



CONNECTIONS
1200 Tower Rd
Suite 100
Halifax, NS
B3H 4K6

902 423-8199
www.cccns.org
info@cccns.org

Mom ECE~ Perspectives on the Dual Role of Being a Mother and an Early Childhood Educator

By Kelly Goulden, BAA (CYS), BA, Mom ECE and E.Elaine Ferguson, BCS, MEd

Mothers and Early Childhood Educators (ECE's) who are involved in Early Childhood Learning and Care (ECLC) programs come with a myriad of needs, skills, values and knowledge that are manifested in the relationship between them. The quality of their relationship and the communication, caring and respect it demonstrates, contributes to the quality of the child's experience in the ECLC program. Knowing about, reflecting upon and developing an understanding of what each brings to the relationship enhances the quality of that relationship. "Mom ECE" is the title the authors gave to the Mom whose profession is an Early Childhood Educator. We interviewed some of these women to tentatively explore how they balance their two roles. A Mom ECE is in a position to draw upon her ECE role and/or her Mom role to increase her understanding and enhancement of the Mom-ECE relationship. The Mom ECE's that we spoke to told us stories about the best things about being a Mom and an ECE and the effect that the two roles had on each other. For many ECE's, becoming a mom has had a tremendous effect on how they perform and view their job.

"After becoming a mother, I have been able to share my experiences with parents in dealing with my own separation anxiety as well as other issues and feel I have a whole new resource to draw on, my own life experience". (Mom ECE)

The dual role of the Mom ECE at times can also cause ambivalence, role confusion and challenges with mothers in the ECLC Program. Katz (2000) suggests that "...clarification and distinction between the mothering and teaching roles may help alleviate some of the strains for those who occupy both roles at the same time". In an article on the two roles (Katz 1980), she identified seven dimensions in the role of parents (mothers) and the role of teachers (ECE's) and compared the two roles of the Mom ECE.(Figure 1)

The Mom ECE, being both a mother and an Early Childhood Educator has all these relationship dimensions at play every day. Those Mom ECE's who work and also have their child in the same ECLC program are constantly changing hats.

FIG.1. DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN PARENTING AND TEACHING IN THEIR CENTRAL TENDENCIES ON SEVEN ROLE DIMENSIONS (Katz, 1980) (information in italic and parenthesis are combination of interpretations by Gestwicki(1992), Katz,(2000) and Keyes,(2000))

Role dimension	Mother (Parenting)	ECE (teaching)
1. Scope of function [<i>extent of role (Keyes, 2000)</i>]	Diffuse and limitless [<i>every aspect of her child's life, 24/7 (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992)</i>]	Specific and limited [<i>related to ECLC programming and delivered during hours of operation (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992)</i>]
2. Intensity of affect [<i>emotional investment</i>]	High [<i>emotional about all aspects of child's life (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992)</i>]	Low [<i>mildly emotional about aspects of the child's life within the parameters of the ECLC program (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992)</i>]
3. Attachment	Optimum attachment [<i>lifelong relationship (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992, Katz, 2000)</i>]	Optimal detachment [<i>temporary relationship, lasting only while the child attends the class (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992, Katz, 2000)</i>]
4. Rationality	Optimum irrationality [<i>unconditional love, 'crazy' about their child, 'from the heart'(Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992, Katz, 2000)</i>]	Optimum rationality [<i>shaped by child development knowledge, analyze child's strengths and needs, 'from the head' (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992, Katz, 2000)</i>]
5. Spontaneity	Optimum spontaneity [<i>spontaneous, instant and emotional reaction, varied and contrasting (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992, Katz, 2000)</i>]	Optimum intentionality [<i>intentional about their work, predetermined and premeditated (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992, Katz, 2000)</i>]
6. Partiality	Partial [<i>biased in child's favour, champion of child's needs, the only child in the program (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992, Katz, 2000)</i>]	Impartial [<i>lack favouritism, treat children similarly using their individual strengths and abilities (Keyes, 2000; Gestwicki 1992, Katz, 2000)</i>]
7. Scope of responsibility	Individual	Whole group

Juggling a career and a family is difficult and the similarities and differences between being a mother and being an ECE is an additional complication of being a Mom ECE.

"Many people feel that everything is easier as a mother if you are an Early Childhood Educator, it is not. I had insecurities in my ability, as any new mother does. I have the same worries and sleepless nights. Mind you, I am more aware of many things: rashes, childhood illnesses, milestones... This has benefited me as a mother..."

(Mom ECE)

Mom ECE's reported that drawing on their ECE knowledge enabled them to relate better to their own children. The knowledge of child development that they gained from being an ECE has had a positive effect on their own child rearing practices as a Mom.

"I feel like I wasn't handed a book on parenting when my children were born but I was given a manual of sorts by working in the ECE field... Being an ECE has taught me lots of tricks for bedtime, meal times, [and] playtime. I'm a happier and more organized Mom because I am also an ECE". (Mom ECE)

and

"It gives me a great sense of pride to be able to share information and my own life experience". (Mom ECE)

Katz (2000) points out that this heightened awareness of her child's needs could also have the effect of increasing expectations and cause stress in the parent-child relationship for both the child and for the Mom.

Moms would agree that the best thing about being a Mom is the unconditional love between a mother and her child. Mom ECE's valued their own devotion, patience, ability, and listening skills. The factors that gave life to them as a Mom were their child's love and creativity, their excitement and knowledge, and having happy and healthy children. Their wishes for all moms were that they have happiness and health, and that their children are safe. Their hopes for their own children were that they remain safe, healthy, strong in character, and successful.

"It's amazing to me that simple little things like watching them [my children] walk in their wobbly way over a bridge in the sunshine can make my heart swell". (Mom ECE).

"For me the best thing about being a mom is both the love and excitement I feel when I see my daughter, or even think about her... The love is so indescribable; my heart skips a beat when I see her after any time away [from her]". (Mom ECE)

Empathy for the moms of the children in their program was dominant in all the responses. Mom ECE's felt that they could understand and empathize with parents and children entering into their program by reflecting on their own experiences as a Mom. They reported that they have developed a new sense of empathy and a new perspective on parenting as a result of becoming a Mom. They feel they can understand and relate to the frustrated parent rushing into the daycare to drop off their children because the morning has been hectic, or the late parent who is coming in with a toddler having a temper tantrum. They also felt that they could empathize better with the parent in their ECLC program who is struggling with a child who may have developmental concerns, or the child who may be losing a parent to an illness. In cases such as these, the mom-role experience is called upon and they felt they could put themselves in their shoes and offer empathy and support to these mothers.

"I have definitely become less demanding and more empathetic since becoming a mother. I realized that these little guys are away from their families for long periods... I've calmed down a lot..." (Mom ECE)

The Mom ECE's we talked to have a deep passion for the work they do and respected their colleagues. They love interacting with the children, creating beautiful environments for them, and sharing in their successes. They hoped that the children they work with always have educators that care about them and provide stimulating activities for them.

"The best thing about working as an ECE- the children- interacting with them, providing a stimulating and beautiful environment for them, observing them and finding out what they are interested in, what engages them and providing activities, materials, and experiences that meets their needs and enhances their learning and interests". (Mom ECE)

They felt that having great mentors and colleagues in their field has been a part of their own personal success. They admired the dedication that ECE's have for Early Learning and Child Care programs, and the respect they received from those who appreciate and

understand their job. They hoped that they keep building their skills, be life long-learners, and have peace in their lives. Mom ECE's wishes for other ECE's included recognition for the valuable work they do with reasonable wages, benefits, and supports. They wished that all ECE's be recognized as professional and educated individuals who lay the ground work for future generations to come. They wished that all ECE's will never lose their core beliefs, and they will always stay true to the values they hold. They wished that all ECE's will always feel the joy and happiness that comes with planting the seeds of learning with the children in their care and even though they may never see the seed blossom, they will take pride in planting it. They wished that they always have a passion for engaging children and encouraging them to learn and grow to their full potential.

"[I wish that] they [colleagues] are able to do a job they love with the least amount of stress possible; that they are rewarded for their hard work; that they don't give up- the children appreciate and need you!"
(Mom ECE)

The stories that the Mom ECE's told us provided insight into their dual role as a Mom and as an ECE. Their stories were inspiring, astute, and wise. It was obvious that the two roles informed and deepened their understanding and experience of each role, and enhanced and complimented each other. Co-author Kelly Goulden, moved by the stories and her own experience as a Mom ECE, summed up the insights of the Mom ECE's we interviewed. She presents them to you as hopes and dreams she has for all those who are a Mom ECE~

"To all Mom ECE's who are dedicated to your Early Learning and Child Care Programs: May your own children and the children you work with always be safe and healthy. May you recognize that, while you not taking the place of a child's mom, you are influencing the children you work with in ways you may never see. May you never lose sight of how precious your time is with these small children. May you always be able to distinguish between your role as a Mom, and as an ECE. May you continue

to remain passionate in your values, and stay true to those beliefs. May you find a life balance between your work at home and your work in the classroom. May you enjoy all the moments that you are given by your own children and those in your classroom."
(Mom ECE)

Kelly Goulden, BAA (CYS), BA, Mom ECE, is a mother of two beautiful girls and has been an Early Childhood Educator since 2000. Elaine Ferguson, MEd has been in child care since 1971, and executive director of CCCNS since 1989.

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Editor: E. Elaine Ferguson
Child Care Connections
100-1200 Tower Road,
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(902) 423-8199
1-800-565-8199 (Atlantic)
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