availability over the next five years is quite good for a variety of reasons. Increasing birthrate, new regulations requiring private childcare centers to employ those who have specialized training, and an increasing number of child care spaces accounts for this positive outlook. The placement rate for those who have specialized education (such as a diploma in college studies or a post-secondary diploma) is extremely high and these individuals are seldom unemployed. Additionally, the proportion of graduates employed in education sector jobs is one of the highest across all technical programs. Again, this information is region specific but general trends will contribute to a fair outlook for those seeking ECE work.

### **To apply**

Jobs can typically be found though online through employment websites such as workingincanada.com or jobbank.gc.ca. Some organizations, such as the College of Early Childhood Educators, maintain public registry of available ECE's that employers can search through when looking for applicants.

### **To know more**

More information can be found though provincial government websites. Additional information can also be found on regional early childhood educators' websites (e.g., College of Early Childhood Educators).

<http://www.skills.edu.gov.on.ca/OSP2Web/EDU/DisplayNocDetails.xhtml?nocid=4214b>

<http://www.college-ece.ca/en/Pages/Home.aspx>

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