

University of Alberta

Child Care Accreditation in Alberta: An Institutional Ethnography

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Educational Administration and Leadership

Department of Educational Policy Studies

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Fall 2012

Edmonton, Alberta

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## **Abstract**

Interest is growing in early learning experiences and in the quality of the child care young children are receiving. In 2005, the Alberta government introduced a voluntary child care accreditation program, the first of its kind in Canada. The purpose of this research is to describe how the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program (ACCAP) actually happens in Alberta child care centres from the standpoint of early childhood educators. This study uses institutional ethnography (IE) to critically examine the accreditation process. It attempts to understand how the coordination and intersection of work processes, activities, and relations organized by accreditation occur. Through interviews, text analysis, and mapping the steps and actions taken by educators and other experts in achieving accreditation, the social organization of accreditation becomes apparent.

Following IE, the methodology for this research proceeded through two stages. Phase 1 focused on observing and talking to a group of informants in the field site to gain an understanding of the everyday work that they were undertaking to accomplish the six step accreditation process. Phase 2 involved exploring the accreditation process translocally, by explicating the connections created by and through accreditation, across and beyond the child care agency through interviews with secondary informants and texts identified as significant by the informants.

My analysis suggests that, through accreditation: 1) the local actualities of child care are transformed into new textual realities to become institutionally actionable based on the terms and conditions of the Alberta government; 2) child care centres are hooked into new relations of accountability with families, the accrediting agency, the community, and the government through tracking, surveillance, funding, and service planning; 3) new categories of experts are developed and the authorized work processes of these experts produce the standardized accreditation decision-making process; 4) accreditation produces a new form of knowing, where the experiential and intuitive work knowledge of educators and their interests are often subjugated; and 5) accreditation concerts three new standardized work processes, which are held in place by the daily work of educators themselves and which serve to organize the work of educators differently.

## **Acknowledgments**

To my family, who sacrificed so much of themselves to this project and gave me the time and space to pursue this goal. Thank you to all my amazing colleagues at MacEwan University who supported me with pokes and prods and sage advice all along the way.

I want to acknowledge the support I received from my supervisor, Dr. Alison Taylor, whose unending patience, timely guidance and support were essential to this endeavour. Thank you also to Dr. Janet Rankin and all the members of the IE Working Group whose feedback and support helped me journey towards a clearer appreciation of the potential of IE as a research tool.

My appreciation also goes out to all the educators at the field site, who so thoughtfully and openly shared their work knowledge with me and allowed me to share their daily experience with accreditation.

## Table of Contents

List of Figures .....	<a href="#">ix</a>
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study .....	1
Child Care in Alberta .....	2
Accreditation in Alberta .....	4
Why Explore Accreditation? .....	7
Explicating Accreditation using Institutional Ethnography .....	9
The Researcher’s Standpoint.....	10
Identifying the Problematic .....	15
Goals of this Research.....	16
Study Overview.....	17
Delimitations.....	19
Accreditation Terms, Definitions, and Abbreviations.....	19
Chapter 2: Setting the Context: The Discourses of Accreditation .....	21
Introduction .....	21
Accreditation in Child Care.....	22
Accreditation Within the Context of New Public Management.....	26
New Relations of Audit and Accountability .....	32
The Current Alberta Child Care Context: Policy and Program Responses and Discourses .....	34
The Current Alberta Context: Accreditation.....	35
The Discourse of the Accreditation Quality Standards.....	37

The Current Alberta Context: Historical Context of Accreditation ..	41
The Discourses of Quality .....	43
Accreditation Literature and Countervailing Discourses .....	44
Critical Analysis of Accreditation and Quality Discourses .....	47
Relevant IE Studies .....	50
Conclusion.....	53
Chapter 3: Conceptual Grounding and Methodology.....	55
Theoretical foundations .....	56
IE Terms and Central Concepts that Informed the Study.....	61
Standpoint. ....	61
Discourse.....	62
Ruling relations. ....	63
Social organization and social relations.....	63
The conceptual importance of experience to IE research.....	64
Texts.....	65
Mapping .....	66
Smith’s Notion of “Work” .....	66
Methods of Inquiry .....	68
The Problematic—Discovering the Everyday of Accreditation .....	69
Phase 1 .....	70
Recruitment of and access to the research site.....	71
The research site.....	71
Participant observation.....	73
Phase 1 interviews. ....	74

Field site texts .....	74
Phase 2 .....	75
Recruitment of secondary informants.....	76
Secondary informant interviews. ....	77
Secondary text analysis. ....	77
Data Collection and Analysis Process.....	77
Mapping the Data .....	82
Ethics.....	83
Summary .....	84
Chapter 4: Local Actualities—The Steps in the Accreditation Process.....	85
Introduction .....	85
Mapping as an Ethnographic Technique.....	85
Analytic Description of the Steps in the Accreditation Process .....	87
Step 1, AELCS accreditation: application.....	87
Step 2, AELCS accreditation: self-study and quality enhancement plan.....	89
Step 3, AELCS accreditation: site visit.....	112
Step 4, AELCS accreditation: moderator review.....	123
Step 5, AELCS accreditation: governing council decision. ....	124
Step 6, AELCS accreditation: maintaining accreditation. ....	124
Local Actualities of Child Care Transformed into New Textual Realities.....	125
The Self-study Guide as Intertextual Hierarchy .....	128
Texts in Action.....	130
Chapter 5: The New Work of Accreditation.....	132

Introduction .....	132
Institutional Ethnography and the Concept of Work.....	132
Educators and the New Work of Accreditation.....	133
Goal setting (QEP).....	135
Producing evidence.....	144
Continuous quality improvement (CQI). .....	157
New Work Processes as Ruling Relations .....	162
Conclusion.....	163
Chapter 6: Accreditation and Expert Knowers.....	166
New Experts as Knowers: The Formation of New Experts.....	166
“Magically it happens:” The Text-Work-Text Sequence of the Accreditation Decision-making Process .....	172
Validator.....	176
Moderator.....	183
Accreditation Manager. ....	187
Governing Council. ....	188
Tensions in the Accreditation Decision-making Process.....	192
Chapter 7: Accreditation as a Socially Organized Way of Knowing .....	197
Looking Up into the Ruling Relations.....	198
New social relations with families: parents as consumers in the child care market.....	199
Educators in new social relations.....	205
New Social Relations as Coordination.....	217
The Work of the “New” Professional Educator doing Accreditation .....	220



Self-reflection.....	224
The Social Organization of Accreditation Knowledge.....	229
Ideological Circle.....	232
Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion.....	236
Introduction.....	236
Summary of Research Discoveries.....	236
Local actualities of child care transformed into new textual realities.....	236
Three new work processes.....	237
Accreditation: hooking into new relations of accountability.....	238
Producing the accreditation decision.....	239
Accreditation as a way of knowing.....	239
The Promises of Accreditation: Tensions and Contradictions....	239
The promises of accreditation.....	240
Contributions of Thesis.....	247
Contribution to IE Research.....	248
Conclusion: Further Research.....	249
References.....	251
Glossary of Institutional Ethnography Terminology.....	269
APPENDICES.....	271

## List of Figures

Figure 1. New work processes.....	161
Figure 2. The text-work-text process of accreditation decision-making in the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services (AELCS) child care centre accreditation process between site visit request and final decision.....	175
Figure 3. Looking up into ruling relations—the hierarchy of socially organized relations instituted by the accreditation process for child care centres in Alberta.....	219

## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

The need for appropriate and useful child care policy is demonstrated through recent demographic changes and research on the far-reaching benefits of quality child care. Today a majority of Canadian preschool children live in families with two working parents. As “child care is undoubtedly a significant factor in the way many Canadian children live, learn and grow” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006, p. 1) advocates claim governments thus have a legitimate responsibility for ensuring the quality of child care and early learning. In 2005, the Alberta provincial government introduced a child care accreditation program in an attempt to raise the standard of child care and ensure that families have access to quality early learning and child care services. The purpose of this research is to describe how the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program (ACCAP) actually happens in Alberta child care centres from the standpoint of early childhood educators. This study uses institutional ethnography (IE) to critically examine the accreditation process as experienced by a group of educators in a child care centre. It attempts to understand how the coordination and intersection of work processes, activities, and relations organized by accreditation occur. Through interviews, text analysis, and mapping the steps and actions involved by educators and other experts in achieving accreditation, a portrait of the social organization of accreditation emerges. This introductory chapter begins with an overview of the context and background within which the study evolved, beginning with a brief description of child care and the accreditation program in Alberta. It is followed by the rationale for the study and a short introduction to the research method. Next, in describing the researcher’s standpoint, I highlight the motivation for undertaking the study, arising from my own background and experience with child care. The problematic and goals of the study follow. The chapter concludes with an overview of the format of the dissertation.

## Child Care in Alberta

In Alberta, workforce participation rates of mothers by age of the youngest child are 61 % for those with children zero- to two- years old and 73 % for those with 3- to 5-year-olds (Beach, Friendly, Ferns, Prabhu, & Forer, 2009). These high rates create the demand for quality early learning and child care programs. The notion of quality care is contentious in the early childhood literature, but it is generally defined by a linked set of process, structural, and contextual factors that can be summarized as including sensitive, responsive, knowledgeable educators; a curriculum and pedagogical approach that supports early learning; physical environments designed for young children to actively explore; respect for equity, inclusion, and diversity; and parental participation (Muttart Foundation, 2010). Research shows a strong correlation between quality child care and positive child outcomes. “The positive relationship between child care quality and virtually every facet of children’s development that has been studied is one of the most consistent findings in developmental science (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, p. 13).

In Alberta, there are 560 licensed child care centres. Private businesses operate 62 % of child care centres (Muttart, 2010). In 2007, there were about 71,000 licensed spaces in Alberta (Child Care Resource and Research Unit, 2008). In 2008, the provincial government committed to the Making Space for Children: Child Care Space Creation Innovation Fund. According to the Government of Alberta (2006) “What We Heard” website, this was a space-creation grant program designed to provide an additional 14,000 spaces. The government announced in February 2011 that it had achieved this goal. Access and availability of spaces still varies across the province; there are currently regulated spaces available for one in five children under five years of age (Muttart, 2010).

As noted, quality care is strongly associated with knowledgeable child care educators. In Alberta, the provincial Child Care Regulation stipulates three levels of professional certification for early childhood educators based on the amount of education—Child Development Assistant (CDA) , Child Development Worker (CDW), and Child Development Supervisor (CDS) . To be certified as a CDA one 45-hour course in child development must be completed. CDW certification requires completion of a one- year certificate in Early Learning and Child Care, and the highest CDS level requires the completion of a two-year Early Learning and Child Care diploma program or an equivalent level of training. The Child Care Regulation mandates that at a minimum, in every child care centre the Program Supervisor must hold CDS certification, one in four staff must be certified at the CDW level, and all remaining staff must have CDA certification within six months of starting work at the child care centre (Alberta Children and Youth Services [ACYS], 2011b). Recent statistics show that 50 % of staff in licensed child care centres in Alberta are certified at the CDA level and 4 out of 10 are certified at the highest CDS level (Muttart Foundation, 2011).

According to the Alberta Learning Information Service (ALIS, 2009) and the Alberta Wage and Salary Survey, the average hourly wage of an early childhood educator in 2009 was \$13.86 per hour, and the average annual salary was \$25, 951. Mahon (2009) reports Alberta had at that time the lowest salaries for early childhood educators relative to average overall provincial salaries for women. Salaries for early childhood educators were just 49 % of the average overall provincial salary for all women.

A recent study commissioned by the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement (ARCQE) examining recruitment and retention issues in Alberta, provides a profile of the child care workforce. Respondents were overwhelmingly young and female, only 1% of those working in early learning and child care settings were male and approximately 48% were under 35 years (Massing, 2008). With respect to cultural diversity, besides

English, over 50 other languages were noted as being spoken at home by educators. In terms of their length of employment, the largest category was composed of those who had worked for their current employer for one to two years, however overall 63.8% had worked in child care before coming to their current employer, with almost one-third having more than 6 years of previous experience (Massing, 2008). The levels of education of respondents ranged from less than high school to post graduate degrees, with the largest groups of caregivers holding CDA (equivalent to one course in early childhood) at 36.5 % or CDS certification (equivalent to a two year post secondary diploma program) at 32.2%. Across auspices, for profit centres had higher percentages of CDA staff and lower percentages of CDS qualified staff than not for profit centres. Wages were identified as an issue in the report, with 92.2% of child care staff reporting earnings of between \$7.00 - \$15.00 an hour (excluding wage enhancements) (Massing, 2008). The picture provided by this report, depicts a classed, gendered and racialized workforce.

The provincial allocation for each regulated child care space in 2008 in Alberta was \$1,429, the lowest in all Canadian provinces except for Prince Edward Island (Mahon, 2009). This is important context for understanding the impact of accreditation in Alberta.

### **Accreditation in Alberta**

Under the British North America Act, child care provision is situated under provincial jurisdiction, thus the development of child care in each province and territory has followed a different trajectory, creating a diverse mix of policy and program implementation practices (Friendly, 2000). In Alberta, child care rests under the responsibility of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note: During the period that this research took place the provincial ministry responsible for child care underwent a name change from Alberta Children's Services (ACS) to Alberta

The implementation of ACCAP in 2005 as a program initiative to address child care quality in the province signalled the Alberta government's reaction to a number of overlapping and complex contextual and competing issues and influences in the child care field, and reflects neoliberal political thought (Langford, 2011) and new managerialism (Evans, 1997). The ministry responded by entering into a partnership with the Canadian Child Care Federation and the Alberta Child Care Network Association, hiring consultants and consulting the field (Golberg, 2005). It created and then contracted with an arms-length accrediting agency called the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services (AELCS) to provide accreditation services, while retaining control of the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program (ACCAP), the funding portion of the accreditation system. It also created and initially funded a separate technical support agency called the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement (ARCQE). Based on 10 quality standards drawn from early childhood research literature intended to define quality child care, ACCAP stated goals that included raising the standard of child care, improving best practices, and addressing issues of staff recruitment and retention in child care programs (Alberta Government, 2005a).

ACCAP is a voluntary program—it is not mandatory for all child care centres to participate. However, the vast majority of Alberta child care centres have achieved accreditation. AELCS reports that as of December 2011, 496 child care centres are accredited, for an impressive rate of close to 88 %. Most programs are successful if they elect to apply to AELCS. Statistics posted on the AELCS website indicate that 86 % of child care centres achieve

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Children and Youth Services (ACYYS). After the October 2011 Alberta provincial election, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services was amalgamated with other departments (Employment and Immigration, Homeless Supports, Alberta Supports) into the Ministry of Human Services.

accreditation after their first site visit. After a second site visit the accreditation rate rises to 98 %.

Accreditation has been defined as “a process by which a representative body, recognized by both the service community and the community in general, establishes standards for services. The standards are above the minimum regulatory requirements of the government. Programs can apply on a voluntary basis for evaluation against standards and if found to meet or surpass them, are granted a certificate that recognizes this fact” (Doherty-Derkowski, 1995, p. 113). One of the most explicit goals of ACCAP as a program solution is to increase the quality of child care in Alberta. As noted above, the intention is for accredited centres to be recognized by the accrediting agency and the ministry for surpassing the minimum regulatory requirements legislated by the Alberta Child Care Licensing Act and the Alberta Child Care Licensing Regulation (Alberta Government, 2007a; 2008). The purpose of the Act and the Regulation, which are enforced by licensing officers acting on behalf of the ministry through regional Child and Family Service Authorities (CFSAs), is to set out the minimum standards that must be met in a licensed child care program to ensure that the health, safety, and developmental needs of children are met (ACYS, 2011a). The emphasis here is on compliance, whereas according to AELCS, the emphasis of accreditation is on the provision of higher levels of quality care and the goal is to recognize this achievement.

Upon being accredited, the child care centre is viewed by the Alberta government as capable of providing quality child care and thus credible for funding. Achieving accreditation status means that child care centres are eligible for accreditation funding under ACCAP. This includes an annual quality funding grant of up to \$7,500, wage enhancements of between \$2.14 and \$6.62 per hour depending on level of certification, and a benefit contribution grant. ACCAP also provides access to professional development grants and a staff attraction allowance, depending on certification level.



## Why Explore Accreditation?

Accreditation is a word that does “work.” The vision statement of AELCS claims it to be “an accreditation system that ensures children, families and professionals excellence in Early Learning and Care Services” (AAAELCS, 2009, About Us). In Alberta, child care accreditation is supposed to be tantamount to quality, offering reassurance to the public. Accreditation is promoted by the ministry, the accrediting agency, the Alberta Child Care Association, and the sector. These groups and agencies would like accreditation to hold a distinct form of meaning by the public; and they promote a standardized version of what it means to be accredited into the consciousness of people by linking accreditation to words like quality, excellence, higher standards, and best practice.

Langford (2011) argues that the introduction of ACCAP in Alberta was highly significant. My research draws attention to how accreditation acts as an influential and coordinating force on and within the child care sector. I argue that the use of rating schemes like accreditation is becoming an influential, standardizing, and generalizing trend in the early childhood sector, both in North America and abroad. I view the increasing demand for child care accreditation systems as connected to the influence of new public management and new accountability and audit strategies mimicking broader current service delivery and government funding trends globally and across diverse sectors including education, social services, and healthcare (cf. Janz, 2009).

Alberta’s own accreditation system, although purported to be “a made in Alberta” solution, is based on other models including the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in the United States, the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) from Australia, and the New Zealand Child Care Association Quality Register (Golberg, 1999). In chapter two I further discuss the reasons for this trend. In these

international contexts, such systems are presented as “the answer to the child care quality question” and are intended to bring assurance to government, parents, and taxpayers that excellent child care will result. A recent statement from a large coalition of American child care advocacy groups, entitled *A Vision for Reauthorization of Child Care*, asserts that to ensure quality, all states will develop a “quality rating and improvement system” (National Women’s Law Centre, 2008) such as ACCAP. It is my understanding that other Canadian jurisdictions such as the Manitoba Child Care Association are watching the Alberta process carefully and intend to develop accreditation systems of their own (Manitoba Child Care Association, 2008). As these systems proliferate, it is essential to provide a more nuanced examination of the process in order to more fully inform the field. Currently there is an absence of literature examining the impact of accreditation on the work of educators, and there may be unexpected consequences of which child care centres, the accrediting agency, and the government may want to be aware. Accreditation is gaining popularity as a quality assurance tool, and therefore this research may resonate with other individuals in agencies seeking accreditation across diverse sectors.

Although this study will not directly address the question of whether accreditation as a quality assurance system is actually effective, it will offer an important exploration of the implications of using accreditation as a way of producing quality child care. The purpose of this research is to recognize the ruling relations and new social organization concerted by accreditation and the form of knowing it imposes—this analytic description is what I am offering from this research. It is my hope that this research offers the field a new shared “in-common knowledge” (S. Turner, 2011, personal communication) about how accreditation is actually happening in Alberta child care centres; it is not to provide a justification of people’s behaviours or to decipher individual motivations, but to be able to explain in detail the

socially organized powers of accreditation in which educators' working lives have become embedded, and to which their work activities contribute.

### **Explicating Accreditation using Institutional Ethnography**

The intention of this research is to analyze how ACCAP is happening in Alberta child care centres. It is not intended to measure the success of accreditation or to account for its effectiveness in a quantitative manner, but rather to illuminate the actions and lived experiences of child care educators trying to achieve accreditation, and other members of the sector who both are subjected to it and produce its coordinating features. Using techniques adopted from IE, a method of inquiry that explores the organization of social relations, an analytic description is produced that maps the processes of accreditation and is used to illustrate what is actually happening in the field in relation to accreditation. Using the methods of IE and participant observation, I went into a child care work setting to draw on people's actual work knowledge, and to observe the connected sequences of activities going on in order to "do accreditation" and how these sequences of activities operate to coordinate the educator's accreditation work through texts and tools without their explicit awareness, although with their active involvement.

Chapter 1 now continues with an account that highlights my motivation for undertaking this study and how it is rationalized from my own experience and standpoint as an early childhood educator. This is followed by a discussion of the problematic that guides this research and focuses the institutional ethnographic inquiry, and highlights the goals of and justification for the research. The chapter concludes with an overview of the study, how the research has been delimited, and a section outlining definitions of important accreditation terms. Relevant concepts from institutional ethnography are defined in a glossary at the end of the dissertation.

## The Researcher's Standpoint

In institutional ethnography, the researcher's "own experience matters" when crafting and conceptualizing a research study (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 17). Hence my interest in child care accreditation grew out of my own experience in the sector. Below I outline how my own experiential knowledge as an early childhood educator led to this investigation.

Child care has been both personally and professionally influential in my life. This is my chosen career, and my passion. My relationship and experience with the field, as well as being a working parent who searched for quality child care for my own daughters, has left me sensitive to the diverse nature and unequal quality of this sector. I have viewed myself as an early childhood professional since graduating from college with an early childhood development diploma. Across my career, now spanning more than 30 years, I held many positions in the sector, from working as a frontline educator in preschool and school-age care settings, to executive director of a community based, nonprofit child care centre. For the last two-and-a-half decades, I have taught preservice early childhood students in a two-year college/university diploma program. As an instructor, I also have an interest in ensuring that early childhood educators are providing competent and nurturing care and education for young children. I hear about the challenges that early childhood educators face in cash-strapped child care centres where decisions about resource allocation to staff, equipment, and programming are cut to the bone, and great variations in educator education and training affect the level of care provided.

In Canada, there is no national federal policy guiding service provision for child care, no entitlement statement, and no national early childhood curriculum framework. This is due to the way in which child care in Canada is embedded in a particular social organization ruled by federalism, a liberal social policy regime, and a strong market orientation towards child care

(Mahon, 2009). Historical accounts of the struggle by advocates for child care policy at the national level are well documented (Mahon, 2000; Prentice, 2001; Timpson, 2001). During my career, I have participated in many advocacy initiatives and worked hard to raise awareness of the need to increase the level of quality in early learning and child care services at the local, provincial, and national level. My efforts and those of many, many others appear to be continually stymied by seemingly nonresponsive government at all levels and oppositional societal attitudes. For example, in January 2006, at federal election time, with the long-awaited national system of child care proposed by the Martin Liberal government almost within the grasp of advocates, forces of reprivatization (Apple, 2006; Fraser, 1989) such as the conservative grassroots but highly influential group REAL Women, succeeded in relocating child care in the family sphere (Lirette, 2006). The then-new conservative government of Stephen Harper shredded the bilateral agreements that would have been the first step in a new national policy, and instead instituted the \$100 per month Universal Child Care Benefit, effectively destroying the foundation of a national system for which child care advocates had been working for decades.

This continued unfulfilled search for a set of responsive policy initiatives and programs that meets the early learning and care needs of contemporary Alberta children and families propels my research agenda. When the voluntary accreditation program was introduced in 2005, it was hailed by many as the breakthrough that was needed to advance conditions in the field. Was accreditation the means to solve issues such as poor wages, high turnover, and wide variations in the level of quality care and education being offered by the struggling sector?

Imagine my surprise when told by a validator from AELCS that early childhood educators “didn’t know what quality care was before accreditation was implemented.” My own frontline experience had occurred prior to accreditation being implemented, beginning back in the early 1980s. At that

time, I believe that my fellow educators and I were providing quality early childhood care and education to the children and families we served. We discussed and debated what we were doing with the support of the centre director, reading further when issues arose. We planned together as a team to ensure appropriate experiences for the children, worked in partnership with their families, and considered carefully the physical environments that we created in our classroom. I joined the Alberta Association for Young Children (AAYC) to add my voice to those concerned that there was no requirement for educator training in the existing child care regulations. Prior to the provincial government implementing training regulations I received AAYC certification as an Early Childhood Professional. I attended conferences and workshops to continue my learning. In those days and continuing until today, I have held a strongly internalized sense of my professional role. I knew what was expected of me as an early childhood educator, based on what I had learned and read in college about the nature of early childhood work, the expectations of my employer and families, and from the modelling of more experienced educators. There was no external agency at that time that oversaw the quality of care I provided, apart from very minimal Day Care Licensing Regulations.

My own experience with accreditation matters. It adds to my knowledge base as a researcher and informs this research as well. During my involvement with the Edmonton-based Child and Family Resource Association (CAFRA) over many years, I attended numerous member meetings where educators voiced their concerns about the lack of emphasis on quality in the child care regulation, and how that hindered their attempts to improve the quality of care they provided. Hoping to build on their reputation of providing a higher level of care than mandated by the provincial legislation, this group decided to develop an accreditation process for member centres that they could then advertise to families seeking quality child care. I participated in a CAFRA committee during the mid-1990s that

developed an accreditation system for its member centres. It was a precursor to the current province-wide accreditation system. The CAFRA accreditation system was implemented locally, but hampered by a lack of resources and volunteer time to sustain it effectively. The CAFRA group then joined with other early childhood advocacy groups to promote a province-wide accreditation system.

Once accreditation was in place, I heard many stories from educators about the challenges they faced as their centres navigated the demands of the accrediting agency. Informal conversations with educators in the field inevitably turned to where their child care centres were in relation to the accreditation process. As we talked, I also began to notice what seemed to be new jargon in their descriptions. Besides being peppered with the term “quality,” I kept hearing about QEPs (quality enhancement work plans) and portfolios in our conversations. What was this new discourse all about? They talked about mentors, coaches, moderators, and validators. Who were these new experts? They also described the enormous amount of time, energy, and overall commitment needed to accomplish the ACCAP process. Much of this informal discussion reflected mixed feelings about the experience as a whole. I heard often a set of what became familiar tales of accreditation that circulate as popular knowledge in the Alberta child care sector, and that express a shared common knowledge and perception that some centres were receiving accreditation that shouldn’t have, and that some centres had somehow managed to fool the accrediting agency by “faking it” during the two-day site visit included in the accreditation process. Some felt that other centres were “only doing it for the money.” Sharing the experience, going through the process, and “getting it” seemed to bring a mutual sense of relief and accomplishment, but many voiced concerns about what was expected of them in order to meet the accreditation standards. There seemed to be real tensions for participants in the process and I wondered what the new accreditation process was all about? How was it working for the sector?

Prior to beginning this research, I was asked to participate on the accreditation team of a local child care centre, during which I participated in the development of their accreditation QEP, which gave me initial insight into the new work processes generated by ACCAP. It was also troubling to hear that the provincial government had demanded and set explicit targets for the number of child care centres that had to achieve accredited status each year for the next three years. I was left with many questions. What was this program initiative really about? Whose interests does accreditation really serve? What does ACCAP tell us about what we value in society for young children?

At the time, I was reading Foucault (1984, 1988, 1991), Dean (1999), Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999), Ball (1994, 2007), Power (1997), Shore and Wright (1997, 2000), and D. Smith (2005, 2006). These readings were critical to my new understandings, introducing concepts arising from postfoundational critique such as governmentality and critique of neoliberal thought reflected in audit culture and new public managerialism that resonated with me. They seemed to lie beneath the motivation for and creation of the context for the accreditation program in Alberta. This literature helped me to begin to question the taken-for-granted nature of the ACCAP initiative. However, few in the early childhood field seemed to be questioning whether this new program initiative appeared to be serving an accountability and efficiency agenda of government, rather than a philosophically informed and early childhood values-based approach to really improving the care and education of young children in the province. Here is where I locate a critical disjuncture between my views and understandings of how to enact quality care and the claims of the accreditation discourse. I contend that child care accreditation in Alberta has received little critical attention and it is this gap that is targeted in this project.



I was introduced to the work of Canadian sociologist Dorothy Smith and institutional ethnography in one of my university courses. As I read more, the approach really “grabbed me” as a way to burrow deeper into the accreditation process. I started to wonder if it could be feasible that accreditation was coordinating the work of educators? If so, how was it happening? I pondered the role that texts played in the accreditation process. What would an IE analysis of the multiple texts of accreditation reveal? How was the accreditation process hooked in to broader discourses and relationships beyond the individual child care centres that were separately attempting to achieve accreditation? It became immediately evident that using IE could help surface a new way for me (and others) to see accreditation for its coordinating potential. IE offered a rich and potentially fruitful innovative research approach to support a purposeful challenge to the traditional discourses of accreditation as neutral and common-sense; it troubles the global trend valorizing accreditation as a universal quality management and funding regime.

### **Identifying the Problematic**

The concept of problematic in IE is used as an analytic tool to direct attention to people’s everyday lived experience. IE researchers use a problematic to anchor the inquiry and make daily actualities researchable. The problematic may include sets of questions, inquiries, and issues that the researcher uses to build a research investigation (D. Smith, 1987). The problematic is used to explore institutional relations and social organization, and to investigate how things happen as they do (Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

IE researchers suggest that you can locate the problematic at the point of rupture between the stated and the actual experience. A disjuncture happens in the local setting when two different versions of reality meet—that of knowing from a ruling perspective and that of knowing from an experiential one (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). As noted above, there were

many tensions in working through the steps required by accreditation—there was an apparent gap between how educators worked to care for and educate young children, and what they were required to produce to prove they met the 10 accreditation quality standards.

The problematic of this research is how the experience of child care educators in Alberta seeking to achieve child care accreditation is socially organized. The point of entry was a child care centre that was applying for accreditation, and the process that the child care educators went through each step of the way. The educators' experience of being in the accreditation process as it is going on and being put together became the context, and provided an actual set of lived conditions for this study (cf. Turner, 2003). I wanted to find out how accreditation works in order to understand and describe it in a way that could be consequential. IE researchers generally operate with critical or liberatory goals (Devault & McCoy, 2006) and it is my hope that this study can open up a new space for activism and agency in relation to accreditation.

### **Goals of this Research**

Using an institutional ethnographic approach, I explored the process of accreditation undertaken within a child care centre, examining how the accreditation process organizes the work of educators differently, and how it draws the child care centre into a new relationship with families, the accrediting agency, the community, and the government through tracking, surveillance, funding, and service planning. The goal was to explicate the social relations that they were drawn into in this process. This research was intended to illuminate the seemingly invisible, concerted accreditation process, and how the work it does is taken for granted. It explicated how educators entered into accreditation work, took it up through texts and discourse, how their consciousness became ordered by it aligning their interests to external priorities, how they engaged and participated in it, or

worked around it. Examining the social organization of accreditation highlighted how the new ways of working to meet accreditation standards influenced educators' decision-making processes and priorities. It is important to note that this research was not an inquest to place blame or point fingers at any individual, child care centre, accrediting agency, or government department. The intention of IE research is to focus on social relations, not individual actions and competence. The spotlight in this work was on inquiry into the actualities of accreditation, and the relations of accountability that are organized through tracking, reporting, and surveillance, as well as how educators' work is pulled into alignment with processes of standardization. It highlighted the emergence of ACCAP, and mapped the progression of its elements into institutional practice within a specific child care site. It examined how ACCAP gave rise to, and depends upon, particular discourses, forms of knowledge, and expertise, and uses techniques and instrumentalities with a range of coordinating effects to reach its purported goal of quality care.

### **Study Overview**

The remainder of this dissertation is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 sets the context for the study. In an IE study, this chapter is intended to demonstrate the researcher's knowledge of the multiple perspectives on the topic and to highlight their connection to particular discourses. It is also intended to point out gaps in previous studies and establish a clear need for the research. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the accrediting body (AELCS) and the role of the ministry in child care, synthesize the academic literature on accreditation, and contextualize my research within the literature. I note the overall absence of research on quality assurance programs, such as accreditation, as able to enhance quality child care and the lack of critical academic engagement with accreditation in Alberta.

Chapter 3 provides a summary of IE and why it was selected as a method of inquiry in general, and as a chosen method for investigating the social organization of child care accreditation in particular. From this chapter, the reader will be introduced to some of the key theoretical groundings, terms and assumptions of institutional ethnography. Chapter 3 also includes the methods section of the dissertation. It examines more specifically the methods used to collect data, and how I explored the social relations of child care accreditation using an IE approach to look at the textually mediated relations and discursive organization of accreditation as it was undertaken in a particular child care centre. I describe my research as it progressed from my entry into the field site, the types of questions I asked in the informant interviews, the reading of certain texts as data, and the ongoing discoveries and contradictions I came across as I worked with and mapped materials and steps in the process in a discursive fashion. I describe possible limitations and barriers in my own location and presence as a researcher, and how I built the analytic description that is offered in the following chapters.

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 combined provide a detailed descriptive analysis of the data produced by this study. In chapter 4, I outline the steps taken in the field site to accomplish accreditation and then describe the coordinating presence of the text of the accreditation self-study guide, with a focus on how local actualities are converted into textual realities to become institutionally actionable. Chapter 5 explicates the ruling relations of three new work processes coordinated by accreditation that were observed in the field site. The development of new categories of experts and how the authorized work processes of these experts are interlaced together to produce the standardized accreditation decision-making process is described in detail in chapter 6. Chapter 7 illustrates the new social organization of accreditation and how that hooks educators into new relationships of accountability. The new professional that is constructed by accreditation is

also examined. This chapter concludes with an exploration of accreditation as a new form of knowing, where the experiential and intuitive work knowledge of educators and their interests are often subjugated.

The final chapter offers a conclusion to my research, summarizing the main findings that arose and describing how it contributes to other IE and early childhood research within the larger social context of quality assurance. Chapter 8 also includes a discussion of how the promises of accreditation produce disjuncture and leave unanswered questions about the social organization of quality child care.

### **Delimitations**

The ACCAP program was introduced simultaneously in both day care centres and family day home agencies. In 2008, the accrediting agency received funding to also pilot accreditation standards in school-age care programs across the province. Although we can assume that the coordinating effects of accreditation may be similar in family day homes and school-age care programs, they are beyond the scope of this study, which will focus exclusively on the experience of accreditation in day care centres.

### **Accreditation Terms, Definitions, and Abbreviations**

Early childhood professional, caregiver and educator are used interchangeably in the literature. I have adopted the term early childhood educator, based on a Canadian Child Care Federation discussion paper (Ferguson, 2004) that reports this as the preferred term of the sector. Day care, child care, and/or early learning and child care program or service are used interchangeably.

The following abbreviations are used frequently throughout the research:

**ACCAP**—Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program—The accreditation program for child care services (serving children 0–6 years) in Alberta.

**ACYS**—Alberta Child and Youth Services—The Alberta government ministry responsible for child care, including the ACCAP.

**AAAELCS or AELCS**—Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services—The agency responsible for implementing the accreditation process.

**ARCQE**—Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement—The agency responsible for technical support for centres seeking accreditation.

**AQS**—Accreditation Quality Standards—10 standards divided into 4 categories of outcomes, and broken down into criteria and specific indicators of quality that establish eligibility for accreditation.

**QEP**—Quality Enhancement Plan—The comprehensive plan required by AELCS as part of the accreditation process.

## **Chapter 2: Setting the Context: The Discourses of Accreditation**

### **Introduction**

This chapter offers insight into the current context for my analysis of the social organization of child care accreditation in Alberta. This chapter is structured to act as an overview and beginning analysis of scholarly discourses of accreditation, and is intended to draw attention to the need for alternative research framings of this important issue to further inform the early childhood field. For the purpose of this study, I am employing the term discourse as per Smith's usage (1999, 2005). For her, discourse refers to the talk and texts evident in the social that are activated and taken up by people in their everyday lives (D. Smith, 1999). Devault and McCoy add, "discourse refers to a field of relations that include not only texts and their intertextual conversations, but the activities of people in actual sites who produce them and use them and take up the conceptual frames they circulate" (2006, p. 44).

The chapter begins with a general overview of international and national trends in accreditation. The influential discourse produced by the new public management and the ruling relations of audit and accountability are highlighted. Next, the academic literature specific to child care accreditation is examined, followed by a brief historical review of the implementation of child care accreditation in Alberta which leads us to the current context that is productive of accreditation as a program initiative. The influential discourse of the accreditation quality standards (AQS) is examined and the literature related to quality child care and accreditation is synthesized. The chapter concludes with a summary of four relevant IE studies.

Accreditation generally refers to the formal evaluation of an organization against a set of accepted standards or criteria by an external

authorizing body. In Canada, accreditation is typically associated with hospitals and seniors housing facilities. More recently, law enforcement agencies, post-secondary institutions and social welfare agencies have become the targets of accreditation movements at the local, national, and international level. For example, Accreditation Canada accredits health care agencies, the Council on Accreditation (COA) accredits over 1,800 agencies serving children, families, and youths in North America, and Imagine Canada now offers an accreditation program to nonprofits and charities across Canada. Most accreditation processes follow a generalized pattern including application, submission of a self-assessment, a site visit by assessors (which may include inspection of the premises, interviews with staff, observation of processes and procedures, review of records), and an exit debriefing where initial feedback is provided to ensure the validity of conclusions and to ensure there are no surprises in the accreditation report. The assessors' findings are reviewed and formal notification of the result is given, often including any deficiencies, and sometimes commendations on how well the applicant has met some or all of the standards, and then the accreditation status is published. Next steps include monitoring the applicant's continued compliance with standards and periodic reaccreditation intended to emphasize continuous improvement (World Development Group, 2006). Although purported to be a homegrown model, child care accreditation in Alberta is remarkably similar to this pattern, demonstrating how child care accreditation in Alberta is hooked into the standardizing nature of broader accreditation discourse.

### **Accreditation in Child Care**

The implementation of the child care accreditation program heralded a revolutionary change in Alberta. The ACCAP program did not just tinker with or fine tune the existing system of child care provision, but signalled a completely new model for quality improvement that was introduced, implemented, and quite uncritically accepted in a relatively short period of



time. Accredited child care centres began receiving new funding from ACYS to increase program quality, completely changing how funding flows into child care centres from the provincial government, producing new relations of accountability with new methods of tracking and surveillance of child care centres, and mimicking current trends in service delivery and government funding promoted by new public management, accountability, and audit discourses. Influenced by international examples of child care accreditation from the United States and Australia, ACCAP became the first provincial child care accreditation system in Canada.

Examining the movement towards child care accreditation internationally, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has been accrediting child care centres in the United States since 1985. Although there are currently at least 20 different accreditation systems that child care centres can choose from in the United States, NAEYC is the most-recognized and largest child care accrediting body, with 7,831 accredited programs (Neugebauer, 2009). NAEYC accreditation is a voluntary process that is administered by a national advocacy organization. It is reputed to be very difficult to attain for a significant portion of the child care sector, and has a high dropout rate. With 10 standards and subsets of criteria, the NAEYC process includes the burdensome requirement that programs must be prepared to be assessed on all 400-plus criteria. Based on feedback from child care centres and using expert review and analysis of program performance in the current system, the NAEYC has recently undergone a criteria review process (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009).

An interesting trend developing in the United States, that in many ways parallels the accountability efforts of accreditation, is the introduction of quality rating systems (QRS). According to the American National Child Care Information Center, “quality rating systems (QRS) are a method to assess, improve and communicate the level of quality in early care and

education settings” (National Child Care Information Center [NCCIC], 2006, p. 1). Typically QRS include five common elements including:

- standards that reflect early childhood education research and that are based on compliance with the state’s licensing regulations and are stratified into two or more tiers,
- accountability through assessment and monitoring for compliance with specific criteria,
- program and practitioner outreach and support such as technical assistance, professional development, and training,
- financing incentives that are specially linked to compliance with quality standards, for example, tiered reimbursement rates, contracts, wage enhancements, and quality grants, and
- parent education so that parents understand the QRS and how it benefits children, families, and the overall early childhood system. It may include the development of symbols that represent an easy-to-understand indicator of quality such as three star or gold level, and that parents can use when making child care choices (NCCIC, 2006).

As of 2007, quality rating systems for child care centres were in place in 13 states and under development in 29 others (Friedman, 2007). QRS is a strategy to improve the quality of early education and care by providing “star ratings” like those for hotels and restaurants. Hailed as a “rapidly advancing approach for improving child care quality,” (NCCIC, 2006, p. 3) QRS is promoted as a consumer guide, a benchmark for program improvement, and an accountability measure for funding (Mitchell, 2005).

Where does QRS fit in relation to the accreditation movement in the United States, especially NAEYC accreditation? Many claim that it is too great a leap for child care centres to move from meeting low licensing regulations to the high NAEYC accreditation standards, and QRS has become the steps in

between (Friedman, 2007). NAEYC believes that QRS should provide a clear continuum of quality leading to a top tier that includes NAEYC accreditation (Advocates in Action, 2006). As QRS grows in popularity, many centres may forgo NAEYC accreditation entirely to focus on their state-endorsed QRS. However, Neugebauer (2009) claims “as state-wide QRS are refined and coordinated, they will be seen as a convenient, across the board rating of programs. But for monitoring quality at the highest level, program accreditation systems will continue to provide the truest, in-depth assurance of quality for parents, regulators, and funders” (p. 17).

The Australian accreditation model was originally based upon the NAEYC process, with modifications for the Australian context. The Quality Improvement and Accreditation System was instituted in 1993 as a mandatory program. The Australian system was unique as the first quality assurance program to be linked to child care funding through legislation and to be funded by a federal government (National Child Care Accreditation Council, 2006). The Australian accreditation model had five steps including registration, self-study, validation, moderation, and the accreditation decision. It is interesting to note that unannounced accreditation spot checks were introduced in 2006 by the Australian government. Validators visited randomly selected programs to observe practices and documentation. Many of the primary and secondary informants in the current study wished for this type of surveillance in the Alberta accreditation system.

Recently, significant changes endorsed and undertaken by the Australian government and resulting from the introduction of a new national curriculum, *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*, have been implemented. The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care includes a new rating system that blends the old accreditation model with licensing requirements combining “the seven quality areas with a five level rating scale” (Council of Australian Governments, 2010, p. 1). The changes will be fully implemented

in January 2012 and include increased staff-to-child ratios and higher staff qualifications. Designed to decrease the regulatory burden by replacing current licensing, regulation, and quality improvement and accreditation processes in each Australian state and territory, it includes the establishment of a new national body responsible for providing oversight of the new system (Council of Australian Governments, 2010).

Although a number of Canadian provinces (British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan) have introduced provincial early learning curriculum frameworks, no Canadian federal early childhood curriculum framework appears in sight. At present, Alberta does not require regulated child care centres to follow an early learning curriculum framework. In the recent Muttart Foundation report, *In the Best Interest of Children and Families: A Discussion of Early Childhood Education and Care in Alberta*, it is recommended that the Ministries of Education and Children and Youth Services work together to develop an early learning curriculum framework (2010).

Alberta remains the only Canadian province to have adopted accreditation. The Manitoba Child Care Association was actively engaged in a feasibility study to develop an accreditation program in that province and went so far as to develop quality standards, but provincial funding commitments have come up short and the process seems to have stalled, although according to their website creation of an accreditation agency remains a long-term goal (Manitoba Child Care Association, 2006).

### **Accreditation Within the Context of New Public Management**

New public management (NPM) is an umbrella term that describes a particular form of organizational and management design, the application of new financial or economic patterns to public management, and the adoption of a pattern of policy and program choices (Yamamoto, 2003). Dorothy Smith (2007) describes NPM as a major institutional specification of neoliberalism,

and it is perhaps the most significant discourse shaping the perceived need for the introduction of ACCAP. Motivated by the Klein Conservative government's desire to eliminate the deficit and pay down the province's debt (Taylor, Shultz, & Leard, 2005), NPM was introduced into Alberta in 1993 (Baines, 2004). Mirroring a larger international government reorganization trend and mimicking previous changes in the Alberta K-12 system made to increase accountability (Taylor et al., 2005), Alberta's recent introduction of ACCAP as a reform to improve the quality of early learning and child care programs exhibits many of the characteristic elements of NPM, and acts as an accountability tool for the ministry within this context.

New public management produces a reorganization of state and public institutions, as new forms of government replace longstanding forms of governance bureaucracy, driven by calls for greater public accountability, efficiency, and lowered expenditures. Accountability and efficiency are constructed entirely as the achievement of performance targets (Baines, 2004). NPM assumes that the public sector needs fixing and the fix lies in better management. "Better" in the case of NPM in Alberta means a private sector, managerialist approach including cost-cutting and formula-based funding; devolving responsibilities to new, separate quasi-government agencies (such as AELCS and ARCQE) and use of contracts and quasi-contracts (framework agreements, business plans) to monitor performance; implementing a purchaser-provider split (separating the funding function from the provision or purchasing of services); and introducing competition into the delivery of public services through market and quasi-market mechanisms, establishing performance indicators or measures and requiring staff to work to specific output or outcome targets and increasing emphasis on customer responsiveness, service standards, and quality (Evans, 1997, pp. 2-3).

Donna Baines in her 2004 article "Pro-market, Non-market: The Dual Nature of Organizational Change in Social Service Delivery" demonstrates

that new managerial strategies implicated in NPM are not just neutral and technical, but reflect both a pro-market and non-market reconstruction of social caring and responsibility. She discusses trends in social service delivery that are remarkably applicable to the trends in governmental strategies for child care provision as well. Accreditation is pro-market in that it does not undermine or threaten to replace the current child care market in Alberta but rather supports and further legitimizes it. The Alberta government made a purposeful decision to open up the voluntary accreditation program to both nonprofit and commercial child care enterprises. One of the guiding principles of the ministry framework states that the government will “recognize equity among child care programs (not-for-profit and commercial) with respect to government support” (ACYS, 2008). Alberta is one of only four provinces to provide capital funding to for-profit centres (Canadian Union of Provincial Employees, 2009). In accreditation planning documents the intent of accreditation to unite nonprofit and commercial centres by “turning the focus away from auspice and toward the quality of care provided is explicitly stated” (Golberg, 2003, p. 1), and in the KPMG Consulting report prepared by Cleland (2002) that recommends the adoption of “an accreditation model linked to increased standards,” one of the benefits noted is that “accreditation will do much to reinject more traditional market forces of supply and demand into the day care equation”(p. 19). Accreditation is also non-market because according to Baines, it produces savings for the province, but does not generate profits for the province, operating outside the market but not replacing it. The Cleland report (2002) highlights the savings that the Alberta government accrues when Alberta Works (the provincial social assistance program) clients leave the welfare rolls and begin to access child care subsidy. It estimates a real savings of \$15 million annually which is available to fund child care accreditation and the subsidy program. By positioning the responsibility for child care within Alberta Child and Youth Services, rather than the education

ministry, as is the trend in other provinces and international jurisdictions, the government reinforces child care as a residual welfare service targeted at those in financial need (Mahon, 2009). Baines goes on to describe a trend that sees social services “restructured and reorganized so as to be more supportive of and consistent with the dominant market ideology” (p. 7). The tone of the Cleland/KPMG report (2002) prominently reflects this discourse in relation to the introduction of accreditation.

Noting that Alberta has been a laboratory for neoliberal experiments in public service restructuring such as NPM through sweeping changes and programme redesign, Baines (2004) reports on a trend that is also reflective of the ACCAP program—more statistics gathering, performance monitoring, and expansion of quality control initiatives. Accreditation discourse is embedded in the business language used by the Alberta government that results from and is informed by NPM and neoliberal discourse. This language valorizes choice (both parental and consumer), accountability, and emphasizes business or market solutions as the most efficient and effective way to deliver services. Under neoliberalism, the state’s role is creating the appropriate market by providing the conditions, laws, and institutions necessary for its operation. The provincial government of Alberta has created the quasi-market environment in which accreditation can operate. This includes coupling the child care market with accreditation mechanisms for the generation of evidence of performance to accomplish the accountability regime of NPM. Accreditation is also a means through which child care centres can be drawn into alignment with and operate in a functioning relationship with the market. It serves to reinforce the managerial discourses of neoliberalism that promote business solutions for social problems, and the need for social service-type agencies<sup>2</sup> to be more effective and efficient.

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<sup>3</sup>Although advocates would declare child care as an educational endeavour, the government of Alberta, by positioning it under the auspices of the Department of Human Services rather

Accreditation is a way of introducing competition into the market between centres that have achieved accreditation and those that haven't. Being designated an accredited centre is itself positioned as a marketing advantage in a competitive free market. Centres are encouraged to market themselves as accredited to parent consumers.

In describing the institutional process involved in the ruling relations of NPM, D. Smith (2007) outlines how "hierarchy becomes a chain of contracts between a higher managerial centre and subordinate units, plans made by the latter within the general mandate of the unit and the general objectives of government are constituted as contracts . . . setting targets for the performance of which they will be held accountable" (pp. 18-19). In the Children and Youth Services Business Plan (2011-2014), ACCAP is included under "Goal One: Families are supported to create the foundation for children and youth to grow and reach their full potential." Priority Initiative 1.3 states "Support families requiring child care by streamlining the child care subsidy program and strengthening quality child care through accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms." Under performance measures, the government target is for 94 % of licensed day care centres and family day home agencies to be "accredited and participating in accreditation" (ACYS, 2011c). This reporting to the taxpayers of Alberta also supports the transparency imperative of NPM.

Smith goes on to describe the power of these ruling relations, saying "textual technologies are used to assess performance or outcomes: a circular procedure is established in which measured values corresponding to the rules for setting target performance and outcomes substitute for the actualities of what is going on and what is happening to the people involved. It is particularly powerful at the point of exchange between government and

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than the Education Department, enforces child care as a social service. This rhetoric is also evident in the KPMG report noted earlier in the literature review.



public institutions and those who are now their customers” (D. Smith, 2007, p. 19). Of interest to this research is this new and particular exchange created by ACCAP between ACYS on behalf of the government, child care centres, and the families using child care (see Figure 3 in chapter 7).

Accreditation is an example of how the discourse of NPM has become activated in the early childhood sector. The creation of the accrediting agency by the provincial government as an arms-length organization, and the separation of the funding function (retained by government) and the certifying function awarded to the agency as a contract with targets and deliverables is certainly reflective of NPM. As an accountability tool, the reach of NPM is impressive. It has stretched into child care in a manner that intends to manage and make accountable educators’ work to the accrediting agency and the terms and conditions of the Alberta government. Smith notes that the introduction of NPM is almost always accompanied by standardizing textual technologies designed to displace professional decision-making procedures and enhance managerial controls. This trend is also evident in child care accreditation at the same time as it promises increased professional status to educators. “Accreditation moves child care providers to a new level of professionalism” and has the potential to create expectations and demands on educators not previously experienced (Golberg, 2005, p. 17). The discourses and processes of NPM as enacted through ACCAP result in educators engaging with purportedly business-like work processes such as goal setting, producing evidence, and continuous quality improvement. These organizational reforms have little or nothing to do in actuality with providing quality care and education to young children and their families, but become imperative under NPM. Accreditation is a technology that is intended to produce objective information about program quality. Quality assurance programs such as accreditation are an institutionalized effort to produce and judge quality. Centres are expected to construct the product (quality child care) as data (evidence) and then measure it against an external set of

standards (Rankin, 2004). In this way, accreditation purportedly becomes a formula for quality based on the 10 quality standards; these selectively identified indicators are viewed as able to adequately capture all the elements of quality.

Educators must produce evidence of their performance to justify to the taxpayers of Alberta that public investment in quality child care is worthwhile. This “appropriate” use of funds is then detailed back to the public by ACYS annual reporting requirements. The government thus uses ACCAP as a tool that allows the portrayal of the ministry as delivering on the responsiveness, accountability, and transparency objectives of the NPM discourse within which it has to operate.

### **New Relations of Audit and Accountability**

The new notions of accountability produced in NPM have been explored theoretically as audit (Strathern, 2000; Power, 1994, 1997), and this concept can be applied to the current analysis. It is my contention that audit, in its new expanded sense, is at play in the new accreditation program.

The idea of audit shapes public perceptions of the problems for which it is the solution: it is constitutive of a certain regulatory or control style that reflects deeply held commitments to checking and trust (Power, 1997, p. 7). Strathern (2000) proposes that the term “audit” has been transformed and imbued with a new set of meanings and is now used in a variety of fields that were never formerly associated with it. Describing this discursive intrusion, she claims “the concept of audit has broken loose from its moorings in finance and accounting; its own expanded presence gives it the power of a descriptor seemingly applicable to all kinds of reckonings, evaluations and measurements” (2000, p. 2). She explains how it has now acquired a new cluster of associated terms such as quality assurance, discipline, accreditation, accountability, and effectiveness, and that these new meanings reflect the “new rationality of government” (p. 61).

The term audit implies a relationship of power between the scrutinizer and the observed (Strathern, 2000, p. 59). As an instrument of government, audit is a means to achieve political objectives. Audit culture as theorized by Strathern (2000) is implicated in new managerialism and neoliberal processes. Power (1994) notes how a “wave of change has swept . . . most OECD countries and various market mechanisms have been introduced in an effort to increase efficiency, accountability and consumers’ power” (as cited in Strathern, 2000, p. 60). As noted above, Alberta in general, and child care specifically, has not been immune to these changes. The texts of accreditation are littered with terms such as standards, outcomes, measurement, quality improvement, and accountability. The repeated use of these key terms creates a powerful new dominant discourse centred on accreditation, reflecting the rational and technical discourse of audit culture. What does this language say? It appears neutral and unquestionable, “based on sound principles of efficient management” (Shore & Wright, 2000), but we must ask how it is implicated in local child care sites, creating standardizing and generalizing technical practices accompanied by increased accountabilities. “What these normalising technologies have in common is an administrative logic, an intention and capacity to govern more effectively by ensuring that correct outcomes are delivered” (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 9).

The audit process is designed to open up the organization to independent external scrutiny by those given a legitimate right to exercise control (Power, 1997). In this example, child care centres are opened up through the accreditation process and required site visits, and by experts like validators, who examine practice for conformity to quality standards. Shore and Wright (2000) describe how organizations are made into auditable commodities and how this animates the invention of new roles, auditable structures and paper trails, and entails extensive preparation for audit visits. The accreditation process is a new way to render local child care sites

amenable to audit, requiring the formation of new committees, and the production of paperwork, checklists, and plans to meet the goal-setting, evidence-producing, and continuous quality improvement work processes required to demonstrate adherence to the AQS. Stories circulate widely in the field regarding the time, stress, and preparation required to get ready for the two-day site visit integral to achieving accredited status. These processes allow the state to inject itself far into the culture, work practices, and subjectivities of child care centres and their educators, without appearing to (Ball, 2007). Drawing together knowledge, text, and power, the current research examines these new intrusive practices and the socially organized nature of these ruling relations which result in the early childhood field becoming acquiescent to scrutiny and accountability through new relationships of monitoring and tracking.

### **The Current Alberta Child Care Context: Policy and Program Responses and Discourses**

Alberta Children and Youth Services is responsible for monitoring and licensing of child care centres in Alberta under the jurisdiction of two provincial acts, the Alberta Child Care Licensing Act and the Alberta Child Care Licensing Regulation (Alberta Government, 2007a; 2008). As noted by Pal (2006), traditionally policy instruments are designed for three main purposes: to influence public behaviour, to influence the political, social, or economic conditions of the public, and/or to provide services to the public. The Alberta government currently uses a number of policy tools and programs to support the implementation of child care policy, including regulation through legislation as noted above, expenditures (in particular through the subsidy program for low income families), and public information directed at helping parents select appropriate quality childcare for their children. According to the Government of Alberta ACYS Ministry Framework, the ministry vision is that “Albertans have access to quality

affordable child care options that provide a healthy and safe start in life for children and help facilitate their growth and development”(ACYS, 2008).

The Alberta government has played a key role in implementing child care policy and used a variety of policy tools to support Alberta families requiring these services. At first glance, this government’s level of involvement seems inconsistent with Alberta Conservative Party ideology and neoliberal designs, which usually emphasize little government involvement in traditional family responsibilities. However, it does reflect the trend noted by Ball (1994) that sees greater governmental involvement camouflaged by the more hands-off approach that is called for by neoliberal and NPM views. The state now acts differently, with the level of intervention tending to increase “for the state will be enmeshed in the promotion, support and maintenance of an ever-widening range of social and economic activities” (Cerny, as cited in Ball, 2007, p. 23). Although clearly evident is an Alberta government priority that directs funding to the neediest families through the subsidy program, there appears to be little altruistic motivation for providing child care services under this discourse. A government text clearly reminds the reader that child care has a role in “breaking the welfare cycle,” with the goal of getting families attached to the workforce, and that this is “wholly consistent with the premium placed on individual self-reliance by the Alberta government” (Cleland, 2002, p. 10). According to the Alberta government, child care is a cost- savings measure and accreditation can “pay its own way” through savings in welfare and other support programs (Cleland, 2002, p. 17), attesting once more to the elevated role of accountability and efficiency in discourses of NPM and audit culture.

### **The Current Alberta Context: Accreditation**

This section of the dissertation looks more specifically at accreditation in Alberta; situating the ACCAP program within the Alberta child care policy context helps improve our view and exposes the discourse of knowledge that

informs and produces accreditation. It is followed by a discussion that explicates the discourse of the AQS and the coordinating role they play as a “boss text” (D. Smith, 2006) in the accreditation process.

The “Our Children Our Future: Alberta’s Five Point Investment Plan” announced in October 2005 currently acts as the policy framework for child care services in Alberta (Alberta Government, 2005b). This summary document was produced for parents and lays out the priorities of the provincial government, highlighting several child care policy changes. It outlines five areas of government focus in relation to child care services, including increased subsidy to low- and middle-income families, support for stay-at-home parents, increased access to child care for children with disabilities, improvement in the quality of child care, and additional early intervention programs.

ACCAP is the program response selected to address the fourth priority—improving the quality of child care (Alberta Government, 2005b). The Alberta government defines accreditation as “a voluntary process that objectively assesses child care programs that meet child care standards of excellence” (ACS, 2007, p. 3). The underlying assumption is that high quality child care practice will lead to better outcomes for children. In this discourse, accreditation status quantifies best practice, making it demonstrable, observable, measurable, recordable, and rateable. The accreditation process administered by AELCS involves six steps, beginning with an application form and fee, completion of a self-study process and a quality enhancement plan (QEP), a site visit by a two-member validation team, a review of the validation documentation by an AELCS moderator, and a final decision by the AELCS governing council based on the moderator’s report. Finally, accredited agencies are expected to maintain the quality standards and meet reporting criteria (Alberta Association for Accreditation for Early Learning and Care Services [AAAELCS], 2009). In order to achieve accreditation status, participating child care centres must demonstrate that they have met 10

Accreditation Quality Standards (AQS). The 10 AQS are based on early childhood research evidence, purporting to create awareness within the public and the field about what has been determined to be quality care, and placing higher value on centres that provide these research-supported best practices.

### **The Discourse of the Accreditation Quality Standards**

As outlined in the self-study guide (Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services [AAAELCS], 2007a), in order to achieve accreditation status, participating child care centres must demonstrate that they meet 10 AQS divided into four categories of outcomes.

#### Part A: Outcomes for Children

Standard 1: Children are safe, secure, well cared for, and nurtured.

Standard 2: Relationships between service providers and children are supportive and respectful.

Standard 3: Every child's optimal development is promoted in an inclusive early learning and child care environment.

#### Part B: Standards for Families

Standard 4: Families are supported as the primary caregivers for children.

Standard 5: Relationships with families are supportive and respectful.

#### Part C: Standards for Staff

Standard 6: Program philosophy, policies, and procedures support staff in providing high-quality early learning and child care services.

Standard 7: The work environment supports quality service delivery.

#### Part D: Outcomes for the Community

Standard 8: The service responds to the needs and concerns of children, their families, the staff, and community.

Standard 9: Families and community stakeholders are actively engaged in ensuring that community diversity and interests are reflected in the delivery of early learning and child care services.

Standard 10: Early learning and child care services participate in ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes that support continuous quality improvement.

Each standard is further broken down into criteria and indicators (AAAELCS, 2009). These standards and outcomes guide the efforts of child care centres to improve the level of quality and act as conceptual and discursive tools of ruling. Child care centres are encouraged to meet the accreditation standards in an efficient and effective manner and are rewarded by doing so with certification and funding. As purported by accreditation discourse, families, educators, and the public are to be assured that it is through these 10 standards that child care quality can be defined, measured, and evaluated. The standards work as ruling relations, determined externally and institutionally, and assume that all child care centres are in agreement that these are the essential components of quality child care and education. Educators are encouraged to find creative and unique ways to remedy any deviance from the standards. Ideas for rectifying substandard performance are also provided by AELCS consultants, validators, and moderators.

The standards were developed by an external contractor early in the ACCAP project in partnership between ACYS and the Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCF). The first drafts were based on the CCCF project *Partners in Quality* (1999–2000) and other child care accreditation program standards were reviewed for applicability. The draft standards were vetted by the ACCAP Advisory Committee and child care focus groups across the



province. In Feb 2004, ACYS contracted outside the project team to do a final rewrite of the standards to reflect the Alberta context.

The Partners in Quality project was a Canadian research and development project designed to review the research on, and to expand the definition of, quality child care with the goal of enhancing the dialogue in communities about the importance of quality child care. It was based on a series of research papers and a survey/questionnaire of Canadian early childhood professionals. The project resulted in a four-part series of resource booklets for early childhood educators covering the following topics: issues, relationships, infrastructure, and communities, and was supplemented by a series of tools for educators including standards of practice, a self-examination tool, and a code of ethics. Traces of these texts are evident in the Alberta accreditation standards, self-study guide, and its tools.

As such, these texts and the knowledge they portray represent the current thinking of the early childhood research base on quality as describable, measurable, and rateable. I suspect that these discourses of accreditation, purportedly the basis of the early childhood sector's best scientific understanding of quality, are meant to be reassuring and legitimizing. They appear to provide a good reason to the field for voluntarily "doing" accreditation. These research-based texts become central to the social organization and coordination of accreditation, drawing child care centres "rightly" into conformity with a set of criteria against which their practice will be judged. Drawing heavily on accreditation discourses, the quality standards and the self-study guide and its tools pull individual practices at multiple sites across the province into coordination. The accreditation standards are inherently standardizing and generalizing of early childhood practice, as they are expected to be enacted in every accredited child care centre in Alberta.

The accreditation discourse, through its texts, works to persuade educators that the quality of child care can be assured through a process that specifies standards, indicators, and outcomes, and their work becomes about demonstrating these indicators in a manner that is authorized by the accrediting agency and the Alberta government as legitimate. As such, the quality standards and their specific indicators are portrayed as “universal and objective, identifiable through the application of expert knowledge and reducible to accurate measurement given the right techniques” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 1999, p. 5).

The standards produce and reinforce dominant images of children, families, educators, and child care centres from the research literature. The very act of selecting 10 standards means that certain ways of thinking and practicing early childhood care and education are prioritized and others are omitted. In this manner, only selective aspects of the educators’ work are accountable within the institutional frame of accreditation. The observation checklists and portfolio report include specific behaviours that educators are expected to engage in and on which they report to AELCS.

The 10 standards and related research base lends credence to the notion that the complexity of the daily care and education of young children can be reduced to the measurement of 10 standards in a neat and tidy, six-step, self-guided package (Grieshaber, 2002). However, as the current research demonstrates, when the actualities of the process are described the complexity of the work is made evident, and the textually mediated social organization and ruling relations that turn educators’ attention towards goal setting, evidence gathering, and continuous quality improvement become visible.

## **The Current Alberta Context: Historical Context of Accreditation**

Next, I provide a brief history of the rise of accreditation in Alberta as a program solution. It is interesting to note that the idea of employing an accreditation system for child care centres has been evident in Alberta since 1986. Back then, the Alberta Association for Young Children, an advocacy group working to promote quality care, realized that the provincial government was only going to enforce minimal standards through the day care licensing regulation, and was searching for a way to recognize the fact that some centres were providing better services than others. They were hoping to use accreditation as a way to supplement basic government licensing policy (Prentice, 2001) but made little progress. As described in chapter 1, in 1997 Edmonton-based CAFRA actually launched the first child care accreditation system in Canada for their member centres. CAFRA-accredited centres were held to a level of service that exceeded the minimal provincial licensing standards, and thus promoted themselves as higher-quality centres to parents and the community. In 1999, M. Golberg, while on a Muttart Foundation-supported sabbatical from her position as the executive director of a nonprofit child care centre in St. Albert, published a proposal for a province-wide system of accreditation based on this model, noting it was a worthy strategy. A turning point came when a 2002 report, prepared for Alberta Children's Services by KPMG Consulting, recommended accreditation as a "mechanism by which program legitimacy and capacity are measured" via achieving accountability and reporting performance (Cleland, 2002, p. 18).

At that time, the Alberta government was able to use new monies flowing from the federal Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI) to fund the recommendations of the Cleland report and execute ACCAP (Golberg, 2005), at the same time appearing responsive to the needs of the field. They began by providing preaccreditation funding to qualifying centres.

The design and pilot of the system began in July 2003, through a partnership between the Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCCF) and the Alberta Child Care Network Association (Golberg, 2005). In fall 2003, using a consultative framework, Alberta Children’s Services and its partners solicited input and feedback from the field on the proposed accreditation agency design and criteria for the accreditation standards. The actual accreditation system was launched in November 2004, under the auspices of the newly formed accreditation granting agency—the AELCS.

Looking across Canada, the Alberta government noted that as of March 2001, 6 of the other 10 provinces were providing some level of wage enhancement for child care staff (Cleland, 2002). The government may have also recognized as a result of reports from other jurisdictions with accreditation experience, and from strong consistent feedback from child care advocates, that they would not get the desired, broad-based centre “buy-in” of the accreditation program without “sweetening the pot” significantly.

As a result, ACCAP offered a tempting parcel that wraps together a wage enhancement package that (as of April 2009) offers between \$2.14 and \$6.62 per hour more depending on level of education or certification, includes professional development funds of up to \$1,000 per staff member per year, a staff attraction incentive allowance of \$2,500–\$5,000, an education bursary program, and a program quality funding grant (up to \$7,500 yearly) for child care centres meeting the accreditation standards. It is a voluntary program, but for many cash-strapped child care centres this package is too good to resist—their participation in the accreditation program is socially organized and ruled by the current financial context in which they operate, making it really less voluntary and more necessary for their survival.

This set of financial incentives signifies a fairly abrupt change in direction for the Alberta government, which had previously been reluctant to

subsidize private businesses with public monies (Cleland, 2002). Perhaps this is an example of the tendency of governments since the budget cuts of the early 1990s, which Ball (2007) describes as new forms of financial controls and allocations, with a redistribution of funding related to indicators of performance and increased use of targeted funding. This trend has seen key boundaries between government and private sector breached and reworked (Ball, 2007), resulting in a new relationship between state and the child care sector with significant policy implications. Ball (2007) further notes a shift in the role of the state from responsibility for delivering services to responsibility for commissioning, contracting, measuring, and auditing services that is much in evidence here.

### **The Discourses of Quality**

The importance of the quality of early childhood experiences in child care programs has been extensively researched over the last four decades. “Empirical studies of small scale programs and large scale longitudinal studies clearly show the positive impact of high quality early childhood education and care programs on children’s development” (Muttart Foundation, 2010, p. 9).

Many of the studies of quality in early childhood programs are organized around the concepts of structural quality and process quality. Structural quality involves organizational dimensions generally reported as three important variables often referred to as “the iron triangle” of quality—group size, education level of staff, and the child-to-educator ratio (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 1999) and on which other aspects of quality depend. Structural quality is easily observed, measured, and regulated, but cannot be isolated as guaranteeing quality. Process quality consists of the general environment and social relationships and interactions taking place in the early childhood setting, and which are directly experienced by children and families (Smith, Grima, Gaffney, Powell, Masses, & Barnett, 2000). Many claim that process

quality is the most important aspect of quality. Sensitive and appropriate interactions, curriculum, and programming; peer group harmony; and parental involvement and communication are often noted in the literature as the most important elements of process quality that affect outcomes for children (Smith et al., 2000). Contextual quality is also noted in Canadian research and includes elements like the director's administrative style, salaries and working conditions for educators, centre auspice, and level of government funding (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 1999).

A recent Alberta report summarizing the research literature on the elements of quality concluded that the five agreed-upon characteristics of high quality early education and care are: knowledgeable and responsive educators; a coherent curriculum and pedagogical approach; physical environments designed for early learning; respect for equity, inclusion, and diversity; and parental involvement (Muttart Foundation, 2010, p. 9).

### **Accreditation Literature and Countervailing Discourses**

Mooney (2007) notes a paucity of empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of quality improvement programs such as accreditation on raising quality. However, supported by compelling common-sense evidence, proponents of accreditation have convincingly argued that accreditation is beneficial for children, families, and educators, resulting in a very high uptake of the program in Alberta. Here I provide a brief summary of this discourse.

A review of the literature on accreditation from the NAEYC and QIAS suggests that its purpose is four-fold and includes:

- Improving quality—by measuring quality there is a means of verifying whether the services being provided are of high or low quality.

- Increasing accountability—accreditation ensures communities, taxpayers, funders, and governments that money is directed to appropriate services.
- Educating parents—as child care consumers, parents can ascertain and make an informed choice in selecting quality child care programs, as the designation of accredited status is assumed to influence market forces and help parents select services.
- Professionalizing practice—educators can evaluate, reflect on, and improve practice.

There are no reliable data on the educational quality of regulated child care programs in Alberta (Muttart Foundation, 2010). Research on the effectiveness of accreditation from the American and Australian experience concludes that:

1) Program quality was positively impacted in a variety of ways such as improved program provision, program marketing, and parent knowledge about their child’s program.

2) Involvement in accreditation improved staff morale, self-esteem, and professional knowledge. A decrease in staff turnover was evident, along with improved management and communication practices.

3) Accreditation required parental input through surveys and committees and thus lead to increased participation, feelings of involvement, and knowledge of the program (Bryce and Johnson, 1995).

In the US, NAEYC-accredited centres rated more highly on measures of quality than nonaccredited centres (Whitebrook, Sakai, & Howes, 2001). Even with these gains, nearly 40 % of NAEYC-accredited centres continued to be rated as mediocre in quality (Whitebrook et al., 1997). The researchers continue, “limitations of the NAEYC accreditation as a quality improvement strategy may be structural, reflecting weaknesses in the validation system

and/or in the accreditation criteria” (Whitebrook et al., 1997, p. 14). The government of Alberta claims that “the accreditation process has increased the quality of child care” (ACYS, 2008). In a consultation report done with Albertans in 2006 to discuss a federal proposal to partner with business to create child care spaces, the Alberta government states that “funding for wage enhancements has helped child care operators recruit qualified staff and reduced the staff turnover in accredited child care programs by an average of 5 % (from 26 % to 21 % since September 2005)” (Government of Alberta, 2006, p. 5). Lower staff turnover is associated with higher quality, but no research on the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the ACCAP program has been published. Highlights from American and Australian research that noted disadvantages and issues with accreditation included:

1) A high dropout rate/low participation rate in the United States in the NAEYC accreditation program. This could be remedied however, by attaching financial incentives according to Whitebrook, Sakai, and Howes (1997).

2) A lack of infrastructure supporting the delivery of services— accreditation can’t make up for the absence of policy and supportive funding (Gallagher & Clifford, 2000).

3) Accreditation status alone was not responsible for improved quality, but a number of variables working together, like nonprofit status, higher wages, retention of staff, in combination did predict quality (Whitebrook et al., 1997).

Golberg (2005) also identified the following four disadvantages of accreditation based on a review of the accreditation literature: the time involved in the process, the many costs associated with accreditation, the professional demands of the process, and the risk of liability.



In 2005, Golberg carried out a study on the Alberta accreditation program as it was beginning to be implemented. She conducted interviews with 16 executive directors of child care centres, with the purpose of identifying barriers and supports in the process. The greatest barrier they identified was a shortage of capable and qualified staff (Golberg, 2005, p. 93) followed by the need for financial incentives such as an expanded wage enhancement program, additional professional development funding and student incentives. Participants in this study also identified the need for strong leadership at the centre level and supportive networks to decrease feelings of isolation. Worries about further bureaucratization and the inability of accreditation to address specific contextual factors were identified at that time. Participants also noted some feelings of fragmentation and exclusion, but overall Golberg reported that a strong sense of hope and potential was associated with the implementation of the accreditation process in Alberta.

### **Critical Analysis of Accreditation and Quality Discourses**

It is not my intent to dismiss the usefulness of accreditation out of hand, but to trouble what is lost or disappears from sight and what becomes foregrounded when the discourses inherent in accreditation are not examined closely. This research is intended to serve as a reminder that accreditation is not the only way, or even a necessary way, to envision and provide quality child care services. The previous research I have cited was done in a manner that sustained the existing discourses; the literature itself is coordinating, relying on the discursive nature of the texts of accreditation for legitimacy and authorization. This study creates a space for a different kind of resistance to these themes and legitimations. My intent is to contest the core assumptions implicit in these discourses, in the hopes of engaging the field in a different way.

Most of the countervailing arguments in the academic literature are not specific to accreditation itself (except for the example from Grieshaber below) but rather relate to the broad critique that has been termed postfoundational and includes postmodernisms, poststructuralisms, and postcolonialisms (Moss, 2007b). The dominant discourses in early childhood “privileges rationality and technical practice” and “inscribes certain values and assumptions like certainty and linear progress, objectivity and universality” (Moss, 2007b, p. 230).

In early childhood discourses, the “project of modernity” (Habermas, 2002) is heavily influenced by the theories of liberalism, economics, management, and psychology (Moss & Petrie, 2002). It is “the relentless demand for order, the desire to classify, design or control everything that is at the heart of modernity” according to Seidman (2008, p. 186). The discourse of modernity is characterized by a particular concept of and relationship between reason and knowledge, where reason is objective, instrumental, and totalizing, and knowledge is unified, scientific, and predictable (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). In modernist thought, reason and knowledge are considered separate from experience, emotion, politics, and values.

Postfoundational thought takes up a sceptical stance that is still contentious in academia and research literature. Since the late 1990s, tenets of postmodernist thought have been raised (Dahlberg et al., 1999; MacNaughton, 2005; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005), but have not been very visible in the mainstream early childhood literature which is still dominated by developmental psychology and the discourse of developmentally appropriate practice. In Canada, modernist perspectives and assumptions persist in dominating discussions of child care (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2005). However, increasing numbers of early childhood researchers are engaged in problematizing and deconstructing work, and some have labelled themselves reconceptualists. Many of these authors draw

on the theories of Foucault, applying his notions of disciplinary power and governmentality to the early childhood field.

Critiques of the influence of business rationality in early childhood are evident in the writings of Dahlberg and Moss (1999, 2005). Arguments against neoliberal thinking, NPM and market-oriented child care policy are evident in the research literature produced by academics like Mitchell Dean (1999) and Nikolas Rose (1990, 1991), in education by Michael Apple (2004, 2006), in policy contexts by Stephen Ball (1994, 1995, 2007) and in early childhood by Peter Moss (2007) and Susan Grieshaber (2002).

Grieshaber, investigating the Australian accreditation system from a critical poststructuralist perspective, wonders whether accreditation is a system of quality assurance or a technique of normalization. Drawing heavily on Foucault she argues that the actions of politicians and bureaucrats operating together in the context of economic rationalist principles have resulted in interventions that have shaped early childhood educational practices, leading to the production of normalizing techniques of discipline such as observation, surveillance, classification, regulation, and calculation (2002).

One of the most explicit goals of ACCAP is to increase the quality of child care in Alberta. This is a hard notion to disavow, as who does not want high quality services for children? The concept of quality itself has been deconstructed by Dahlberg et al. (1999). Using Foucauldian analysis they reveal the “discourse of quality” as part of a larger movement of quantification and objectivity, tracing its origins back to Edward Demings in the manufacturing sector in the post-war years and its eventual influential emergence in the public sector and education. Quality is often presented as a universal truth, self-evident and necessary, rather than as a value-laden concept. In the accreditation discourses, quality child care is viewed as an objective reality, static and finite. It is observable, documentable, and

measurable. Quality has become an “international buzzword” in early childhood (Moss & Pence, 1994) and is certainly the mantra of accreditation. It is used no less than seven times on only one page of a government document (see Cleland, 2002, p. 19). In its evaluative sense, the term quality relates to an assessment of performance of certain processes and structural features of child care and is linked to certain measurable outcomes. “The ‘discourse of quality’ offers us confidence and reassurance by holding out the prospect that a certain score or just the use of the word quality means that something is to be trusted, that it really is good” (Dahlberg et al., 1999, p. 92). Quality is represented through the certificate or status of accreditation. The 10 ACCAP quality standards represent a surety of knowing what quality is. This certainty of what is right for all children is reflected broadly across the early childhood field which, as a whole, tends to rely heavily on the scientific discourse of child development, brain research, and research about quality care. This positivistic formulation of quality offers the field and child care programs legitimacy of purpose embedded in a “search for definitive and universal criteria, certainty and order” (Dahlberg et al., 1999). Their Foucauldian analysis of accreditation as governmentality requires a reflection of the taken-for-granted nature of this discourse, questioning both its scientific foundation and its collective certainty and applicability.

### **Relevant IE Studies**

The discourse of IE itself provides an additional vantage point from which to view accreditation. “IE is inherently a political endeavour through critical inquiry of text-based discourses and forms of knowledge to explicate how texts (i.e. institutional documents) serve as a medium to dominate, objectify, and subordinate local practices to promote systematic principles of policy, accountability, and organizational power” (Janz, 2009, p. 13). Institutional ethnographers view the world as socially organized. Adopting this “ontology of the social” (D. Smith, 2005, 2006) “provides a conceptual framework that gives agency and legitimacy to individuals and their actual

'doings' while broadening the empirical scope of ethnographic inquiry into the extended social relations which coordinate people's activities in the local" (Janz, 2009, p.12).

Although some of the research I reviewed asked educators about how they experienced the NAEYC accreditation process, talking about accreditation solely in terms of the opinions of educators is not productive in an institutional ethnographic sense, as it individualizes the effects of coordinating processes and misses the institutional order. Institutional ethnographers do not study problems as informants explain them and recognize that people's actions are coordinated by something beyond their motivations and intentions (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). McCoy (2006) advises against generating descriptions of the informant's meanings and perspectives as a way to keep the focus on the institutional rather than the individual. I was interested in getting past the familiar tales of accreditation that circulate as popular knowledge in the Alberta child care sector. I was drawn to IE because it allowed me to start with the standpoint of educators, thus respecting their views and opinions as valid, and to see their daily lived experience as essential to understanding how accreditation was working out in the field, but it also allowed me to move beyond the daily to look at larger coordinating and organizing influences that may not be immediately visible to those working directly with children and families. IE researchers strive to "keep the institution in view" (McCoy, 2006, p. 109), assuming that the everyday world (the material setting of each embodied subject) is organized in powerful ways beyond the local and that cannot be fully known from within the informant's experience. In IE, the research subject is the institution and this perspective was central to how I framed my investigation into child care accreditation.

Besides Dorothy Smith's writings, in the development of this research study four Canadian institutional ethnographic studies were useful in showing me how to make institutional processes visible, and were helpful in

deciding that IE would be an appropriate approach to investigate child care accreditation. Janz (2009) applied institutional ethnography to explore the workings of a social service agency undergoing changes as it prepared for accreditation. She found that the work of frontline workers in the agency was being drawn into line with broader discourses and institutional mandates for measurement and quality improvement, leading to reorganization of the agency's work. In the process of doing the research she uncovered the ruling relations of accreditation.

Turner's research (2002, 2006) on the land use and planning process in Ontario was influential as an example of the power of IE techniques of mapping as a way to make evident the complexity of a standardized network of texts in action, and suggests that a similar approach using mapping could be taken in this study to examine child care accreditation as a textually mediated, socially organized institutional process. Rankin (2004) used an IE approach to examine and problematize the routine nature of nurses' work in a restructured Canadian health care system. The study raised important questions about how the work and knowledge of nurses is changed (subordinated and displaced) by the new health care efficiency and accountability mandates. I had noticed that although the quantitative and measurement urgencies of health care aren't as prominent yet in early childhood accreditation work, the calls for accountability and evidence-based practice in health care noted in Rankin's study are being drawn into and beginning to resonate in the child care sector as well.

I am indebted also to Clune (2011). In her PhD dissertation she conducted an institutional ethnographic examination of the social organization of injured nurses returning to work. She thoughtfully explicates three types of work that nurses must accomplish to successfully return to work. This study was extremely helpful in helping me 'see' the work processes that educators undertook to achieve accreditation. All of these studies usefully demonstrated that IE can be used purposefully to explicate

the daily actualities of people's work, showing how it is discursively socially mediated and coordinated. By moving from particularities to generalized processes (D. Smith, 2005), IE research can link what is happening locally to broader institutional trends and influences.

## **Conclusion**

The introduction of child care accreditation in Alberta was a significant change. The ACCAP did not arise in isolation and I have attempted here to highlight the material conditions that led to the emergence of accreditation as a government supported child care quality assurance program in Alberta. In this chapter I have discussed broader discourses influential in the conceptual framing of accreditation related to NPM, audit, accountability and child care quality. This chapter attempts to provide more than contextual background. By looking outwards and upwards in this manner, it begins to make visible the way child care accreditation is socially organized by new relations of ruling and to answer the question 'how is accreditation put together so that it happens as it does in Alberta child care centres?' What is happening locally in child care centres across the province as they strive to achieve accreditation is organized by these discourses and the actual activities of people in translocal settings, and results in extended standardized courses of action by educators across divergent child care sites. By theorizing these connections, we begin to make discernible how what happens in child care centres in relation to accreditation is hooked up to what happens elsewhere and elsewhen. Making this social organization observable provides us with a new critical stance from which to go forward and to examine accreditation using the lens of IE.

Empirical research studies on the effectiveness of accreditation as a quality improvement program that raises the level of quality are in short supply (Mooney, 2007). Most of the studies have focused on NAEYC accreditation in the United States, which has limited applicability to the

Alberta context. There is much that the literature doesn't reflect about the actualities of "doing accreditation." The type of critique that IE allows is missing from most early childhood literature on accreditation. Relations between local accreditation practices that coordinate child care work and knowledge about the sector, especially from the standpoint of educators, remain uninvestigated. Other literature on accreditation fails to make visible the work processes and texts that have become material to the accreditation process. In the next chapter I describe important concepts and assumptions of IE as a method that can help make the actualities of accreditation work for educators visible.



### **Chapter 3: Conceptual Grounding and Methodology**

In this chapter I describe the conceptual grounding, theoretical underpinnings, and methodology employed in this inquiry. I begin with a description and definition of IE, briefly note its theoretical influences, and then explain the methodological orienting concepts that are important to shaping this research. The rationale for and benefits of selecting IE as a research method is also noted. The second part of the chapter includes a description of the research procedures and methods employed, describing the two phases of the study, the data collection and analysis process, and concluding with important ethical considerations for carrying out this research.

The design of this investigation is based on institutional ethnography, which has not been commonly used in early childhood research. Coming from the work of Canadian feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith (1990, 2005, 2006), IE is presented as an alternative to mainstream sociology that explores how the experiences of people in everyday life are coordinated by external institutional forces. IE is a method of inquiry that allows the exploration of the social relations that structure everyday lives. It is concerned with how our lived experience is governed and administered—or socially organized—and how that organization is achieved and mediated, particularly through texts. As an approach to empirical inquiry that combines theory and method, IE has proven its usefulness in a range of research areas in the social sciences, education, human services, and policy research; thus I believe it to be a rich and useful method for this inquiry.

I consider accreditation in Alberta as a coordinating process that is embedded in a complex of relations that allows it to function with a standardizing and generalizing result. According to Smith (2006), examining the local actualities of this coordinating process would bring into view a vast linking network of coordinated work processes and courses of action in very

diverse sites. IE allows the researcher to explore strands or corners of this nexus to make visible their points of connection. Such connections are accomplished primarily through what Smith has labelled "textually-mediated social organization," a form of social coordination.

In IE, the local setting serves as a starting point for explaining how activities are coordinated in relation to multiple sites, and moves to how they are structured and shaped by institutional relations that extend beyond the local. It involves an exploration of the social relations individuals bring into being through their practices as they go about their daily work and as that work is coordinated in relation to the work of others in "translocal" settings in an effort to map or make visible its social organization and ruling relations (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). My investigation examined how the work of child care accreditation coordinates, organizes, and administers practices across diverse sites and how it is implicated in the reorganization and reconceptualization of child care work in Alberta.

### **Theoretical foundations**

IE did not develop in isolation and Dorothy Smith is quick to acknowledge that she learned "quite unscrupulously" from and applied the ideas of others to her conceptualization of this alternate sociology (Smith, 1987, p. 9). At the same time, Smith states "the sociological strategy I have developed does not belong to or subject itself to the interpretive procedures of any particular school of sociology" (1987, p. 9). IE does not share the goal of many other research approaches that emphasize explaining events through the application of theory. The purpose of IE is "to *explore* everyday life, not *theorize* it" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 50). Smith explains that instead of starting with theory, IE stays always with actual individuals in their bodily being, with their doings and with how what they are doing is coordinated with others (D. Smith, 2010, personal communication).

Ontology refers to the way reality comes into being. Reality is often viewed as emerging through structures or discourse. In these approaches, agency is transferred from people to things or concepts and is no longer understood as having been produced by people (Frampton, Kinsman, Thompson, & Tilliczek, 2006). In contrast, IE argues that human existence is essentially social. Dorothy Smith refers to ontology as a “theory of being” and uses it to denote a theory of how the social exists (2005, p. 226). IE shares its view of the social as ontology with phenomenology, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism. Smith explains “we see then, people very much as they are, the competent practitioners of their everyday worlds, active in definite material and social contexts, desiring, thinking, feeling, and actively engaged with others in producing the actualities of the world that they have in common with one another” (1987, p. 125). To this social materialist ontology, Smith adds the concept of social relations, which describes the large- scale coordination of people’s activities occurring in and across multiple, diverse sites by people often unknown to each other (Devault & McCoy, 2006). In contemporary society, Smith observes that these translocal relations often take the form of relations of ruling and are carried out in text-based ways.

IE holds the ontological belief “that humans organize social institutions and humans perpetuate the unconscious, routine, taken for granted ways of living and working in the everyday world” (Townsend, Langille, & Ripley, 2003, p. 23). Following Marx, and according to D. Smith (2005) it is “we”, as individuals and groups of people who, through our own practices, coordinate and produce the social world and thus we can collectively make changes to it. IE works from what people are experiencing to “bring the beyond-their-experience into the scope of ordinary knowledge” (Smith, 2005, p. 221).

Epistemology refers to theories/nature of knowledge (how we know what we know). The traditional scholarly way of knowing is to reference authorities. Smith offers an alternative (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). IE

acknowledges that knowledge is produced from doing, from social practice, and from interacting with others (Frampton et al, 2006). In contrast, “most ruling forms of knowledge subscribe to an objective value- free approach, pretending that the world can be explored from some disinterested neutral place somehow outside or above the social” (Frampton et al, 2006, p. 4-5). As knowledge is socially organized, Smith focuses IE investigations on how everyday experience is socially organized and coordinated. She encourages the explication of the tensions that are produced by the social organization of knowledge and aims to generate further knowledge about invisible, interconnected forms of ruling in everyday life (Townsend, Langille, & Ripley, 2003).

D. Smith’s thinking has had many influences. The next section outlines how she drew and expanded on key ideas from feminism, Marx, and ethnomethodology. “In different ways, all these ground inquiry in the ongoing activities of actual individuals” (Smith, 1999, p 232).

Feminism is at the heart of institutional ethnography (Campbell, 2003). Smith’s experience in the women’s movement of the 1970’s, coupled with her realization that “as women we have been living in an intellectual, cultural and political world, from whose making we had been almost entirely excluded...” (Smith, 1987, p. 1) drove her research agenda. In her contestation of traditional sociological ideas and practices, she set about to create a research approach that took into account women’s lived bodily experience. She promoted a shift from the world of mainstream sociology of the time, which according to Smith, was a world where the conceptual was divorced from everyday experience (Frampton et al, 2006). Smith was concerned that traditional sociology was done from the “top down” and rarely made reference to the everyday realities of women at home, work or in the community (Townsend, Langille, & Ripley, 2003). She worked to situate a sociology in knowledge grounded in women’s experience (1987, p. 46) and produced a sociology *for* women. Overtime she re-tooled her thinking into

what became a sociology *for* people. Using this new way of seeing and through the tools of IE, she set about exploring power, texts and knowledge and how they organize and are organized in the everyday in order to map relations of ruling.

D. Smith's interest in researching how everyday life actually works directed her to the German ideology of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels (1976). She is drawn to their critique of a method of reasoning that treats concepts as if they were agents (Smith, 2005). She found support for her ideas from Marx and Engels that women/people are active agents who can develop awareness of forces beyond their individual situations, which influences what they can do. Following Marx, Smith sees humans as active, social agents who consciously or unconsciously choose to comply or resist the conditions of work and everyday life (Townsend, Langille, & Ripley, 2003). While she emphasizes the agency of individuals, Smith also follows Marx in recognizing that there are limits to that agency, that individuals do not have complete control. She often quotes Marx and Engel's question, "how does it happen that their relations assume an independent existence over against them? And that the forces of their own life overpower them?" (D. Smith, 2010, personal communication).

Based on her own experiences as a single mother and female academic at that time, combined with her reading of Marx, Smith became cognizant of how the material conditions and the social world coordinate, (often in oppressive ways), particular groups (see Smith and Griffith, 1990, 2004 for example). Her dawning awareness of the way in which material conditions and social relations are felt but not seen has been a continuing theme of her activist research agenda and cements its overall transformative aim. Her attention to how these relations are expressed in contemporary times, particularly through texts, sets her sociology apart.

Marx and Engels also influenced Smith with their explanations of the interconnection between micro and macro social relations (Townsend, Langille, & Ripley, 2003). Based on her readings of Marx and Engels and their description of the economy of their time, Smith began to talk about local activities and translocal settings, proposing that both were part of the social relations of any experienced actuality (Campbell, 2003). This kind of thinking supported Smith's objective of making obsolete the artificial traditional sociological division between micro and macro analysis. She claims that when one knows from the inside, there is no such separation (Smith, 2005).

In Smith's ongoing efforts to determine where to look and what to look at (Smith, 2005), her notion of standpoint was further developed from phenomenology (Heap, 1995). From phenomenology, Smith learned how to make the inclusion of the knower's own experience central to research (Campbell, 2003). Generally in traditional sociology, the knower's position is established by theory as above or outside the everyday world of people's experience, and people are represented as objects (Smith, 2005). Smith's enterprise, along with feminist writers of her time, helped to create a subject position for women in the public sphere and in the political, cultural, and intellectual life of society (Smith, 2005). She explains that her notion of standpoint provides a "methodological starting point in the local particularities of bodily existence" (2005, p. 228). She is adamant that institutional ethnographers "do not subordinate the knowing subject to objectified forms of knowledge of society or political economy" (Smith, 2005, p. 10). Standpoint is a position that anyone can occupy and is integral to IE as a research method.

The roots of IE in ethnomethodology allowed Smith to grasp and express the competence and commonsense methods of 'members' which they skillfully apply in everyday situations (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Her introduction to Garfinkel's use of ethnomethodology helped her to challenge the taken for granted ways that people live. His work contributed to her

position that the routine organization of social structures is a human creation and thus can be changed or altered by those who decide that a different organization is desirable (Townsend, Langille, & Ripley, 2003). However, as noted, IE's ontology is materialist which distinguishes it from Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. IE's aim is to explore social organization through the actual practices of individuals and the interaction of those practices with material objects, particularly texts. Additionally, Smith's concern was with the social organization of experience. Focusing at the level of the empirical she was asking 'how does it happen to us as it does?' not as other phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists of the time who were concerned with the broader theoretical problem of the determination of social order (Heap, 1995). It is this essential question that separates Smith's sociology of knowledge from all others. In the following section, I highlight some of the central concepts of IE, which are reflective of these theoretical underpinnings and the epistemology and ontological orientations of IE.

### **IE Terms and Central Concepts that Informed the Study**

In IE, as in other research methods, there are a number of grounding concepts employed by researchers that I want to briefly highlight as they are significant to the alternate view of accreditation produced by this research and are strongly intrinsic to the analytical framework I employed.

#### **Standpoint.**

Standpoint is used in IE to establish a subject position as a method of inquiry, "a site for the knower that is open to anyone" (D. Smith, 2005, p. 10). Standpoint does not identify a position or category of position, gender, class, or race within society. It is not Smith's contention that there is "a" standpoint from which the world can best be viewed. Instead, in IE standpoint describes a tangible place from which to begin an inquiry. Thus IE begins in people's lived experience but is designed to discover the social as it extends beyond personal experience.

## Discourse.

The term discourse has been used in many ways. I am adopting Smith's conceptualization of discourse as noted. Here I briefly compare and contrast Smith's conceptualization of discourse with Foucault's. IE's use of discourse is built upon but also diverges from Foucault's notion of discourse (Smith, 2005). Smith is impressed by Foucault's ability to "pry thinking away from that of the traditional history of ideas that interpreted works in terms of the intentional thought of the authors" (Smith, 2005, p. 17). Smith's IE shares with Foucault an interest in texts, power and knowledge. According to Devault and McCoy, (2002) Foucault's notion of discourse is similar to a large scale conversation in and through texts. In contrast, in D. Smith's words "discourse refers to translocal relations coordinating the practices of definite individuals talking, writing, reading, watching and so forth, in particular locations at particular times. People participate in discourse and their participation reproduces it" (D. Smith, 2005, p. 224). Her notion of discourse goes beyond only text including a broader field of relations that includes actual individuals and their activities as they actively produce, take up and circulate discourse. She emphatically insists, in opposition to postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers, that "this notion of discourse never loses the presence of the subject who activates the text in any local moment of its use (Devault & McCoy, 2006, p 44).

In this study, I observed how dominant discourses are actively carried in and through accreditation texts and the talk of actual individuals, organizing and coordinating how educators think and do their work, constraining what can be said and done within the confines of the knowledge that is legitimized within the texts. Educators are implicated through accreditation to participate in a web of social relations that discursively coordinate their doings with other people, organizations, and priorities elsewhere (Campbell & Gregor, 2004).



### **Ruling relations.**

“The phrase ‘relations of ruling’ designates the complex of extralocal relations that provide in contemporary societies the specialization of organization, control, and initiative. They are those forms that we know as bureaucracy, administration, management, professional organization, and the media. They include the complex of discourses, scientific, technical and cultural that intersect, interpenetrate, and coordinate the multiple sites of ruling” (D. Smith, 1990, p. 6). A guiding frame for IE research is the idea that institutional texts and documents become textually mediated “relations of ruling” (D. Smith, 2005). The IE researcher engages with organizational texts and discourses that are taken for granted as a routine in everyday work and describes how they become purposeful coordinating tools of individuals’ activities. In this research, I start to uncover the ruling relations of accreditation as they align the educators’ work with the priorities and terms of government through the accrediting agency. I explicate how educators’ way of knowing quality care and education is reorganized in the everyday through institutional and text-mediated relations.

### **Social organization and social relations.**

Institutional ethnographers view the world as socially organized, understanding that people’s doings are coordinated, and that texts and discourses concert this coordination of people’s doings across time and space. The term social organization “orients the researcher to viewing people’s work in particular local settings as articulated in sequences of action that hook them up to what others are or have been doing elsewhere and elsewhen” (D. Smith, 2005, p. 228). This ontology of the social provides the conceptual framework that gives agency and legitimacy to individuals and their actual doings, while broadening the empirical scope of ethnographic inquiry into the extended social relations which coordinate people’s activities in the local (D. Smith, 2005).

It is the IE researcher's role to explicate how these "forms of coordinating activities produce institutional process" (D. Smith 1990, p. 60). For early childhood educators thus we see their work with children and families, their "doings," as implicated in a complex network of social relations that extend beyond the local particularities of their everyday activities, to the extralocal sites of accreditation and government funding authorities. These extralocal sites coordinate educators' work through importing accreditation texts' discourse, funding, and reporting requirements deep into the local child care centre setting.

### **The conceptual importance of experience to IE research.**

"To begin in the everyday is not to claim the character of 'experience' is 'real' but rather to trace how everyday life is oriented to relevances beyond the particular setting" (Manicom, 1995, p. 8). In IE, the ground of inquiry is to explore the fundamental link between the particularities of life experiences and the social relations of the society in which we live. The intent of IE is not to treat experience as unmediated and somehow more real. It is not to understand experience as subjectivity. Nor does it claim to get at the meanings and intentions of individuals; instead the ambition of IE is to understand everyday experience as it happens.

So this research does not rely on the educators' interpretation of accreditation, or their speculative accounts of the problems with accreditation attributed to an uncaring government and a society that does not value children, or the unrecognized work that educators perform on their behalf. These types of explanations preclude an examination of how accreditation work actually happens in child care centres across Alberta. Without a concrete grasp of how accreditation functions, there is little chance of effectively challenging or changing the experience of accreditation for and with educators.

## Texts

For Dorothy Smith and IE researchers, texts are of central importance (1990). As they are replicable, a key feature of texts is that they can be present in multiple sites at various times. In her dissertation, Turner (2003, p. 91) outlines four methodologically significant stipulations for considering texts as central to IE research:

- The active text organizes institutional processes and relations that govern and regulate the society we produce and live.
- We are constantly engaged in textually mediated forms of action and thus in ruling relations.
- The operation of texts is pervasive, relatively unnoticed in people's behaviour.
- Text-mediated social organization is observable as people's actual practices.

I discovered that ACCAP is a highly textually mediated process. Dorothy Smith uses the term "textually mediated social organization" to portray the idea that "engagement with texts concert and coordinates the actions of people" (1990, p. 29). She goes on to explain that texts are activated by the people who use them and can carry meaning across sites. The activation of texts allows for power to be exercised, structuring choices about how to act and interact, and doing administrative and management work through the relationship. The use of text in our daily work is rarely questioned—it is assumed neutral and necessary, even though according to Smith, it regularizes and lends itself to efficiency and accountability needs of the organization.

In the accreditation process texts are consistently visible. The educators in the field site responded to and did work on account of texts. They relied on the texts from AELCS to tell them what to do, how to do it, and when. The texts were viewed as the voice of authority by educators, as they

reflect the official and dominant discourses. As replicable institutional texts, they ordered the work of educators in the local site along with accomplishing social coordination across multiple sites. The texts of accreditation are replicated across the province in every centre attempting to achieve accreditation. The accrediting agency counts on this replication to order the work of educators in every centre.

### **Mapping**

Cartographic and diagramming techniques have been used with success in past IE investigations as analytical tools that can be used to represent coordinating complexes of institutional sequences of action and decision-making processes that engage multiple people across various geographic locations (Turner, 2006). Maps of the accreditation process represent the details of the social. They make visible the social relations and social organization of accreditation work. In this study, maps were especially useful in depicting how child care centres, through accreditation work, are hooked into relationships in the translocal. As described in chapter 5, maps were also valuable in making visible new accreditation work processes.

### **Smith's Notion of "Work"**

This study will make use of the generous definition of work employed by institutional ethnographers that encapsulates anything done intentionally by informants that takes time and effort, under particular conditions and requiring resources and certain work knowledges, and explicates specific sequences of actions (D. Smith, 2005). In IE, work is used as an orienting concept in both conducting and analyzing interviews about everyday experiences (McCoy, 2006). This definition allows the IE researcher to get analytically closer to how people are actually putting their work, speech, and textual practices together. By employing Smith's notion of work, educators can begin to understand how their own work may be implicated in priorities

that extend beyond the local setting and interactions with children and families, despite their well-meaning intentions.

By employing IE, I gained a powerful tool for critical inquiry that revealed the politics of power and knowledge embedded in the text-based discourses of accreditation. The ontology of the social has two aims, to produce for people “maps” of the ruling relations and institutional complexes in which they participate, and to build knowledge and methods of discovering the institutions and ruling relations of contemporary Western society (D. Smith, 2005). IE’s conceptual frames and terms support the discovery of how the documents and discourse associated with accreditation with which educators engage organize and dominate how they do their work and how they set priorities. From Smith’s writings and thinking, I gained a major realization, learning to see accreditation as concerted work practices and social relations, and to recognize the textually mediated nature of accreditation work. I also learned to think past people’s opinions and perceptions to see the textually mediated nature and social organization of their work. In her work, Smith encourages IE researchers to produce a “telling” about the world. A central premise of this telling is describing how the social organization and social relations are textually represented in ways that allow us to see how our daily activities come to happen. The product of institutional ethnography is a social cartography that can be used by people whose work is concerted and controlled, and by activists to better understand, challenge, and transform the powerful social forces that rule and coordinate their everyday (D. Smith, 1990; Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

In summary “institutional ethnography is committed to discovering beyond the individual’s experience . . . and putting into words supplemented in some instances by diagrams or maps what she or he discovers about how people’s activities are coordinated” (D. Smith, 2006, p. 1). Applying the concepts, logic, and method of IE, this study seeks to describe how the accreditation process actually happens in Alberta child care centres from the

standpoint of educators. The next section describes the specific methods used to uncover the work of child care accreditation.

### **Methods of Inquiry**

This section presents the research procedures and methods used in this inquiry. I am indebted to the work of many IE researchers who came before me and published excellent models of methods and analysis to draw on, including McCoy (1995, 2006), Turner (2002, 2003, 2006), Rankin (2004), Janz (2009), and Clune (2011). Their combined efforts to thoughtfully explicate textually mediated social organization by applying the conceptual foundations provided by Dorothy Smith, and their close attention to detail were instrumental in guiding the process of this research methodology. As a novice IE researcher, I also benefited greatly from participating in the IE working group that is moderated by Dr. Janet Rankin from the University of Calgary. The monthly opportunity to openly discuss the approach with fellow students was instrumental in assisting my emerging grasp of IE methods and concepts. I was also fortunate to attend a weekend workshop on IE at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) facilitated by Dorothy Smith in June 2010. I returned the following June to take a weeklong session, where I benefited from the combined knowledge of both Smith and Turner. This intensive week helped me to explore the possibilities of mapping the data I had collected, and cemented my commitment to IE as research method that could be used to fundamentally explore the social organization of accreditation.

The next section of the chapter begins with a discussion of the research problematic as employed to discover the everyday work of accomplishing accreditation as an entry point into concerting institutional and government structures. The research is divided into two phases as is typical of IE. Phase 1 focused on observing and talking to the informants in the field site to gain an understanding of the everyday work that they were

undertaking to achieve accreditation. Phase 2 involved moving out into the translocal to gain a better understanding of the institutional aspects and socially organized quality of the accreditation process through interviews with secondary informants and texts as identified as significant by the informants. Methods employed in the study included observations and field notes made at the field site, interviews, mapping techniques, and text reviews. Data management and analytic strategies are described next. The chapter concludes with the serious consideration given to carrying out this research in an ethical manner, including how confidentiality was maintained and how informed consent was gained. Details of the analytic description of accreditation, the building of the data, and analysis of findings are presented fully in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7.

### **The Problematic—Discovering the Everyday of Accreditation**

The problematic is a technical term that is based in the theoretical orientations of IE. It is not a formal research question, but a “territory to be discovered” (Smith, 2005, p. 41). As described in chapter 1, this research project developed from my interest in the tensions arising out of educators’ stories of their accreditation experience, my own interest in and experience with accreditation, and the noticeable space between how educators worked to care for and educate young children and what was required by AELCS to prove they met the 10 accreditation quality standards. The problematic of this research is located in this disjuncture. There is a rupture that I observed between the stated intentions of the accreditation program (as a textually mediated abstracted form of social relations) and the educator’s actual lived experience of the process. This rupture is nested within socially organized (contested and contradictory) notions of quality care. Broadly, I wanted to explicate how the experience of child care educators in Alberta seeking to achieve child care accreditation is socially organized. This is the territory that I wanted to explore and map. Some of my questions arising from this

problematic include: How do Alberta child care educators actively go about achieving accreditation? How is their accreditation work hooked into and concerted by translocal relations of ruling? How does accreditation happen as it does?

The problematic is the starting point for exploring people's everyday lived experience; it anchors the inquiry and makes daily actualities researchable. As an analytical tool, the problematic of the research guided who I talked to, what types of questions I asked, and what I observed and mapped. I engaged in the IE research process in an emergent mode, guided in part by the sequential nature of the accreditation work processes in the field site, and by informant's accounts, texts, and by the analysis of the actualities that I observed and explicated. The research process was one of discovery and detection, beginning with observations, meetings, and interviews at the field site from the standpoint of educators, and followed by interviews with secondary informants, mapping techniques, and textual reviews. As per IE, the informants' experiences and perspectives were used to organize the direction of the investigation (Smith, 2005). Each step built on what had been discovered, uncovering further dimensions, extending from micro to macro, creating a map of the terrain of accreditation.

### **Phase 1**

Phase 1 of the study focused on gaining an understanding of the local experience of educators seeking accreditation. All individuals who participated in this study are considered expert informants in their experiences of everyday work processes and institutional practices. IE privileges the standpoint of these primary informants and provides a way to understand how their local experiences with accreditation are coordinated by translocal structures and practices.

The word informant, rather than research participant, is used in this study for an important reason. Institutional ethnographers use the term



informants to indicate to the reader that a sample of people is not being investigated, instead it is the social organization of institutional processes being studied (Devault & McCoy, 2002). The informants are not the object of study but rather the entry point into the daily actualities of local practices. The intention is to examine their work, work processes, and work organization and to “look up” into the social relations that coordinate them.

### **Recruitment of and access to the research site.**

The intention of the research was to “hitch a ride” along with the educators in an Alberta child care centre (the field site) as they prepared for and worked through the process of achieving accreditation status. The procedure for selecting a field site began by approaching the accrediting agency for permission to include a letter of invitation with their information package. The invitation letter went to Edmonton-area child care centres applying for accreditation for the first time. Interested centres were invited to sign a consent form, giving permission to AELCS to release their contact information to me and for me to contact them directly by phone to discuss the study further (see Appendix A). One centre responded to the invitation letter through AELCS. I immediately contacted them and set up an initial meeting to explain the research project, to answer any of their questions, and to deal with any issues that might arise in the research process. Once the centre had agreed to participate, a letter of consent was signed by the centre’s owner-operator (see Appendix B).

### **The research site.**

The field site selected for this research project was a licensed child care centre located in a suburban area just outside a major city in Alberta. In Alberta, a child care operator’s license is required under the Child Care Licensing Act to operate a child care program that provides care for seven or more children. The centre had only been licensed for four months when the field site observations began. The child care centre leases space in a community church building. The classrooms are used by the church school

on the weekend. The hours of operation are Monday to Friday; 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The centre is licensed for 46 children ages 12 months to kindergarten age (20 spaces for infants-toddlers and 26 spaces for preschool-age children). There were 11 educators (including some part-time staff), a director, an owner-operator, and cook employed at the centre when the research commenced. As of the site-visit date six months later, the staff complement had grown to 14 educators (including some part-time staff). Five were certified at the Child Development Assistant (CDA) level, one at the Child Development Worker (CDW) level, and seven at the Child Development Supervisor (CDS) level<sup>3</sup>.

The centre staff explained that the center is a play-based program and uses a project-based approach<sup>4</sup> to curriculum. The centre also tries to apply the philosophy of Reggio Emilia<sup>5</sup>. On the Site Visit Request Program Description form, they described themselves by saying, “we extend opportunities for children to explore, experiment, create, discover and represent their knowledge through authentic learning experiences, meaningful relationships, and collaboration. We aim to form relationships between the centre, family and community.” The physical environment of the centre is appealing and friendly looking. The centre is well equipped; classrooms are arranged in learning centres. Evidence of the children’s projects is on display in the hallways.

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<sup>3</sup>CDA—one 45-hour course in child development; CDW—one-year certificate in Early Learning and Child Care; CDS—two-year Early Learning and Child Care diploma program or an equivalent level of training.

<sup>4</sup> An emergent curriculum approach is based on indepth long term inquiry into topics of interest to the children and educators.

<sup>5</sup>Coming from the Reggio Emilia region in Italy, this approach to early learning has gained popularity in North America and is based on the concept of the rich child, a child with one hundred languages. The philosophy foregrounds relationships, children, and teachers as co-constructors of knowledge and aesthetic classroom environments (See Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 1993).

### **Participant observation.**

During the study I spent approximately 50 hours in the field site conducting participant observation (see Appendix C). I observed the sequence of activities the educators, director, and owner-operator carried out to accomplish accreditation. I observed the educators in their daily work with children, attended staff and family information meetings about accreditation, and made observations of the accreditation work being carried out by educators. There were many casual conversations and some more formal interviews with educators at the field site. I also met with the director and owner-operator on numerous occasions. During these meetings they described the progress they were making in the process, the challenges they were experiencing, and the tasks they were undertaking, especially in relation to their activation of the self-study guide and its texts and tools. The meetings did not follow a standard format; I was expressly interested in listening to their description of what was happening, what came before, and what was coming next. I often asked about the tools of the self-study guide and how they were using them. I asked them what they were thinking about as they read and filled in the information, form, or document.

In this way, I began to examine in detail the specific methods, mechanisms, and processes they employed in combination to make the work of accreditation happen in their centre. I took extensive field notes, and with permission I audiorecorded the meetings and interviews that occurred in the field site. I then transcribed the audiorecordings. At three points during the study, while the centre was completing the observation checklists, the QEP, and the evidence portfolio, I returned my observations to the director for her feedback on the actual steps, activities, and tasks they undertook. As the basis for future mapping, I wanted to ensure that I had accurately captured the sequence of events they participated in.

### **Phase 1 interviews.**

The goal of the interview process in IE is to open up the field through the collection of qualitative responses. Dorothy Smith describes its goal as finding and describing social processes that have generalizing effects; not to generalize about the group of people interviewed (2006, p. 18). In IE, interviewing is often referred to as “talking to people,” hinting at the range of interviewing techniques that can be used, from preplanned interviews to much less formal and more open-ended process that can be employed. Interviews in IE are also described as a nonstandardized, open-ended inquiry, a “fully reflexive process in which both the participant and the interviewer construct knowledge together” (Kinsman & Gentile, 1998 as cited in D. Smith, 2006). Much data were produced in this reflexive process through observations at formal and casual meetings, informal conversations, and educators doing routine work in the field site.

Interviews and observations helped to make visible what educators are actually doing in relation to accreditation and its social organization. As noted, the types of questions asked often focused on the texts instead of a standardized, preplanned question structure. By asking descriptive questions, my role was informal and nondirective, focused on gaining the informant’s perspectives and experiences related to the accreditation process they were engaged in, and delineating how the textual process they were engaged in became purposefully coordinating.

I digitally recorded and transcribed interactions with the informants at the field site with their permission. Each interview was summarized and analyzed with notes on the content, concepts, interconnections, and institutional linkages revealed.

### **Field site texts**

The accreditation process is described by the accrediting agency as a six-step process. My aim from the start was to explicate these steps. After a

couple of conversations with the director, I soon discovered the importance of the second step, the self-study, and the prominent role of the self-study guide. I knew then that I would be asking specific questions about the textual tools of accreditation, in particular the 10 accreditation quality standards, the surveys, observation checklists, the QEP, and the evidence portfolio that were embedded in the self-study guide produced by AELCS. This textual resource was a significant source of language, discourse and work processes that were activated in the field site and that I critically engaged with as part of the analysis process, discovering how it was coordinating the work of accreditation across the province.

In this study, mapping out the textual process of the self-study guide, its texts, and tools included determining how the text comes to the educator and where it goes afterwards, what the educator needs to know to use the text, and what the educator does with, for, and on account of the text. It also included determining how the text intersects with other texts and textual process and the conceptual framework that organized the text, and how it was read (Devault & McCoy, 2006). Permission to access texts created by AELCS about the field site's accreditation site visit and decision was generously granted (see Appendix D).

## Phase 2

The second phase of the study sought to gain an understanding of the complex, ongoing mechanisms of accreditation through interviews with secondary informants and a review of texts. This was followed by a comprehensive review of the data from all sources and mapping exercises.

The data collection process of IE requires “tracking back or following clues forward” from the local site and the data collected there, in order to expose the linkages between different kinds or levels of data (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 81). Phase 2 was intended to help fill in the missing organizational details and broaden out the investigation into the translocal as

necessary. Phase 2 helped to explore the connections created by and through accreditation, across and beyond the child care agency. This continuing exploration of the problematic also relied on secondary informant interviews and text analysis as required by the emergent nature of the research.

### **Recruitment of secondary informants.**

The term secondary informant is used to refer to a person with organizational knowledge of child care accreditation. Each secondary informant, with their expert knowledge of accreditation based on their experience, was considered as someone who could inform my understanding of the topic. These persons were interviewed in Phase 2 of the study with the intention of tracing the path of the accreditation work of educators outwards from the local to explore how their work is hooked into the ongoing work of others through institutional processes. I had a sense at the outset of the research that I would need to interview informants at the accrediting agency, at the technical support agency, and at the ministry once the project started; I recruited secondary informants in an emergent fashion. When informants in the field site mentioned an individual or a position in an external agency, I made note of it to be followed up later with an interview. I used my original contact at the accrediting agency to arrange to interview the staff of this organization and to arrange to interview the validators who conducted the site visit in the field site. My contact at the accrediting agency also gave me the names of moderators and governing council members who might be interested in participating in the study. Likewise secondary informants in the accrediting agency mentioned their contacts at the technical support agency and at the ministry, so I followed up with an interview.

For all the secondary informants, I made initial contact via email to solicit their interest in participating in the study. I was certain to indicate that participation was voluntary. If they agreed to participate I followed up by sending an information letter and consent form (see Appendix E).

### **Secondary informant interviews.**

In total, 11 interviews with secondary informants were conducted. Informants with various positions within the accrediting agency were interviewed. One informant each from the technical support agency and the ministry were interviewed. One director from an accredited child care centre was also interviewed. Interviews were held in locations convenient to the secondary informants, most often their offices; however two interviews occurred in public spaces. The interviews ranged from 60–120 minutes in length. Questions for each secondary informant were based on my emerging understanding of the accreditation process (for sample questions see Appendix F). As for Phase 1, interviews were digitally recorded with permission and transcribed as soon as possible after each interview occurred.

### **Secondary text analysis.**

Texts produced by the field site and from the accreditation agency (AELCS), the technical support agency (ARCQE), and the government of Alberta (ACYS) were reviewed as part of this project (see Appendix G). Following Griffith (2006) these texts were considered as data. Reading texts as data meant scrutinizing for the discourse and language of accreditation held within the texts. It meant using the texts to inform the analysis I was undertaking and drawing on how the texts mediated and coordinated knowing about accreditation for the sector and for the public at large; especially relevant were themes related to accreditation as a necessity, and accreditation if not as a guarantee of excellence, at least as a guarantee of higher standards.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Process**

The data of this study arose primarily from participant observation at the field site, including the interview transcripts of Phase 1 informants and Phase 2 secondary informants, mapping techniques, and the textual review

process. Data were recognized as important when they helped to illuminate the original problematic of the study, made ruling relations visible, and when they helped to enlighten the researcher's understanding of how accreditation was actually happening. IE is a "project of inquiry and discovery that rejects the dominance of theory" (D. Smith, 2005, p. 49). Smith continues, "findings are not already prejudged by a conceptual framework that regulates how data will be interpreted" (p. 50). In institutional ethnographic studies, analytic description is the goal. There is no intention to propose interpretations or ascribe theory, or to fit ideas into an explanatory framework. The analytic purpose is to describe—logging and mapping the actualities of local practices and discourses.

In this study, analysis began to take place at the same time as data collection was occurring through note taking, reflection, and transcription. In IE, coding or predetermined themes are not generally employed as methods of analyzing data. Informants are not expected to have matching experiences. Rather, I depended upon on observations, interviews, and documents to explicate the problematic. I made use of the data as a way to make material connections and to discover how the work of accreditation happened, the way it happened, and how it was triggered. I consistently attempted to pay attention to what people did, and to illuminate what their daily work under the accreditation process required of them. I examined the data numerous times, examining it carefully for how the informant's work was concerted with others, and how texts shaped their work and coordinated their activities.

In her article, "Keeping the Institution in View: Working with Interview Accounts of Everyday Experience," McCoy (2006) suggests that IE researchers ask these kinds of questions of their data:

- What is the work that these informants are describing or alluding to?
- What does it involve for them?



- How is their work connected with the work of other people?
- What particular skills or knowledge seem to be required?
- What does it feel like to do this work?
- What are the troubles or successes that arise for people doing this work?
- What evokes the work?
- How is the work geared into the system or institutional organization?

I willingly employed this suggestion as a means to discourage my own tendency towards interpretation. Using the questions as an analytical frame for each interview and text review helped me to see the social relations and ruling relations in evidence in the child care accreditation process, and kept me focused on the institutional.

As the investigation progressed, regular reflection on, and review and analysis of the data were undertaken to discover issues or concerns such as unclear work processes or texts, identifying any holes in the researcher's knowledge so that further information could be gleaned or processes clarified to address the gap and further explicate the problematic. For example, I had difficulty understanding the scoring system used by AELCS. Educators knew little about it except that they got points. It took interviews with a moderator, an AELCS governing council member and finally the executive director of the accrediting agency to make sense of the scoring. Each interview with informants in different locations offered a partial and limited view until a fuller picture of the scoring method came together. During analysis, as I explicated the accreditation decision making process I recognized that the hidden aspect of scoring is not conducive to transparency for educators.

It is important to note that the data collection and analysis conducted for this research were not as straightforward or linear as presented in this chapter. Each piece of data added to my overall understanding of the

accreditation process in some way. The recordings of interviews and transcripts were reviewed frequently. A cumulative and iterative analytical process emerged as my insights grew. By successive reading of the data, moving back and forth between the data and texts and the context that produced them, the researcher can map out and explicate how informant experience takes shape within complex institutional chains of action (D. Smith, 2005).

As the work progressed, I endeavoured to maintain a flexible and creative stance towards the analytical process, foregrounding the notion of reflexivity. According to Reay (2007), reflexivity requires “attention to differences within as well as without. We need to pay attention to the internally complex nature of subjectivity and how this is worked through at the level of self-understanding and practice . . . reflexivity is about giving as full and honest an account of the research process as possible, in particular explicating the position of the researcher in relation to the research” (pp. 610–611). In typical sociological research, researchers are expected to demonstrate that they have achieved intimacy with yet maintain distance from their subjects and data and show their loyalty to ensuring that they meet the discipline’s standards for objective inquiry (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). A different reflexive stance is invited by IE, and by taking up Smith’s notion of standpoint, the investigator is situated as a constitutive part of the inquiry. Undertaking any type of research involves entering a social relationship. IE researchers are asked to take up a certain form of self-reflexive practice that involves a theorized way of looking and knowing (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). In keeping with IE’s epistemology and ontology, the researcher is a located knower in relation with others. In IE, the researcher’s location and stance from which they know is not treated as a problem or a bias rather “we believe it reveals something about whose interests are served” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 15). Thus, I entered this investigation not as a naïve observer, nor expecting theory to arise out of the

data, but as an informed and critical observer and listener. As my background knowledge, experience, professional judgement and skills were all brought into the investigation, and as I sought to sort out my own position as a researcher, I learned that my own location as an embodied knower was socially organized as well.

I had my own questions and general ideas about accreditation at the outset of the study, stemming from my experience in the field and the problematic. Sometimes my own biases and assumptions bubbled up into my data gathering and analysis, and it was difficult at times to set aside my own understandings of how to enact quality care; however, thinking “institutionally” helped to re-centre the research on the social organization and coordinating effects of accreditation. My past extensive experience in the field also left me susceptible to “institutional capture,” (D. Smith, 2005; Janz, 2009, p. 49) a process by which the taken-for-granted discourse of the ruling relations overrides. I often heard the educators adopt institutional language and discourse to explain what they were doing and often let it go by uninvestigated at the time of the interviews. When I couldn’t see their work to map it because I only had recorded their thoughts and motivations, Turner and Smith (2011, personal communications) recommended that I go back to the director for more specifics. Afterwards I would realize when the educators’ institutional talk glossed over their actual practices, and that I needed to ask what seemed like very obvious questions and to ask for very specific examples to break down and explain their actual doings.

During interviews, I often found myself nodding in agreement with educators’ concerns and subjective understandings, thinking that I really knew what they were speaking of based on my own experience. It was hard not to take their accounts for granted and to get caught up and sympathetic to their struggles. “But institutional ethnographers do not stay inside people’s accounts of their experiences” (Rankin & Campbell, 2009, p. 2). In cases like this, once I read the interview transcripts, and started to analyze

the interviews, I realized I had become too focused on the educators' stories and experiences, rather than on how their understandings and actions were being socially organized and ruled. Janz (2009) and McCoy (2006) refer to this as "unintended analytic drift." I had to go back to the texts and discourses evident to surface the linkages and to see the texts in action. At these times, I found it very helpful to return to the writings of D. Smith (2005, 2006), Turner (2002), and Rankin and Campbell (2006) to resubmerge myself in institutional ethnography.

I am also aware that my embodied presence in the field site may have influenced the pace of the activities of the educators. For example, the director commented that she had accomplished the majority of their QEP because she knew that I was coming into the field site that day. The owner-operator viewed my being there as a resource to the centre. She willingly agreed to participate in the study and viewed it as a learning opportunity for herself and the other educators. My presence during the two-day site visit may have also affected the validators. The validators tried to verbally explain their actions, decisions, and rationales to me as they accomplished their observations. They also often paused to answer my questions. This would not normally occur if they were not being observed.

### **Mapping the Data**

Mapping helps make the particulars of the social evident. During the data gathering and analysis phase I made use of mapping and visual representations to help make sense of the enormous amount of information that the study generated. I started by mapping the six steps of accreditation as abridged by AELCS. Based on participant observations, interviews, and text reviews, I fleshed out the steps as actually undertaken by the field site, including an additional seven steps of the self-study process and an undocumented step that saw the accreditation manager review the moderator's reports prior to their receipt by the governing council. This map

was sketched out across 13 sheets of flip chart paper measuring approximately 10 metres. Additional maps of specific aspects of the process were helpful in explicating, for example, the relationships that accreditation work coordinates, and the text-work-text sequence of the accreditation decision-making process. These two maps are included in the dissertation as Figure 3 and Figure 2. One of the most fruitful mapping exercises helped me to see past the work of the director in relation to accreditation. I originally had difficulty visualizing the way that accreditation coordinates the work of educators. Using maps I concretely made visible how the work of the director is coordinated by AELCS, and how she in turn coordinates the accreditation work of educators. I also mapped the self-study guide, tracing its texts through the process. Many other sketches and diagrams helped me grapple with and describe the textually mediated, socially organized work of accreditation undertaken by educators in the field site.

### **Ethics**

Although this study posed limited risk to informants, it was my goal to conduct it in a manner that protected the dignity, rights, and well-being of all participants. I worked to minimize potential harm and risk to participants, to guarantee confidentiality, and acquire informed and voluntary consent as per the University of Alberta ethical standards for conducting research on human subjects. This study was reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. Risks were managed by careful deliberation and action on two important considerations—confidentiality and consent. A blanket consent form that ensured informed and voluntary consent was garnered from all the informants at the field site at the start of the field work period (see Appendix H). As the investigation shifted outward to Phase 2 data collection and secondary informants, I obtained informed and voluntary consent from all participating informants (see Appendix E). To try to ensure the anonymity of secondary informants who may be identified by the particular position they

hold, I have referred to them in the analysis chapters as a secondary informant only.

### Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the two phases of data collection and analysis procedures used in this institutional ethnography process. In Phase 1, I embarked on a “ride-along” with educators in the field site as they set about doing accreditation, to make visible new work processes they undertook using the texts and tools of AELCS, and the coordinating social relations they entered into. I continued to trace the path of their work into the translocal in Phase 2 of the study, interviewing secondary informants and analyzing relevant texts.

The significant findings and analytical description of the work educators engaged in during the accreditation process are described in the next four chapters of the dissertation. Chapter 4 will describe, based on analytic mapping, the standardized steps undertaken using the prescribed texts and tools of the AELCS self-study guide. In chapter 5, a description of the three new work processes that educators are required to undertake to achieve accreditation is provided. In chapter 6, the data from the study are used to describe the creation of new categories of experts whose work produces the accreditation decision. Using mapping, and looking up from the standpoint of educators, I show in chapter 7 how accreditation hooks them into a series of coordinating social relations to which they are now accountable. Next I describe and critically analyze the work of the new professional educator doing accreditation. I close chapter 7 using the data to uncover accreditation as a different form of knowing where the experiential and intuitive work knowledge of educators subjugates their interests. Chapter 8 draws together the findings for discussion and summarization.

## **Chapter 4: Local Actualities—The Steps in the Accreditation Process**

### **Introduction**

My study indicates that accreditation is all about local actualities being converted into textual realities to become institutionally actionable, in a form that is authorized by the accrediting agency and based on the terms and conditions of the Alberta government. Through the accreditation process the quality care and education of young children is reconceptualized as 10 standards. The accreditation process is designed to measure and assess the success of educators in meeting these 10 standards. Enacting these standards in their daily work results in a new organization of educators' work focused on goal setting, producing evidence, and continuous quality improvement (described in chapter 5).

This chapter begins with a description of the mapping techniques used in the analysis of the data. Mapping provides the researcher with the ability to trace the text-based sequences of action and extended relations of accreditation, with the goal to make visible the linkages and new social organization and ruling relations. Next, the standardized steps of the accreditation process are explicated, based on mapping techniques and observations and interviews in the field site. From this analysis the new work of accreditation becomes visible. The chapter concludes with a description of the textually mediated nature of the accreditation process, using the AELCS self-study guide an example.

### **Mapping as an Ethnographic Technique**

In her "Mapping for Change" workshop Turner (2011) defines the mapping approach of IE as "an analytic descriptive technique that visually maps extended relations and shows how individual activities in multiple sites are coordinated and produced in the acts of the institution." She goes on to

explain that mapping is a way to “produce visual and written accounts of the workings of institutions that display the extraordinary power of texts, that take language into account and that show institutions being put together and going on around us.”

It is important to note that although comprehensive and detailed, the mapping I undertook is not exhaustive. There is always more that goes on than can be seen and made visible in this kind of graphic representation. The maps are ethnography, as they are based on the actual work observed in one child care centre seeking child care accreditation. In the processes governing accreditation, these mapped sequences are standard chains of action in which people’s experiences are located, and which bring their activities into relation with others (Turner, 2006). The work processes, texts, and tools that I observed the educators using are required as mandatory work processes by the accrediting agency. The texts actively shaped the educators’ strategies and choices as they engaged in the steps of the accreditation process.

The standardized texts of accreditation that were mapped in the field site included the application and self-study guide, and tools such as staff and family surveys, observation checklists, QEP, and portfolio report. I also mapped some of the standardized texts of the accrediting agency (moderator’s report, scoring template) and ACYS (funding forms). In IE, these texts are all viewed as essential regulatory devices that bring into existence the activities constituting and organizing the multisite institution of provincial accreditation in Alberta. Accreditation is reliant on texts working in the same manner across diverse child care centres. Thus texts come to organize standardized forms of action and procedures of the institution of accreditation that transcends the local practices of individuals. There is a temporal sequence of activities that is coordinated, recognizable, and reproducible (cf. Turner, 2006) as the “accreditation process.” The texts are activated and reproduced each and every time, in every centre, in every accreditation self-study process.



## Analytic Description of the Steps in the Accreditation

### Process

In the next section, I provide an analytic description of the steps in the accreditation process. A central task of this research was to use the strategies and techniques of IE to explicate the steps taken by the educators in the field site and to answer the question “how does accreditation happen?”

On the AELCS website, the accreditation process is represented as a progression of six official sequential steps: “apply for accreditation, complete self-study and QEP, site visit, moderator review governing council decision, maintaining accreditation.” The steps are depicted as a succession of neutral, standardized events and actions (Turner, 2002). Individual child care centres volunteer by applying to the accrediting agency and “going through” the steps in the process. Thus they are drawn into a complex sequence of actions that are textually mediated, that open the centre to scrutiny by experts, and culminate in the “decision.” The longer that I observed in the field site, and as I engaged in the graphic mapping process, the more complex this six-step process actually turned out to be. For a chronological summary of the activities undertaken in the field site to accomplish the steps of the accreditation process see Appendix I.

#### **Step 1, AELCS accreditation: application.**

The first step in the accreditation process is to apply to AELCS, the accrediting agency. There is currently no fee for applying. The application form is a simple standardized form, but several accompanying documents are required by the accrediting agency. From the very beginning, accreditation hooks the child care centre into an ongoing textual process, requiring that the child care centre provide particular texts as proof of its intentions, and positioning it as a legitimate applicant as determined by the accrediting agency.

The application pulls in the license holder, ACYS ministry officials, the work of Child and Family Service Authorities (CFSA), the centre's owner and/or board chair, and employees of AELCS and ARCQE. By referencing two Alberta legislative acts—the Child Care Regulation and Licensing Act and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act—the application asserts its official and legal grounding.

By requiring that the accreditation application form be accompanied by the child care centre's valid provincial operating license, it hooks the accreditation process into the Alberta Provincial Child Care Legislation and Regulation. This signifies the prior work of the provincial child care licensing apparatus through the CFSA in granting a child care licence to the centre, and the work constituted by the centre to ensure the minimum legislated child care regulations and requirements are met consistently<sup>6</sup>.

As part of the accreditation application, centres agree to have information about their child care centre made public on the AELCS website. This alerts the centre to a new public relationship with the community as well. Their status as an accredited agency is information that they are agreeing to make public. This public pronouncement is part of the accountability relationship that they will enter into. As an accredited centre they are responsible to the public and community for the tax dollars they will receive.

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<sup>6</sup> A day care license is required for any program providing care for seven or more children. To obtain a child care operator's license, applicants must complete the License Holder Information Session provided by the regional CFSA office, submit an Application form and \$200 Application fee, complete a program template form and a subsidy grant agreement (if intending to receive subsidy benefits on behalf of families who qualify). The applicant is also responsible for submitting all program premise approvals, including all permits to ensure zoning, health and safety regulations, and building codes are met. Applicants must also provide confirmation of current liability insurance, criminal record checks for individual applicants, and evidence of corporate status from corporate registries. Prior to receiving a license an applicant must also have an onsite inspection by a licensing officer, to ensure the premises meet the requirements of the Child Care Licensing Act and Regulation.

The submission of the application produces a file and number in the accrediting agency and formally activates the complex of work procedures constituting the accreditation process. The official activation includes notification of ACYS and ARCQE, again a formal hook in to broader translocal relations. This instigates a complex set of actions that is mostly taken for granted as “the way it works,” but which draws educators into a textual mediated and socially organized process that in fundamental ways changes the way they will work and the relationships they will enter into.

### **Step 2, AELCS accreditation: self-study and quality enhancement plan.**

The self-study portion of the accreditation process is “core.” Once the application has been processed by the accrediting agency and the ministry, a substantial text entitled the Self-study Guide Reference Manual arrives from AELCS. The arrival of the self-study guide hooks the educators into the official and authorized accreditation process and offers a set of instructions that direct the educators in a fashion that is consistent with the requirements of AELCS.

The self-study guide has a standardized format and is intended as a complete set of instructions for accomplishing accreditation by AELCS. The text is divided into seven sections including 1) introduction to accreditation, 2) ACCAP standards, 3) self-study process, 4) self-study toolkit, 5) samples, 6) forms, and 7) glossary. The self-study guide’s role as a coordinator in the accreditation process is outlined later in this chapter. It will play a central role in the work ahead.

The introduction to the self-study process in the self-study guide begins to orient the reader’s consciousness to the terms of accreditation. “The goal of the self-study process is to review and enhance the quality of care in your centre” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1). The review and enhancement noted in the directions requires educators to enter into a

sequence of actions that is set forth in the guide, including seven steps to complete the self-study process, culminating in the site visit and ultimately the accreditation decision.

The instructions to educators for completing the self-study include (AAAELCS, 2007a):

**Step 1.** “Read the self-study guide”, “Establish an Accreditation Team”, and “Distribute Family and Staff Surveys”.

**Step 2.** “Use the sample Accreditation Portfolio Report as a reference to review your documentation and files for your Accreditation Portfolio” and “Complete all three Observation Checklists using the initial review column in each room”.

**Step 3.** “...write up your Quality Enhancement Work Plan.” “Submit QEP to AELCS.”

**Step 4.** “Start working on items in your QEP.”

**Step 5.** “Complete the final review of all three Observation Checklists; complete Accreditation Portfolio and Portfolio Report. Complete Consent Forms.”

**Step 6.** “Submit Site Visit Request Form.” “Forward all required documentation to AELCS.”

**Step 7.** “Facilitate Site Visit.” This step in the self-study overlaps with Step 3 of the overall process (site visit).

Based on observations and interviews at the field site, in this section I summarize the analytically relevant procedures used by educators to complete the self-study portion of the accreditation process. In the field site, it took the educators almost six months to work through the self-study process. This is less than half the time of 14 months that child care centres

are allowed to complete the self-study and request a site visit. It is important to note that the process I observed in the field site was not as straightforward or linear as that described in the self-study guide or depicted here. There were many instances when work with the texts and tools overlapped or cycled back. For example, the observation checklists and QEP require an initial review that must be supplemented later in the process with another pre-site-visit review.

### *Step 1, self-study guide process.*

The self-study process officially begins at the field site when the self-study guide reference manual arrives from AELCS. In reality, the educators in the field site had been orienting towards the requirements of accreditation from a much earlier point. They described how achieving accreditation was always a goal, so that when they opened the centre they began by writing a number of policies that they knew from previous experience with the accreditation process would be required by AELCS. With these basic policies in place, they felt ready to begin the self-study process when the self-study guide arrived. Its arrival prompted a series of actions by the director and owner-operator. As instructed, they read over the whole manual. In doing so there is an activation and interrogation of the text as they actively try to figure out what “they” (AELCS) will require and what work the director and owner-operator, along with the other educators, will have to undertake within the centre to meet the accreditation requirements.

Together the owner-operator and director started to put together an accreditation team. Educators from each classroom were invited to join the team. The team was formed based on the owner-operator and director’s working knowledge of the role these educators undertook within the centre, and their belief that this group of educators would invest their time and energy in the process. “We knew they would do a good job, along with the other educators (who work at the centre but are not a part of the accreditation team), to meet the accreditation requirements” the owner-

operator said. The team was composed of the owner-operator, the director and five educators. According to AELCS, the accreditation team is responsible for “ensuring that families, staff, Board/Advisory Committee members and others are informed and involved”, that all of the AQS are addressed and that “the process is moving along according to the timelines” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 2).

The director and owner-operator began to generate a list of initial goals that they would undertake to accomplish the accreditation process and to demonstrate that they were providing quality care based on the terms of the 10 AQS. In doing so, they imagined the work that they could undertake, demonstrating thinking and logic work on their part, which is based on their practical work knowledge—their actual daily experiences in the centre with staff, children, and families.

Part of this imagining included consulting with others. In response to instruction in the guide that encourages them to include “all stakeholders” and that “the self-study process needs to be planned and implemented in a way that allows staff and families to feel ownership and take responsibility” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 1), they initiated two meetings, one for families and one for educators.

#### *Initial meeting with families.*

The educators invited the families to attend an informational meeting about accreditation. This was accomplished through the newsletter that describes centre events and goes home to families monthly. Educators also spoke to families directly about the meeting at the beginning or end of the day when they came in to pick up or drop off their children. A number of families attended the meeting that began at 7:00 p.m. The meeting was hosted by the owner-operator, the director, and a member of the accreditation team. Some interested educators attended, while others provided child care for the children whose parents attended. I attended the

meeting to observe this step in the process. The director described the purpose of accreditation, saying that it is a way to evaluate quality according to a set of standards that are above the minimal requirements of licensing. She outlined the steps involved and the self-study process, noting it “involves a lot of paperwork.” She asked parents to participate in the process, offering them the opportunity for input by completing the required surveys for families. She explained briefly that the centre would be completing three observation checklists in the classrooms which focus on three areas of quality, and creating a QEP “which shows what we are doing now , what we will do next, when, and how,” and that includes setting both long- and short-term goals that the centre would be expected to meet. She advised parents that they may “see changes in the centre as they work on things.” The director commented that the centre would be building an evidence portfolio “to prove that we are great” in preparation for the site visit. She told parents that the site visit meant two validators would be observing educators directly, as well as reviewing the evidence put into the portfolios. She noted the prospect of the site visit may be a “bit scary for staff.”

The owner-operator then asked for input on the initial list of goals including:

- Creating developmental portfolios of the children
- Instigating a system of communication books between educators and families
- Building additional community partnerships
- Possibly offering music or dance lessons
- Providing parents with a free coffee station on Friday mornings

All the suggestions seemed to be warmly received by the parents. She went on to ask for volunteer help with tasks like painting the fence, fundraising through a possible casino night in the future, and other family involvement ideas. She told the families about plans to hold a workshop for

families on the project approach, and invited them to “Pedro’s Birthday Celebration” (the conclusion of an emergent curriculum project focused on babies). The parents were open and willing to be involved. A few offered comments related to their children’s positive experiences in the centre. The owner-operator answered a few questions from families and drew the meeting to a close. After the meeting the educators commented that they were pleased with how it went, and felt they accomplished their goals for the meeting.

*Staff meeting.*

Later that same week a regularly scheduled evening staff meeting was held. Accreditation was on the meeting agenda. After some initial housekeeping items, the director informed the group of educators in attendance “where we are at with accreditation.” She described the steps in the self-study process, telling staff that she would be observing them so that she could complete the three observation checklists. She told them the requirements involve “proving exactly what we do.” For example, they had to implement an opening and closing checklist. “The things that we need to do go into our QEP.” She described the process and timelines for the site visit, attempting to reassure the educators that the validators “won’t just stare at you . . . they will interview educators and families, look at all the paperwork, and interact with the children too.” She promised staff that “you will be fully informed and involved, based on what we will have already done to prepare . . . all the evidence collecting will be done and ready, so they will be looking more at interactions, and that is what you are good at, so they will see evidence of you with the children.”

The owner-operator reinforced that they were hoping for ideas and input from the educators based on their experience. They were encouraged to participate in the process, and she asked for voluntary involvement from them, noting that she “expects that all will want to be



involved as all will benefit from it.” Staff were instructed to read the monthly newsletters to stay abreast of developments.

#### *Distribution of staff and family surveys.*

The self-study guide requires that the family and staff survey be used as part of the initial review process. The self-study instructs centres to “begin your initial review by distributing the two surveys: family and staff” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 3). Centres are encouraged to distribute the survey and to discuss the accreditation process and what it offers.

In preparation for distribution of the family survey a number of tasks were undertaken in the field site, including putting brochures for parents about accreditation from AELCS up on the parent bulletin board and inviting parents to the previously noted evening meeting about accreditation. The director retyped the surveys that AELCS provided on child care centre letterhead. She did not change the survey, as she was instructed by the self-study guide to use as provided. She did devise a note for parents explaining the purpose of the survey, based on the sample that was included in the self-study guide. The surveys were photocopied, along with the letters, and placed in an envelope with each family’s name on them. She sorted them into the family’s mail slots.

This was not the suggested method of distribution recommended by AELCS. To encourage a higher response rate, AELCS suggests educators set up a table where families can complete the survey on the spot. The director felt this might make parents uncomfortable and rushed; instead she wanted to provide them an unhurried and less pressured opportunity to complete the survey. “It’s just too awkward for the families as staff stand there and watch them fill in the surveys”, so she insisted on sending them home with families, “so they can discuss it together, to reflect and have the time and opportunity to answer honestly”. This was one of the most overt acts of resistance that I observed in the field site.

The director verbally made all the educators aware that the family surveys were going out, so they could answer any questions parents might have. She also wanted staff to be aware that parents might be returning them to staff members.

Previously centres collected the surveys, and without reading them, sent them in to AELCS office where they were tabulated and the results then sent back to the centres. The self-study guide reiterates the importance of maintaining confidentiality. However, this procedure was cut to save costs as part of contract negotiations between ACYS and AELCS (although the instructions to submit the surveys to AELCS remain in the current version of the self-study guide). Centres are now expected to collect and analyze results themselves. In the self-study guide is a copy of the required survey and a sample letter for families to accompany it that can be used if the centres wish (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, pp. 2–3). The survey consists of eight statements. For example: “I am satisfied with the care my child(ren) is/are receiving,” “The centre did a good job of explaining the program to me when I registered my child(ren),” and “I feel comfortable approaching the staff at the centre when I have concerns or questions.” Families are asked to respond that they agree, strongly agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or are not sure, to the statements. There is room for families to make comments also. According to the self-study guide, a response rate of 20% of families is required.

In the field site, the owner and director read over all the responses as they were returned. They note that they received “tons back,” more than the number required by AELCS. The feedback they received from families was viewed as positive. The director described how they planned to use the survey results. They intended to share the feedback with the educators and ask them for ideas on how to address any concerns. They also planned to summarize the results in the centre newsletter for families (there is no evidence that this happened). In the self-study guide they were directed to use the results of the survey to identify areas to address in the quality

enhancement process, and advised that the results must be reflected in their QEP. Parent access to policies and procedures is one aspect they highlighted for improvement in their QEP. Later in the process the director included copies of the completed surveys in the portfolio, and checked that the surveys were completed on the site visit request form.

### *Step 2, self-study guide process.*

After the meetings, the director, who had assumed responsibility for filling in all the texts and documents required by AELCS, began to fit the initial ideas that they had generated, along with the ideas that arose at the meetings, into the categories on the QEP report form. All the forms were filled in by hand, first as a rough draft and then a “good” copy was produced. (AELCS is presently in the process of creating an electronic version of the self-study guide, but is not yet able to provide forms that can be filled out on a computer).

Following up on the parent meeting, the director sent home the monthly newsletter to families with an update on accreditation. “Last week we sent home surveys for you to fill out and return to us. We are working hard to incorporate your ideas into our Quality Enhancement Plans.” The director also introduced the implementation of communication books<sup>7</sup>, which had been discussed at the meeting.

### *Observation checklists.*

The self-study process includes three observation checklists that have to be completed. Each must be done twice, as the self-study includes an initial review and then a pre-site-visit review. The checklists are meant to assess the quality of the educators’ engagement and interactions with children, to

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<sup>7</sup> Communication books are a fairly typical communication strategy used by educators to pass messages about children back and forth between home and centre.

measure the quality of the physical environment, and to gauge the success of the daily practices that educators engage in.

The Physical Environment Observation Checklist “addresses aspects of the physical facility related to health, safety and well-being of the children” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1). This checklist consists of 35 items. The centre is required to complete this checklist in each playroom, with the results of the observations compiled in one checklist. The Interactions and Daily Experiences Observation Checklist “addresses two critical components of child care: interactions between children and adults; and children’s daily experiences” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1). This checklist consists of 49 items. The centre is required to complete this checklist for each playroom. And finally the Practices Observation Checklist “addresses the centre wide ‘practices’ of your child care program. In the context of accreditation ‘practice’ means the ways (the processes and the daily activities) you implement your philosophy” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1). This checklist consists of 22 items. The centre is required to complete this checklist in each playroom with the results of the observations compiled in one checklist.

There are specific instructions for completing the observation checklists in the self-study guide. There is a standardized scoring method that educators must implement. The Scoring Guidelines for Checklists (AAAELCS 2007a, Section 4, p. 2) direct the observer to rate each item in the following manner:

- “BP<sup>8</sup>-Best practice consistently observed
- N/O(E)- Not observed but there is other evidence that supports it *Or...* observed and evidence partially supports the observation

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<sup>8</sup> In the glossary of the AELCS self-study guide, best practice is defined as “a set of procedures that exceed the minimum requirements set out by licensing” (2007, Section 8, p. 2).

- NOC- Observed but not observed consistently *Or...* you have not observed the item on the checklist but neither have you seen evidence to demonstrate opposite practice
- OP- Opposite practice observed or evidence demonstrates opposite practice
- NA- Not applicable i.e. Comment about special needs if there are not special needs children in the room”

Educators are directed to “use the ‘What we do/What we need to do’ column to note what you do that meets the standard and also list the changes that need to be made to enhance quality” (AAAELCS 2007a, Section 4, p. 2). In the field site the director read the checklists over and looked at the directions and examples provided by AELCS in the self-study guide. She made photocopies of all the checklists and hole punched them. She then prepared two binders, one for each classroom. She put copies of each of the checklists in each binder, saving the originals for the final “good” copy. She put dividers in between checklists to separate them.

The director of the field site was responsible for completing the three observation checklists. She began to fill in the checklists with its codes and columns for observations and evidence. She commented that it took a bit until she “figures out how to make the forms work for her.” She told me that she mostly worked from memory. Some of her observations and comments were based on staff observations she and the owner-operator had done recently. She moved back and forth from office to classroom as required, explaining that some things she had to go and see—“At some points I had to go sit in there and observe to check on toys, materials. Was it all good? If it wasn’t then I had to write down what was needed.”

An informant at AELCS, when asked about the notion of best practice, replies that “defining it is never a problem, when we bring it up with educators they all seem comfortable with it and know what it means” and in

the field site the director was able to confidently code the observations as required by AELCS, and had no problem identifying when educators were acting in a manner that she believe demonstrated best practice. She made notes in the initial program review column of the practices checklist; on others she noted “what we do/what we need to do” in the boxes provided. As she progressed, in an effort to bolster her work knowledge and to draw other educators into the process, she conferred with educators, getting input, and consulting the centre’s policy and procedure binder.

Her work must be presented on the checklists in coherence with the dominant accreditation texts, using accreditation discourse and language, gearing it to the samples, templates, and forms required by AELCS. The director wished for “more samples of the checklist,” noting there is only one sheet for each. She would have liked more examples of comments, for example “what they need to do if they already have best practice noted.” As she activated the checklists her attention was narrowed and delineated to the specifics of the checklist. Originating elsewhere, the checklists are an example of how with people’s doings, the institutional capacity of texts to coordinate action gets things done in a specific way. The director couldn’t do her own thing with the checklists, if in fact she wouldn’t think of it. The checklists, as servants of the institution, regularize, make efficient, and account for best practice—she had to accomplish them in the manner directed.

The checklists organized her thoughts; she was caught up in her own representation of themselves. They become the “what we do.” The text in this box and the coded behaviour will represent them to AELCS. The checklists dictate the work that the educators make visible or not—and which educator behaviours are valued by the accrediting agency as evidence of best practice. The director’s interaction with the checklist was locally observable and at the same time it connected the local into the translocality of the ruling relations.

It hooks the director's consciousness into relations that are translocal (across multiple sites) (D. Smith, 2005).

The director attended to the categories required by the checklist; they organize what she can say about themselves and their practices. "Boss texts written in institutional discourse supply categories and concepts. People's actualities have to be fitted into the categories and concepts of the institutional discourse. Then they can be read in terms of the boss text and articulated to/as institutional courses or sequences of action" (D. Smith, 2011, personal communication). Using the checklists, the director translated the educators' actuality into a textual reality for the accrediting agency's use. Her account was produced in conformity with the selective requirements of accreditation's boss texts (and what it depicts through its categories and concepts as quality). The checklists serve as a textual bridge—bridging actualities with textual reality. The director knew that in rough draft format, the checklists are not yet actionable—she had to make a good copy, and that is the text that can then go forward with the selected actualities to make their practice a textual reality, which then could be interpreted and handled (as a text in sequence) within the routine procedures of the accreditation process. The checklists then fit within the scope of the discourse's/institutions capacity to act.

The checklists serve a particular coordinating function and are used to "fit" the multiplicity of daily actualities of child care into specific concepts proposed by accreditation categories. Determining what can be used to "fill it in" (the checklist) required the director to notice examples of the daily actualities—specific instances when the actions of educators become examples of behaviours that represent the 10 AQS, which she could then code as best practice. For example on the Interactions and Daily Experience Observation checklist, ID 27 states, "materials are used to assist children to develop language and literacy skills" (AAAELCS 2007a, Section 5, p. 18). The corresponding "What we do" box was filled in by the director stating,

“Teachers strongly focus on language and literacy during circle time and group discussions by practicing songs, fingerplays, new vocabulary and writing at the writing centre”. This practice is coded as best practice by the director.

The director described her process of completing the checklists as “a bit sporadic.” I noticed that the director responded immediately to some categories, while others she left for later to go back to or check with others about. “It was harder to get it done when I had to check policies or check with people.” Some items that required additional policy development she left until the end. “Sometimes I had to put it aside and then go back to it.” She engaged in a process that allowed her to get organized to do the checklists, and to carve out time from her other duties to accomplish the checklists. The director demonstrated the thought and energy that went into it—“it was a big job, and I figure it took about two hours for each checklist, times two classrooms, so at least 12 hours all together.” She is thankful for the support that she got from the other educators “. . . when I had trouble thinking of what else to do to fill in the spaces on the checklist, I would just go and ask random questions of whatever staff was around . . . it was hard to do it alone, you don’t know and see all, sometimes you don’t see the obvious.” The educators were active together in this discourse, writing, saying, talking about it, engaged and active in their local setting. The accreditation checklist was the new language and reality they had in common, and they used it to describe “what we do” as they were now subjects of its discourse. It constituted objects of knowledge and established the conceptual practices that managed and connected them. For example on the Practices Observation Checklist, P2 requires that the “Program schedule reflects a planned balance of self directed play with adult initiated activities and of free play and routines” (AAAELCS 2007a, Section 5, p. 4). The director responds in the Program’s Comment box “ability to be flexible to accommodate needs of infants. Extremely specific and organized routine and schedule was made by



all staff". She adds that in the preschool room the "routine and schedule are consistent, smooth and based on children's wants and needs. Independent play, circle time, group work and free play are incorporated". The checklist organized what can be represented by their work. The checklists have material effects; they became the basis of organizational priorities and influenced decision making, policy creation (for example an aerosol use policy, appliance safety policy and nontoxic materials policy), and centre goals. In this manner the observation checklists reorganized and refocused their work.

Prior to accreditation, individual child care centres may have engaged with checklist-type tools such as the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales Revised (ECERS-R)(Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2004), or relied on the guidelines established by developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) but there previously was no required or regulated, text-based, shared discourse around practice. As a text, the observation checklist is governing and standardizing; all centres use the same three checklists, all educators are observed for the same behaviours, and all programs environments and daily practices are rated using the same codes. As one educator comments, with accreditation "everything is based on best practice."

### *Steps 3 and 4, self-study guide process.*

#### *The quality enhancement plan (QEP).*

Further analysis of the new work process of goal setting occurs in the following chapter, but here I focus on describing the actual observed practices engaged in by the educators at the field site.

Although designated as the third step in the self-study process, the educators in the field site had started to orient to the QEP requirements much earlier. As noted prior to the initial parent meeting, the director and owner-operator had brainstormed and generated ideas for their quality

enhancement goals. These initial ideas had been shared with the parents and then with the staff at evening meetings. So they entered Steps 3 and 4 with some initial ideas and goals in place. In order to accomplish the QEP, the director set up a meeting with an educator who was on maternity leave. Prior to her leave, this educator was involved in the initial plans for gaining accreditation. They intended to work together to fill in the QEP Report. This involved identifying what the centre already did to meet the standards, and filling in the program's initial review column. At the same time they brainstormed ideas and created goals for each standard. The director noted these ideas in the column labelled Work Plan. They worked through the first three standards at this initial meeting. The director recorded their ideas in rough copy of the QEP report form by hand. The educator assisted by creating a "to-do" list for the director in a separate notebook as they went along.

One week later the director met with the educator again in the child care office to finish going through the QEP Report. They worked together and continued to note what the centre already did in relation to the standards. They continued to brainstorm ideas and set goals for each standard. In the process of creating the QEP, they had to decide what they would work on in the coming months and "sell it" to AELCS—AELCS judges whether it is an appropriate, clear goal with a proper timeline.

They noted that the process was quite repetitive. They noticed that what they do currently addresses more than one standard, and the new goals often meet more than one standard. They included some of the ideas that were discussed at the parent meeting. Together they decided to leave Standards 9 and 10 for the owner-operator to complete, as they pertain more directly to the business and financial operations of the centre.

Again we see the power of the boss texts of accreditation as they coordinate. The template provided by AELCS for the QEP report offers the

standardized categories along with examples that narrow and delineate the possibilities for goal setting, and constrict decision-making to address the 10 standards. As the director attended to the categories required, the text organized her thoughts— fitting the daily practices of the educators into the accreditation discourse, she was caught up in making a good and clear representation of themselves through the goals they set. The QEP report organizes what will become visible to AELCS as their goal setting work in the Work Plan box, limiting what she can say and do. In this manner the director undertakes institutional work for the accrediting agency. The multiplicity of decisions required by individuals involved in “doing” accreditation are framed as discrete individual choices or decisions, when in reality they are the varied doings, social processes, and routes through which the educators enter into a ruling relationship with accreditation.

The director planned to work to finalize the rough copy of the QEP and review it with the owner-operator. She would do another draft that incorporated the owner-operator’s comments and have the educator review it. At this point the director planned to mail the completed QEP to AELCS. She learned later that it is best to go downtown in person and drop off the QEP at the AELCS office. The director made a photocopy of the final version to keep for the centre’s records.

Step 4 of the self-study process instructs educators to begin work on their QEP goals. In order to accomplish this, the director created a new text that she called the QEP calendar, lifting the goals she had created from the QEP report form and creating her own document. Further analysis of the QEP calendar occurs in the next section, but here I focus on how this text itself begins to instigate and coordinate the work of the director and other educators. The director activated this newly produced text to coordinate the work of others; she was now responsible for the accomplishment of the goals and had to enlist the support and cooperation of the other educators to realize the goals. She delegated and instituted the work of educators on

account of the QEP report and her QEP calendar to accomplish goals prior to the site visit. The director used an evening staff meeting as a platform for drawing the other educators into the goal setting and accomplishing work that they were now accountable for. She explained the timelines she had constructed on the QEP calendar to the educators, and set up the expectation that they would all participate in working towards the goals on the QEP calendar. For example, she recruited an educator who volunteered to develop a sign-up board for families to volunteer for work that needed to be done around the centre over the summer. Other staff helped by reminding parents to sign up. For July, a goal on the QEP calendar required the implementation of a new, master-cleaning checklist. This new checklist incorporated all existing checklists (open/closing, toy, bathroom) into one master checklist. Educators were instructed that the list would be compiled each week and checked to ensure that the cleaning was done, then transferred to the master list and recorded. (It was decided earlier to use a reusable form to help conserve paper, as the centre wants to be environmentally friendly). This text would then be collected and used as evidence of the goal being accomplished, and included in their portfolio.

In this manner, the director was able to recruit the assistance of the educators in accomplishing some of the goals of the QEP report prior to the site visit. This work was demonstrated to the validator as evidence in the portfolio, which in turn convinced the validators of the centre's ability to engage in the goal-setting, evidence-producing, and continuous quality improvement work processes valorized by AELCS. These three new work processes are described in detail in the next chapter.

### *Step 5, self-study guide process.*

#### *Observation checklists, pre-site-visit review.*

When it was time for the pre-site-review of the checklists, about four months later, the director reviewed the initial checklists. She looked through

her initial review, checking to see what the centre needed to do and what they had already accomplished. She observed that for a lot of the items, “if it wasn’t best practice they had already addressed it.”

The director found it “really, really easy to do it, to do pre-site visit one. If it is best practice you keep it the same. I have already given evidence that we are doing it, and we are still doing the same things. So in that sense the pre-site visit is so much easier.” The director commented that it was beneficial to look back and see the improvements that they had made. She was glad for the opportunity to do the pre-site-visit review, now that she knows they were doing best practice. “Look back and have a sense of how you have grown. This is a positive of accreditation.”

The director complained about the inconsistent format of the checklist forms. She specifically complained that there was no section for her to comment on what they were doing now; she had no space to write or to reflect on the changes between the initial review and the pre-site-visit review. She liked the form for the Practices Checklist because the classrooms are all on the same page, which meant less copying for her “but the format should be different as there was no room to write anything. This form is different from the others, I am not sure why, it needs a space on it where you can write what has changed.”

Once the director had the three observation checklists finalized, she checked the box that indicated it was complete on the site visit request form.

### *Portfolio.*

The accreditation portfolio provides “opportunities for assessing the quality and effectiveness of policies, procedural guidelines and related documents . . . and even more important that they are reflected in daily practice” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1). Initially the director was confused by the instructions for the portfolio, so she referred to the self-study guide and consulted the owner-operator. She referred to the examples

in the self-study guide and figured out how to organize it and set it up in a way that made sense to her (sections in binders with tabs, and plastic document envelopes).

Her first step was to make a list of all the evidence they had created, and she then bodily went about the centre to collect it and to check it off her list. To produce the evidence that AELCS requires, she had to go through the centre to gather it from the classrooms and from the educators, and put it in the binder—for example, finding photos of previous events, and examples of planning and documentation that they had been saving. The director noted that “we have been collecting evidence as we go along, we know what we need in advance to keep, lots of it we are doing on the computer, so we can make copies if needed. Now I will make sure that all the evidence is there for every requirement.” In the accreditation discourse the portfolio is constructed as concrete proof that child care centres are meeting the 10 AQS. This discourse draws on scientific thinking, the belief in a direct causal link, the understanding that educators can offer a factual and true account of what they do through concrete forms of evidence.

The portfolio report is structured around a set of 45 questions. Rather than being organized according to each of the 10 standards, each question is cross-referenced to quality standards or indicators. For example, PR12 which asks child care centres to provide evidence for “what are the procedures you use to ensure medication is administered safely?” is cross-referenced to Standard 1.1, “policies and practices support children in forming secure attachments,” Standard 1.2, “the child centred environment promotes best practice,” and Standard 6.2, “there are clear written policies and procedures for managing day to day operations of the program” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p.11; Section 2, p. 2 and 9). Could this mean that if your centre has evidence of safe medication procedures in place, it has effectively met the standard for forming secure attachments; demonstrated child centred practice, and is effectively managing the day-to-day operations of your

program? The specific technical procedures for ensuring medication is administered safely can in no way act as a total measure of attachment, child centred practice, or day-to-day operations.

The number of questions related to each standard may be telling in terms of AELCS' priority categories and criteria. Eleven questions of the 45 are cross-referenced to Standard 1.1, "policies and practices support children in forming secure attachments" (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 2, p. 2). Ten questions are cross-referenced to Standard 3.7, "there is regular and systematic documentation of children's growth and development" (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 2, p. 6) and seven questions are cross-referenced to Standard 6.2, "there are clear written policies and procedures for managing day to day operations of the program" (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 2, p. 9).

The following questions are all cross-referenced to Standard 1.1, "policies and practices support children in forming secure attachments:"

- What are the procedures you use to ensure medication is administered safely? (PR12) (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p.11).
- What are the policies and procedures that are in place to ensure that staff practice thorough hand-washing routines . . . ?(PR13) (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p.12).
- What are the policies and procedures that are in place to ensure that children practice thorough hand- washing routines . . . ?(PR14) (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p.12).
- What policies and procedures are in place to reduce cross contamination of germs or contagious conditions? (PR15) (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p.13).
- What procedures do you have in place to ensure that the outdoor environment is safe? (PR19) (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p.17).

By providing evidence that answers the questions in the portfolio report that can be judged by validators as clear, current, and comprehensive, centres will get recognition for achieving this standard. Here we see an apparent mismatch between the purported good intention of the standard and the ability of the tool (the portfolio in this instance) to accurately and effectively capture the evidence of this standard.<sup>9</sup> It is unlikely that any educator would answer that administering medication safely, keeping the playground safe, avoiding cross-contamination, and having appropriate hand-washing practices in place has anything to do with helping children form secure attachments.

Having a safe playground and appropriate hand-washing procedures are not unimportant objectives in themselves, and even contribute to quality child care and should probably be addressed by minimum health and licensing regulations. However, accreditation requires educators to provide evidence on the basis of the AELCS authorized version of forming secure attachments, to then have the evidence judged. In the accreditation discourse, demonstrated evidence of those policies and procedures means that child care centres are meeting the criteria for Standard 1.1 and thus are purported to be helping children form secure attachments, when in fact evidence of forming secure attachments in actuality would and should be demonstrated quite differently.

For example in the field site, the evidence provided in response to the question, “what are the procedures you use to ensure medication is administered safely”? (PR12) (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p.11) included six examples such as “all classrooms have red emergency binders which contain policies for administering and receiving medication, as well as blank forms to

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<sup>9</sup> Besides the fact that attachment theory is a strongly contested theory in early childhood literature, there is no explanation in the standard of who the child is supposed to be forming good attachments with. Do they mean secure attachment between the child and its parents, the child and its educators, the child and other children in the centre?



fill in correct administrative information”, “all medication boxes look the same and are kept in specific locations in all classrooms”, and “all staff trained on epi-pens during staff meetings.” The evidence the field site provided answers the question posed in the portfolio report template but does not directly address Standard 1.1; however the validators report in the site visit wrap up that “through our observations it is evident that there are policies and practices in place that support the children forming secure attachments.”

Structured in this manner and coordinated by AELCS, the portfolio report does not measure what it sets out to, and the data helps us locate a disjuncture between the portfolio report as a legitimate and authoritative form of communicating accomplishment of the standards, and the actual daily practice of educators.

#### *Consent forms.*

In preparation for the site visit, centres are asked by AELCS to garner consent from families, the accreditation team, and educators so that the validators can have access to personal files, and to attain permission to be interviewed. In the field site, all families were sent home the standard AELCS consent form with a return envelope. Every family was asked for consent. The owner-operator explained that they wanted to give all the families equal opportunity to participate. They didn’t “want to cherry pick a family, this way the validators could equally pick a family with a beef or not.” The owner notes that the families were very willing—“nobody said no.”

#### *Step 6, self-study guide process.*

##### *Site visit request.*

In preparation for making the site visit request, the director ensured that all the necessary reports had been transferred from rough draft to good copy. The Site Visit Request Form is four pages long and is mostly structured as a checklist describing the documents that need to be submitted

with the form, as well as those to be completed and on hand for the validators during the site visit. The director of the field site had difficulty keeping track of what documents needed to be completed for which dates or events. Some forms were to be completed prior to requesting a site visit, some had to be submitted with the site visit request form, some were supposed to be on hand during the site visit, and some were supposed to be given to the validator to take away after the site visit. She complained, “filling out the site request form was kind of confusing . . . there was different information on the AELCS website that contradicted the form. I had to call AELCS and they said that only what the form states is correct.” She also noted some discomfort with the checklist structure, saying “it was weird in a sense . . . checking off things that you haven’t done yet but will have done for the site visit . . . like we haven’t started our portfolio yet and we checked it off and got the site visit booked.”

### **Step 3, AELCS accreditation: site visit**

#### *Step 7, self-study guide process.<sup>10</sup>*

##### *Facilitating the site visit.*

The site visit is an integral part of accreditation. In general, most accreditation systems include an onsite visit by external examiners. The two-day site visit is the mechanism of child care accreditation that opens up the centre to external scrutiny. The site visit allows the translocal to penetrate the local setting of childcare and draws institutional discourses, processes, and texts deep into child care centres. It is a highly textually mediated exercise that coordinates the work of validators.

The site visit is viewed as the culminating event and is seen as very stressful by educators. “I just want to get it over with,” lamented the director.

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<sup>10</sup> Note this step in the self-study process overlaps with Step 3 of the AELCS advertised six-step process.

Notification comes from AELCS staff by email that the site visit request form and all the required accompanying documentation have been received. The centre is given a two-week window during which the site visit will occur. Once the two-week window arrives, the child care centre receives a phone call which provides them 24-hour notification from the lead validator that the site visit will begin the next day. The director and owner-operator had decided earlier that when the notification came they would hold an evening staff meeting in preparation for the site visit the next day. The evening before, the director ensured that she had all her documents (texts) in order to show the validators the next day. She used the checklist provided by AELCS to make certain she had all the required material for the validators. These included:

- Final portfolio report
- Portfolio binders, with table of contents, organized into sections reflecting the standards. One binder was 154 pages long, the second was 134 pages. This was their “extensive collection” of evidence compiled to prove that the centre was in compliance with the 10 quality standards as required by AELCS.
- Final copy of QEP
- Final copies of checklists (initial and pre-site-visit review)
- Copies of the accreditation surveys that staff and families completed
- Consent forms from:
  - Parents
  - Staff
  - Accreditation team members
  - Board members

In preparation for the evening meeting, the director created a large to-do list on flipchart paper and posted it on the wall. She called all the staff together and reviewed the list. She delegated tasks to staff and they set off.

The educators stayed until 10:00 p.m. cleaning and organizing their classrooms for the site visit inspection the next day.

*Site visit: Day 1 validator activities.*

The first morning of the site visit, the director and owner-operator arrived early. As directed by the AELCS self study guide, they had taken responsibility for “hosting” the site visit. They prepared coffee, tea, and muffins for the validators, and had negotiated the use of an office space with the church for the validators to meet in. They admitted to being very nervous and excited about the prospect of the site visit, but “glad to be getting it over with.” They hoped that it “all goes smoothly” and that they “make a good impression.”

Once the lead validator arrived, they performed introductions and took her on a tour of the centre, which lasted approximately 45 minutes. A lead and peer validator assigned by AELCS conducted the two-day site visit. I observed the actions of the validators and recognized the text-mediated nature of the endeavour. The validators oriented to the standardized forms, reports, and texts provided by AELCS and accomplished by the educators to coordinate their own work processes over the two-day period. This began immediately. During the orientation tour provided by the educators the lead validator was already asking questions that would facilitate their process. For example, when shown the storage cupboards that held materials for educators to use in their programming with children she asked “Can I look through these cupboards?” “Is all your planning posted?” “Do I have your consent to look at all these materials?” Then when told of the location of the centre’s filing system she asked, “Do I have permission to look at them?” At the end of the tour, the lead validator commented, “that was a great tour. I already have things to write down.” The validators were guided by and did work on account of the texts during the site visit.

The peer validator arrived as the tour was finishing so they settled the lead validator in the office space. The lead validator had an expanding file with all the paperwork and forms required, and a clipboard provided by AELCS. The lead validator asked for a copy of the portfolio contents list. She then began to review the centre's evidence portfolio and the director repeated the tour for the peer validator. After her tour, the peer validator touched base with the lead and they decided that she would begin to carry out observations in the preschool and infant-toddler classrooms, with the intent to complete the three observation checklists required.

The lead validator commented that "a big part of the process is looking at the documents. I am aware of how much time. . . the hours they spent putting it together." She spent time flipping through the evidence portfolio binders and making notations on a form from her file. She had been instructed by AELCS to mark the evidence as clear, current, and/or comprehensive. She explained that she was checking the contents of the portfolio to see if it matched what was on the contents list that she had been given. She commented on its "completeness," and then she intended to check to see if it was implemented when she observed in the classroom. She commented that this centre's "portfolio is a treat to see." She commented that it is "so organized. . . typically I would have lots of questions, but it is all here, all explained, all dated. They have pictures to back everything up and the policies are all laid out." The validator explained that she couldn't read through every document provided as evidence, and said that "she has already gotten the answers to both her questions and so I will now just focus on certain ones to see if they are being followed up in practice."

Once she completed her review of the evidence portfolio, the lead validator also began to make observations in the classrooms, making notations on the checklists. She explained that they use the same checklist as the educators use, but the validator's copy is reformatted to give them more room to write comments. Partway through the morning they met to confer

and discuss a couple of questions that had arisen from the observations they made, and switched rooms. During her observations, the lead validator checked the attendance sign-in sheet (required by Licensing) against the number of children present. She also looked at the posted copies of the licensing visit reports to ensure that any noncompliances<sup>11</sup> the centre had received from Licensing had been self-reported by the educators on the form provided by AELCS.

They both continued to observe through the bathroom and lunch routine at the centre, switching the three checklists between themselves. One wrote in blue pen and one in black to distinguish their individual comments from each other. The lead validator explained that if she doesn't have the specific checklist and she observes something the educators are doing that belongs on it, she will make a note on an extra sheet of paper and then transfer her comment when she gets the checklist back from the peer validator; this way she knows she "didn't miss anything."

The validators then took a break and went out for lunch. I accompanied them. During their lunch break they reviewed the progress they made in the morning and noted any questions they have. They made a plan for how to proceed in the afternoon with staff and family interviews.

When they returned to the centre after lunch they arranged with the director and owner-operator to interview two educators. This is standard procedure for the site visit, and the validators have a set of predetermined questions that they are required to ask and a form to record the educators' answers. The validators wanted to interview two educators with different levels of certification and different lengths of time employed in the centre, and who work in different classrooms. The determination of who would be

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<sup>11</sup> To be accredited child care centres must consistently meet Licensing requirements. Any noncompliances identified by licensing officers must be reported to AELCS along with an action plan for remedying the noncompliance on a form provided by AELCS.

interviewed was accomplished in conjunction with the director and owner-operator. The educators who were selected were reassured by the validators that what they say is confidential. Educators were asked to respond to a series of standardized statements on a scale that ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The two educators answered agree or strongly agree to all the statements posed by the validators. For example: do you usually engage in play with the children? Do you regard routines and transitions as important learning times? Do you feel you have open and communication with the director?

At the end of the interview the lead validator comments on the questions stating “who wouldn’t answer strongly agrees?” She remarks that the questions are close-ended now compared to a previous version of the questionnaire, so she generally tries to probe for additional information, saying that she “likes to ask for examples, and if they can’t provide any, that says something as well”. The peer validator agrees, stating that asking for more information “wouldn’t be a problem if you know your stuff.” Regardless of their concerns about the inherent lack of depth in the interview questions, in the site visit wrap up, the validators include a standard statement pronouncing “from staff interviews it was evident that staff knows what their jobs entail and work together as a team”.

After the educator interviews were completed, the validators made arrangements with the owner-operator for their next set of interviews, which involved talking with two parents. The validators resumed classroom observations for a short period prior to the first parent arriving.

The parent interviews are also standard features of the site visit, and have a standard set of questions and a reporting form that validators rely on to accomplish their work. Just like the educators, the two parents were asked to respond to a series of standardized statements on a scale that ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” For example they were asked: “Do

you feel that your children are safe and well cared for?” “Do you feel that your children are respected?” Overall both parents reported being happy with the program and said that they were comfortable addressing any issues that might arise with the director or owner-operator.

After the interviews were concluded, the validators determined that they would like to next examine the centre’s files. In order for this to occur, the educators had garnered consent from the families and from the educators for AELCS to look at their personal files. The validators were checking for specific information in each set of files. The minimum amount and type of information that must be held in the educators’ and children’s files is listed on the portfolio report form. For example, in the children’s files, the validators were inspecting to see if they had a registration form, current emergency contact information, observation notes or developmental checklists, any information required by licensing, and signed permission forms. In educators’ files, they were checking for an application form or resume, contact information, documentation that the educator has provincial certification, a record of reference checks, a record of criminal record check, performance evaluations, record of professional development activities, signed document saying that educators have read and understood the policy and or staff handbook, evidence that the educator received an orientation, a confidentiality statement, and a statement of terms of employment with hours and salary. The validator explained that she would “pull five or six random files and check to see if the specified information is included.”

The validators briefly asked the director and owner-operator some questions they had, arising from the files. This conversation occurred while we were all standing in the doorway to the day care office. Two conversations were occurring at once as the peer validator spoke with the director and the lead spoke with the owner-operator. The validators arranged to return to the centre at 8:00 a. m. the next day. They departed at about 5:30 p. m.



*Site visit: Day 2 validator activities.*

In the morning, the owner-operator had an urgent need to speak to the lead validator when she arrived. She wanted some clarification about the requirements for staff files and had some documentation to share with the validator. The lead validator answered the owner-operator's questions.

The peer validator arrived and the two validators met in the office space to get oriented to the tasks of the day ahead. The lead validator had "worked through the checklists, QEP and portfolio report last night." She was prepared with a list of questions that still needed to be answered pertaining to the standards, and a list of what still needed to be observed. She had put sticky notes on each of the checklist items that still needed evidence. There were about six items that the lead validator felt they had not seen enough evidence of yet. She reviewed these with the peer validator, commenting that the centre was doing well. Usually on the morning of the second day she "has a lot more to look for." They set off separately. The peer validator continued checklist observations in infant-toddler and preschool rooms, and the lead validator was checking for evidence arising from the QEP of goals that had already been accomplished. She scanned the staff bulletin board for evidence of length of employment, certification level, and first aid training. She noted the community resources posted nearby. She looked at the menu that had been posted, and noted the newsletters and suggestion box for families. "This is all evidence of communication with families." she observed. She made a note to ask the owner-operator about membership in professional organizations. The expectation for accreditation is that the centre has two current memberships. She observed that the director had posted courses, workshops, and other professional development opportunities for educators to see. She checked in the centre library to see what resource books were available for the educators to support their planning and work with children. She also looked for evidence that the cook had taken a food-handling course. The cook produced the completed workbook from the course, and the lead

validator accepted this as concrete evidence that the cook was there and did participate. After an hour or so the two validators met back in the office, confirmed that the three checklists had been completed, and were ready to prepare for the site visit wrap-up meeting. Prior to this, however, they conducted two more interviews, one with the director and one with the owner-operator. As before, the interview was standardized, with common questions and a form for recording responses provided.

In preparation for the site visit wrap-up, the two validators had numerous texts to deal with. "Let's go through and make sure that all the forms are complete," suggested the lead validator. They began with the three observation checklists, ensuring that they had commented on and rated each item. They both signed off on the front of all three checklists. They went through the QEP together, noting the goals that were set and which ones had already been implemented. "This is evidence of quality improvement occurring in the centre," said the peer validator. They signed the front of the QEP and set it aside. The portfolio report was checked as well. The lead validator commented again on how organized the portfolio binders were. The lead also noted that they have complete summary sheets for the four interviews conducted, and the signed noncompliance form.

Next the lead validator brought out a template for the site visit wrap-up meeting. She explained to me that at an in-service organized by AELCS all the validators got together and devised a list of some examples of evidence for each standard. All the validators agreed to cover the list (as applicable) from the template during the site visit wrap-up meeting. The lead validator commented that AELCS still stresses that validators personalize the site wrap-up report, but that the template with the standard statements is very useful. She went on to explain that at the site visit wrap-up, the validators would read each standard out loud, and then identify some selected examples of best practice. They would also identify any lack of evidence, especially opposite practice or items rated NOC (not observed consistently). She stated

that this is so “they will know what to work on.” The site visit wrap-up is done verbally, but the centre will “get a letter saying what is missing which can be used for future goal setting.” She commented that “no opposite practice was observed in this centre.” After some discussion, the two validators agreed on a few items that they had not seen evidence of, or limited evidence of, and what they had seen evidence of for each of the 10 standards. The lead encouraged the peer validator to check her notes to make sure that nothing was missing.

They completed a Site Visit Validation Form and both signed it. They asked the owner-operator to sign the site visit wrap-up form confirming that the validators completed all the site visit procedures. They quickly reviewed a checklist from AELCS that lists the tasks validators must complete during the site visit. They concluded that they had completed all the assigned tasks and could proceed to the site visit wrap-up meeting.

The lead validator commented that is “hard to decide how much to tell them. The wrap-up meeting is not to tell them what to do or to problem solve for them.” She admitted that “this is hard to avoid sometimes.” The lead validator commented that she has tried doing the site visit wrap-up report on her computer, but wouldn’t this time. She described that is harder to read her notes from the computer screen and maintain rapport with the educators at the same time. She commented that “the computer gets in the way of communicating.”

The site visit wrap-up meeting, with the owner-operator and director in attendance, began with the lead validator describing the format of the meeting and reminding them that their role was only to collect evidence for the moderator, not to judge. The lead validator told them the steps in the process and when they could expect to hear back with a decision from AELCS. She reviewed all the activities the validators undertook in the last two days. Then validators shared their findings. The peer validator read each standard

and the lead described the evidence they had observed or not observed. In this manner they quickly went through the 10 standards. The director commented that “there were no surprises there, all the items that had limited evidence had been identified in our QEP as part of our self-reflection process, we already knew that these are areas to improve upon.” The validators had them sign the Site Visit Validation form and gave the owner-operator a thank-you card from the accrediting agency.

The validators departed from the centre at approximately 1:30 p. m. on the second day. The validators left behind a two page Program Evaluation of AELCS form for the centre to fill out and fax back within 48 hours of the site visit. The form asks that the educators rate the validation team on their professionalism, their familiarity with materials, and how well they put staff at ease during the site visit. Even though the form assures them that the feedback they provide cannot influence the accreditation decision in any way, it is not an optional form. The validators were clear that if the form was not received by the accrediting office within the timelines, the validators’ reports would not be processed. In compliance, the director filled in and faxed the Program Evaluation of AELCS form back to AELCS the next day, ensuring that their site visit documents would be processed by the staff at the AELCS office. In order to facilitate the decision-making process, the lead validator submitted all the required documents to AELCS within five days of the site visit. The subsequent accreditation decision-making process will be examined more fully in the next chapter.

The site visit is analytically significant as it is the mechanism that opens up child care centres to external inspection. As described above, the site visit and the work of the validators is driven by and accomplished through standardized texts and work processes concerted by AELCS. Validators’ work processes are highly managed by AELCS, and the educator and parent interview questions are scripted for them. AELCS needs all the validators to be carrying out the same standard activities during the site

visits to ensure consistency and commensurability. Validators must orient to specific texts and tools prepared by the educators, using certain objectified and theorized practices of looking at the actualities that are occurring in the field site. As we will see further in chapter 6, the daily practice of the educators is observed during the site visit in a particular way and for a particular institutional purpose by the validators, who are there to accomplish a textually mediated process designed to facilitate the accreditation decision-making process.

#### **Step 4, AELCS accreditation: moderator review.**

This is a very important step in the process as the work the moderator does positions the applicant centre to be successful or not. The moderator's recommendation to the AELCS governing council is pivotal. The text-based nature of this work became evident as the moderator I interviewed listed the documents she receives to facilitate her own work processes, including:

- Site visit wrap-up
- Summaries of the interviews of parents and staff
- The three observation checklists that the validators complete during the site visit
- Portfolio report coded by the validator
- Final QEP report prepared by the centre
- Self-report of noncompliances form
- Staff list

Based on these texts, the moderator produces two critical documents, the Moderator report and the Accreditation Feedback report. This step is seemingly invisible to the educators in the field site, although as described in chapter 6, it plays a crucial role in the text-work-text sequence of the accreditation decision-making process.

### **Step 5, AELCS accreditation: governing council decision.**

The director of the field site called me to say that they had received official word of their successful achievement of accreditation via a phone call from the executive director of AELCS one month to the day of the site visit. The field site director said she felt their “hard work has paid off at last.” The day they received the news, the centre was having a fall celebration with families—“we will share the big news with them . . . Staff will be happy . . . I never doubted it,” said the director. An official written letter and certificate followed from AELCS.

### **Step 6, AELCS accreditation: maintaining accreditation.**

Nine months after the site visit, the owner-operator reported that she was expecting notification to arrive soon from AELCS of the required annual report. As an accredited centre, they must complete an annual report and submit it to AELCS. Every three years the child care centre has to apply for reaccreditation to maintain their funding.

To summarize, mapping techniques helped to explicate the complex actions of educators as they enacted the steps of the accreditation process through their engagement with the work processes, texts, and tools provided by the accrediting agency and the ministry. In this study, mapping helped produce a working knowledge of accreditation, making visible what people carry out routinely when “doing accreditation.” Maps were compiled based on field experiences and participant observation in a child care centre seeking accreditation, talking with informants at the local site, and interviewing secondary informants including staff members of the accrediting agency, the technical support agency, and a Children and Youth Services ministry official.

## Local Actualities of Child Care Transformed into New Textual Realities

In the process of completing the steps of accreditation, local actualities are converted into textual realities that become institutionally actionable in a form that is authorized by the accrediting agency and in line with Alberta Government terms and conditions. In this next section, I focus on the AELCS self-study guide, its texts, and tools to explicate the work it does in coordinating the accreditation process in the field site and also across the province.

The self-study guide arrives once a child care centre has applied to AELCS. It now is sent digitally, but when I began this study a hard copy of the “humungous binder” arrived at the field site by mail. Its arrival is significant, as it is concrete evidence of “what we have gotten ourselves into,” according to the director of the field site.

The self-study guide as a text works its “magic.” According to D. Smith (1999), the magic of the text is its ability to bring into play an ordering that is not present in the immediate setting. In the moment of the text-reader conversation with the self-study guide, the organization of accreditation as an institution takes place. The reading coordinates organization of what happens in the setting in which the reading takes place, as well as the multiple sites in which the same text is read, along with the local settings of work connected to the ongoing process (for example in the offices of AELCS, ACYS, ARQCE) (Turner, 2002). The arrival of the self-study guide hooks the educators into the official and authorized process as they respond to it, interpret, and act based on it.

As instructed, in the field site the director first reads through the entire self-study guide. As she reads the texts of accreditation she is drawn into a text-reader conversation. “Text reader conversations take place in real time, in the actual local setting of their reading and as moments in sequences

of action” (D. Smith, 2005, p. 228). Thus the self-study guide is not inert—her activation of its texts enable us to see that she is embedded in social relations; in fact her doings in her child care centre are hooked up to and articulated with the sequences of action that are happening elsewhere and elsewhere. What she does with the texts of the self-study guide is embedded in a sequence of coordinated action, and brings their institutional nature to light.

The self-study guide gives educators permission to start the accreditation process. The director and other educators in the child care centre are positioned as voluntary seekers of accreditation by the self-study guide. The self-study guide defines their point of entry into the actual work of doing accreditation and positions them in governing relations. Immediately, the introduction to the self-study process begins to orient the educator’s consciousness to the terms of accreditation. “The goal of the self-study process is to review and enhance the quality of care in your centre” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1).

The self-study guide directs educators through a seven-step sequence of actions to complete the self-study portion of the process, and to prepare for the site visit and ultimately a decision. The director’s part in the accreditation process is scripted in the text of the self-study guide. For example, she is directed to “work with the accreditation team to develop a plan for the self-study” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 3). She is expected to draw everyone into the process, fundamentally changing her supervisory role. “Each child care service will approach the process to suit the needs of its particular circumstances or population group. While the self-study is coordinated by the accreditation team it is important that the whole centre be involved throughout the process” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 3). The director is explicitly prompted in the self-study guide. “Carefully coordinating progress through the work plan is important. This includes setting and monitoring timelines for completion, providing and/or accessing needed



help and resources, and ensuring that everyone is kept informed about the progress of the self-study” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 5).

The coordinative work of the self-study guide is in its engagement with a particular reader in a common consciousness of child care work, individuals, and settings, and a particular ongoing sequence of action in which others are already active. The textual work is done in specialized forms of language that bring and organize educators’ talk and actions into the accrediting agency’s sphere of knowing and doing (for example the coding of educators’ observed behaviours on the checklists). The materiality of the text is central in the understanding and production of a social knowledge of accreditation and its actual local practices of writing, speaking, and reading by active individuals. We can see that educator’s talk is scripted and formed within the relations in which the text is embedded, hence their subjectivities and capacities to act are organized (Turner, 2002). Educators have a very narrow opening given to them by the forms—the “what we do/what we need to do” boxes limit and organize what educators can say about themselves to the accrediting agency, in a way, standardizing the observable. Educators become who they are reporting to.

The AELCS self-study guide as a text “formulates a process” (D. Smith, 2006, p. 82). Educators’ “doings” are no longer just that, but become “interpretable as expressions or instances of a higher source of organization” (Smith, 2006, p. 82). As a text, the self-study guide constitutes and regulates as it carries the capacity to control and mobilize the work of others. In the field site I observed, the educators were successful in achieving accreditation. In following through on the seven steps of the self-study guide, the educators did work that they had never had to do before. They oriented to what the validators would be “looking for” to ensure that they “looked good” for the site visit. They began to orient to the others authorized in the process and the sequence of actions constituting it, and turned their daily work into the textual formats and language in the self-study guide. They talked about

“QEPs” and “portfolio reports” and “were needing evidence.” Positioned as seekers of accreditation, they oriented to the coordinating task of making visible their work of goal setting, producing evidence and continuous quality improvement to authorized others.

### **The Self-study Guide as Intertextual Hierarchy**

Texts act as the medium through which extralocal priorities come to permeate local work practices and intentions. This research has exposed the accreditation self-study guide as a purposefully coordinating tool that acts to control the work of educators. It is used as an organizer of action and information, hooking educators into relations of ruling by their use of the guide and its tools, and their subsequent participation in particular actions that the texts initiate.

Texts can function as ruling relations in two ways (D. Smith, 2005, 2006). The first way depicted above describes the production of institutional realities through texts. Secondly, a text may act as a primary coordinator establishing dominant frames and concepts that then guide the actions and production of other texts to produce institutional actualities. This type of textual mediation is called an intertextual hierarchy.

In the field site, the director enters into a text-reader conversation with the accreditation self-study guide, reading it, taking up its concepts, and activating its regulatory potential in her subsequent interactions with educators. The self-study guide is a higher-level text that controls and shapes lower-level texts and how they are created, made sense of, and used by educators in their new work processes. The self-study guide is activated as a “boss text” (D. Smith, 2006), establishing the frame from which the creation of other subordinate texts and work processes make sense to educators.

Educators produce their own texts as well, intended for particular hearers and readers such as frontline educators, parents, validators, and

ministry officials. These texts produced for particular recipients in particular local and translocal settings in the accreditation process commit the educators to the already-given institutional forms of speaking and acting within the social relations, and are expressed in the standardized forms and tools produced within the accreditation process. These forms and tools hold attributes and values that valorize the overall rational process being put together. The textually mediated accreditation process leads educators to produce accounts of their work in the textual formats and language that they learn will be regarded as legitimate and authorized by AELCS. In this way, their work processes can be judged and valued in a routine process and manner as part of the ongoing accreditation discourse (cf. Turner, 2002).

All child care centres that apply for accreditation receive the self-study guide. In this manner the self-study guide enters into the local settings where educators are at work, producing and reading the text at different times and in different places. As an institutional text carrying the dominant discourses of accreditation (standards, goals, continuous improvement) “the self-study guide makes possible the coordination of standardized action and textual production across diverse settings” of child care (Janz, 2009, p. 87). It has “the capacity to carry a particular idea or meaning across sites and perpetuate it” (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 36). The text would have no effect, force, or capacity to create change in work processes if it had not been authorized and accorded the official capacity to “guide” the accreditation process. The text of the self-study guide formulates the accreditation process, laying out the steps and explicit directions for educators to use the tools, surveys, checklists, and report forms in a manner recognizable as a valid and legitimate expression of the centre’s accreditation work. Their work will subsequently be reviewed by accreditation experts who have been accorded the official capacity of knowers. In this way the discourse of accreditation is reified, especially a particular concept of quality as expressed in standards,

goals, and evidence for continuous quality improvement that is observable and measurable.

### **Texts in Action**

As noted, the tools and texts of the self-study guide include standard forms and formats in which what the educators have to say about themselves is inserted into the accreditation discourse. This organization coordinates what educators say in the institutional mode. Texts are in action in the organizing of the accreditation process, and for educators to participate in these relations the texts must enter into their routine practices in time and space, and the educators have to become competent in employing them.

Also built in are the ruling relations, which require educators to make their statement of self in the terms organizing the discourse—for example, best practices, child centred, continuous quality improvement. Ruling is the concept that Dorothy Smith uses to denote the socially organizing exercise of power that shapes people's actions and lives. Ruling is a way to understand how power is exercised in local settings to accomplish extralocal interests, when the interests of those who rule come to dominate the actions of those in local settings (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, pp. 32, 36). Ruling relations travel through and in knowledge, experience, discourse, and institutional practices. Looking closely at the textual forms and how they operate in educators' actual practices helps us understand the power of these texts in regulating the accreditation process and in instituting new work processes (described in the next chapter). The self-study guide exhibits explicitly its authorization as institutional, by the appearance of the official logo of the accrediting agency and its copyright mark on each page.

The texts of the self-study guide draw educators into an ongoing course of action in a particular way by including the stable, standard steps and tools that enable their next action and that keep them moving through the process. Continual progress is important to the ruling relations, and both

AELCS and ACYS have procedures and guidelines in place to ensure that centres move forward within the 15-month timeframe allowed to complete the self-study guide and request a site visit.

All along the way, the texts of the self-study guide orient the work of child care educators and AELCS staff towards the final accreditation decision. The steps of the accreditation process delimit a coordinating process that is embedded in a complex set of social relations. Completing the steps helps ensure successful achievement of accreditation. The steps ensure that educators are focused on producing textually mediated “proof” that they are meeting the 10 AQS, which as we will see in the next chapter fundamentally changes the way educators work. In this way, the educator’s consciousness becomes ordered by accreditation requirements, aligning their interests to external priorities. Through mapping the six steps and the activities and work they impose on educators, we begin to see accreditation, with its discourses, standardizing texts, and new normalizing work activities, as a powerful form of governing the work activities of child care centres.

Attention was paid to the textually mediated nature of the educator’s activities to accomplish the steps in the accreditation process. Chapter 4 explored in detail how the local practices in a child care centre are converted into textual realities through new work processes and the actions of educators, to become institutionally actionable in a form that is authorized by the accrediting agency and based on the terms and conditions of the Alberta government. Carefully examining the texts of accreditation and using the self-study guide as example, their coordinating power becomes evident in the field site and also across the province. The standardized text of the self-study guide puts together the accreditation process in diverse sites in a manner identifiable as an authorized expression of the centre’s accreditation work.

## **Chapter 5: The New Work of Accreditation**

### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with a review of how the concept of work is taken up by institutional ethnographers. I describe the new work that I observed educators undertaking and how it became fundamental to achieving accreditation. I highlight the coordinating and standardizing role of the texts and tools provided by AELCS to the educators, and how they are implicated in the way in which the daily actualities of child care are transformed textually into the requirements of accreditation. The chapter concludes with a description of how these new work processes function as ruling relations.

### **Institutional Ethnography and the Concept of Work**

This study employed Smith's generous definition of work. Her conceptualization offers an extension of the traditional view of paid work and encapsulates anything done intentionally by informants that takes time and effort, that they mean to do under particular conditions and that requires resources and certain work knowledges, and that explicates specific sequences of actions (Smith, 2005). It was the researcher's task to find and explore the informants' accounts of accreditation work undertaken in the field site.

Work has been envisioned as an "empirically empty term" in IE, meaning that it is not used to classify some activities as work and others as not. What educators are actually doing regardless of how they understand and name their work within professional or organizational discourse becomes data for the researcher (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). The value of conceptualizing work this way "directs analytical attention to the practical activities of everyday life, in a way that begins to make visible how those activities gear into, are called out by, shape and are shaped by, extended translocal relations of large scale coordination" (McCoy, 2006, p. 110) or what Smith refers to as ruling relations. Seen this way, work happens at the

interface of the individual embodied subject and the physical and social worlds. These spaces are sites of interface between the individual and a vast network of institutional relations, discourses, and work processes, and includes the mental state of consciousness (McCoy, 2006). In this study, it became clear from mapping exercises and observations in the field site that new work to accomplish accreditation was being undertaken in the interface between the educators, the centre, and the accrediting agency. The new work was called out by, geared into, shaped and ruled by AELCS and ACYS and the new relations of accountability and reporting they required.

### **Educators and the New Work of Accreditation**

I observed closely the work that the educators in a child care centre performed to achieve accreditation. From the observations of the actualities and the local practices, and analysis of the maps, three new interrelated work processes became evident (see Figure 1 below). These new forms of action are driven by the institutional organization of accreditation. As a result of the concerting actions of accreditation and the influence of dominant discourse drawn from business management, a transformation in the work of early childhood educators across multiple sites is occurring. New ways of thinking about quality, and performing the care and education of young children are emerging in the new work processes required by accreditation. I am labelling the three new emerging work processes in child care centres seeking accreditation as goal setting, producing evidence, and continuous quality improvement (CQI). The activities that educators undertake to carry out this work are essential to accomplishing accreditation. The emphasis on these types of work has never before been realized in Alberta childcare centres in this standardizing manner. This form and way of knowing the work of educators based on goal setting, producing evidence, and CQI is emerging in Alberta and coming to dominate the thinking and actions of educators. “Looking good” at doing this type of work is increasingly important to achieving and maintaining accredited status.

The textually mediated nature of the new work processes is important to explicate. The work of educators and how they act on account of the texts to accomplish goal setting, to produce evidence, and engage with CQI was actively observed in the field site. Educators activated texts to discover what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. In this manner, the texts and tools of the self-study guide draw the educator's consciousness and actions in line with the AELCS, the AQS, and the terms and conditions required by the Alberta government to receive funding. Rankin and Campbell's (2006) comments are applicable to my research focus—"even those [educators] who have not yet adopted the imperative for [goal setting, producing evidence and CQI as coordinated by accreditation] as their own are still captured within the practices that the imperative organizes" (p. 164).

Based on my observations, I can foresee how these three work processes will themselves emerge as coordinating, as educators begin to think about all their future plans for the care and education of young children and judge them through the lens of their usefulness to accreditation requirements, and how they can be used as future evidence for meeting a goal or an accreditation standard. In this manner, educators begin to always orient to these work processes and requirements as part of CQI; the work of educators is brought into line with standards and thus "the practice establishes its relevances" (D. Smith, 1990, p. 14). Educators must do work in the form of goal setting, producing evidence, and continuous quality improvement to have their caring and education work recognized as these (AELCS' and ACYS') "relevances." Educators must ensure that what they are doing in their daily work with children and families can be recognized in these terms— that they are "doing accreditation work."

In this next section, with the help of the Figure 1, I explicate the new production of changing work to early childhood care and education brought about by accreditation. This changing work requires that "local actualities have to be converted into textual realities to become institutionally



actionable” (D. Smith, June 2011, personal communication). As educators took up the discourse, texts, and tools of accreditation I observed the emergence of three new normalizing and standardizing work processes based on observations made at the field site.

### **Goal setting (QEP).**

While in the field site I observed educators spending a significant amount of time engaged in a work process and associated activities that I call goal setting. AQS 10.2 requires that “the program uses an annual review process to set goals for the coming year and to develop and implement action plans to address these goals for continuous quality improvement.” It continues, “goals and action plans are concrete and realistic” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 13). As part of the self-study process the accreditation agency requires child care centres to produce an individualized action plan (the QEP). The plan frames upcoming work action to achieve and then maintain accreditation certification. The goal-setting work I observed was shaped by the requirement to produce this plan. The accreditation process standardizes goal setting through reporting templates and categorization. Educators have not previously engaged in this manner of goal setting in relation to the care and education of young children. For example, the secondary informant executive director complained that the AELCS process for setting goals was not reflective of previous kinds of strategic planning initiatives that she had been involved in. “There is a disconnect . . . my head is in strategic plan mode . . . and then I am trying to fit into this weird system . . . and I don’t mind having to match it with standards, wherever I have worked they always have some overarching goals that you fit your strategic planning into but in a much looser way than this.”

As depicted in Figure 1, the new work processes imposed by AELCS for goal setting as a component of continuous quality improvement are informed by the discourse of the 10 quality standards (AQS). All goals set by educators must be attuned to achieving these ruling standards. The

standardizing and normalizing aspects of the standards and the legitimizing discourse they draw on are described later in this chapter.

The goal-setting work of accreditation takes the frame of the AELCS QEP tool. The QEP report form is included as part of the self-study package. Educators must use the QEP report form to report their plans to AELCS and to ACYS. The form itself is 31 pages long. There are five columns on each page. The first column is a statement of the criteria and indicators for the AQS and has been filled in by AELCS. The second column is left blank for the centre to complete and is labelled "Program's Initial Review." In this column educators are directed to summarize what they are already doing to address the specified AQS. The third column requires the educators to note their future plans for meeting the AQS. In the fourth column they are expected to indicate the date achieved or to comment on their progress to date. The last column of the page is labelled "Validator's Notes." This column is left blank by the educators. The lead validator will insert comments here during the review of the QEP on the two-day site visit.

Educators' goal-setting work is coordinated by AELCS as they are directed to incorporate the results of the family and staff survey and the observation checklists into their goal-setting process ("Use the Family and staff survey results, items from the What we do/What we need to do column of the observation checklists to set goals"). As described in the previous section, the survey and checklist work processes undertaken by the educators are the basis upon which the educators' daily work with children and families is constructed within the accreditation discourse. These tools delimit and tell educators what they should be paying attention to in order to provide quality care. The survey and checklists do administrative work and activate the ruling relations within the apparently neutral and objective texts and forms. What is omitted is taken for granted as not being important any longer. The survey and checklists are intended to make apparent to the educators what goals they need to set in order to be delivering quality.

Through their survey and checklist work, AELCS expects change and quality improvement to be concretely demonstrated. Educators are instructed to set both short-term and long-term goals (up to five years). AELCS directs them to begin work on short-term goals immediately, and there is an expectation that significant progress toward the short-term goals will be made prior to the site visit and that this progress is tracked and reported on by educators in the final QEP document prepared for the site visit.

Educators are required to submit their initial QEP to AELCS when completed. An AELCS consultant is responsible for reviewing the initial QEP. In an interview, an AELCS consultant described to me that she assesses the QEP for “reasonable and attainable goals” and ensures that the centre has included “appropriate short, medium, and long term goals.” If there are “issues” she “sends back some feedback in the form of broad open questions.” Centres are expected to incorporate her feedback in to their QEP and to more clearly indicate that they are working towards the AQS prior to the site visit.

The work of goal setting is also monitored and concerted by ACCAP for funding purposes, tying the process of goal setting into the social organization of child care centres with the provincial government. The self-study guide includes the following instructions: “if you are applying to ACYS for Enhancement Support Funding you will also submit your QEP to them along with your [funding] application.”

A secondary informant (an executive director of an accredited child care centre) reflected on this new work, “When you are writing your plan, there is money attached to the plan, the money you can get, the \$7,500.00 [Quality Enhancement Grant]—it has to be a goal on your plan. So every year you have to write a goal that says you are improving your environment, because if you don’t do that you can’t buy anything; even as I am writing I am

thinking, I better write a goal on it [improving the environment]. Even though it is part of what we do in our practice, I better make a goal on it.”

Educators at the field site complained that they received very little feedback on their QEP after spending significant time and effort to complete it. Educators had noted in their QEP that work on some of their goals would be “ongoing.” They were however directed by an AELCS consultant to remove imprecise dates and to include specific dates for completion. AELCS plays a concerting and ruling role here; educators will be expected to meet these plans by the stated date, prove that they have met the plan or describe the progress they have made towards it, and provide reasons why they haven’t met their stated goal in the next reporting cycle. In this socially concerted process, educators are expected to demonstrate that they are beginning immediately to work on their goals as evidence that they are engaged in quality improvement to satisfy the ruling relations of the accrediting agency and ACYS.

As depicted in Figure 1, prior to submitting the QEP to AELCS for approval the educators in the field site took numerous steps to address the new goal-setting work of the accreditation process. Activating the text of the QEP report form, the director and owner-operator had an initial meeting where they brainstormed some plans and ideas. In this process they imagined the work that needed to be done and how to accomplish it. They described how they tried to remain cognizant of both the human resources and financial resources required to complete the goals. An informant at the field site commented that the QEP “gave us the opportunity to put all those things that you always talk about and that you want to do and hope to do, and now is finally the chance to put it down on paper and get those things done.”

They explained that they tried to figure out how to do what they wanted to do (and would have done anyway even if they were not involved in the accreditation process) within the confines of the AQS. There were

tensions evident as educators made efforts to balance what they wanted to do “for the centre” and what they had to do to demonstrate that they were working towards the specific goals required by AELCS. Stated goals and plans must show evidence that the centre is working towards meeting the AQS and the categories of the QEP report form. “Because even the way you have to do the report is a way I have never goal planned before. So I am just trying to make it fit into their standards” (secondary informant).

### *Filling in the QEP report form.*

As noted, the QEP report form is sent to educators as part of the self-study guide. Use of the standard form is mandatory. Every one of the child care centres that has undertaken the accreditation process in Alberta has been required to use the same form. Educators are directed to use the form and “summarize where you are in terms of the ACCAP Quality Standards” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 1). Each of the 10 standards (although not every criteria) is included in the form, and although not explicitly stated in the self-study guide, the field site was under the impression that at least one goal must be set for each standard. This requirement is confirmed by a secondary informant from AELCS, creating the ruling expectation that in order to accomplish accreditation child care centres will be actively working towards meeting at least 10 goals. The secondary informant executive director complained “ten goals is too much, five to seven goals is pushing it.”

As I observed the educators at the field site I saw many challenges associated with filling in the QEP report form. This included challenges describing what they did for the column entitled “Program’s Initial Review.” For example, referring to one of the standards they are required to demonstrate, the director commented, “I am looking for more of a concrete physical way of showing that this is something we do.” Translating their often intangible work into concrete goals was a struggle. “Not everything we do can be concrete . . . when it comes to emotions . . . like when it comes to being

respectful and supportive . . . that is more about how we do it . . . can we put it in a more concrete way?"

There were also difficulties associated with filling in the third column entitled "Work Plans." Educators are instructed to "Designate goals and actions to enhance practice with regard to the standard" (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 1). I observed this work to involve "thinking up" goals to meet the specific categories detailed in the QEP text. In the field site, the director's work knowledge was bolstered by collaborative idea sharing and brainstorming efforts with other educators. The director lamented that this was "not a one-man job." Reflecting the guesswork and uncertainty that resulted from the new work process, field site informants reverted to a brainstorming process and commented to each other, "How are we going to do that? What can we do?"

Educators in the field site also struggled with figuring out what is required of them by AELCS, for example, trying to tease apart the difference between the new work processes of goal setting and producing evidence. The director in the field site asked her colleague "for the initial review [of the QEP] . . . is it sufficient enough to be stating the things we are doing or should we be supporting that with concrete evidence?"

Classifying their work so that it fits into the prescriptive categories set by AELCS is also problematic. For example, a secondary informant described an extensive curriculum investigation they were implementing that explored the notion of children as citizens. She wondered what AQS this would meet. She mused that "it will have to go under" Standard 2 (relationships between service providers and children are supportive and respectful), even though she felt that in no way did that standard reflect the type and level of educational work being undertaken by the educators.

### *The work of accomplishing goal setting.*

Early in the process the director and owner-operator engaged in a number of communications-based work actions to get “buy in” for these plans. Educators are reminded in the self-study guide about the importance of accreditation as a “shared endeavour” and that it “needs to be planned and implemented in a way that allows staff and families to feel ownership and take responsibility,” so that “all stakeholders need to fully understand the benefits of accreditation and support the process involved” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 1). The centre held an evening parent meeting where the director and owner-operator presented their plans verbally to the families and sought their input. At this meeting, families were advised in advance that they might see some modifications of practice and procedures occurring within the centre as they worked through the QEP and implemented changes. Newsletters also went home periodically to families with updates on the accreditation process.

Later that week they held a staff meeting, where the director presented the initial QEP plans to the educators and asked for feedback from them. In the meeting, the director relied on a shared creation of work knowledge to reduce uncertainty. In some ways, the staff meeting served as advanced notice to the educators that they would be doing some things differently, and established the director’s need for commitment from them and conformity to the goals.

The new work of goal setting was accomplished in a textually mediated fashion with associated changes in social relations within the local setting. The director engaged with the self-study guide and the QEP Report form to conform to the requirements of AELCS. Accomplishing the new work of goal setting also involved the production of new texts by the educators. For example, in the field site the director created a new planning text based on the goals of the QEP which she called the QEP calendar. The QEP calendar was a two-page summary document of the QEP goals lifted from the AELCS

QEP report form and reformatted into chronological order, beginning immediately and extending forward monthly for two years. The QEP calendar became an important text in the centre. It was referred to often by the director as the site visit approached. When I asked her about the QEP calendar, she explained that she created this document to make the implementation of changes more manageable. She explained, "I took all the goals and dates off the QEP report and created a master checklist. I divided the time up by month and sectioned it off evenly, so I spread the tasks across two years." This effort is excellent evidence of the textually mediated concerting forces and the social organization of accreditation. The director's work is concerted by AELCS through texts, then the director, using texts of her own production, in turn coordinates the work of educators, using these newly produced texts to help make the goal-setting work processes required to achieve accreditation clearer to them.

The process of implementing the changes required to accomplish the QEP goals in a child care setting is not an easy one. The reality of the difficulty of the change process is not addressed in the self-study guide; instead educators are encouraged to engage in the change process for the sake of others. "The changes that you make as a result . . . will help you offer better service to children, families and your community and will make your centre a better place to work" (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 1). The self-study guide characterizes the change process as "busy but satisfying," and states that a sense of accomplishment will result. Here is a quote from the director of the field site about the difficulty of sustaining changes required by AELCS and the QEP.

"We need time to implement things or it will be too much at once for parents and staff. It is a lot to do and take in . . . you may be too rushed to keep it up and maintain the practices. Will it still be happening three months after accreditation? All the new things that you have put in place? How will



we keep the changes going, especially if the change is initiated by accreditation, not the program?”

I observed how the goal-setting process works to subsume the knowledge and interests of educators, and works instead to foreground accreditation goals and standards. The director stated:

“I would rather work on our ideas like the communication books, and use them properly than worry about a nontoxic paint policy! But we need to because they say so. You know what will truly improve your own program. Everyone’s accreditation plan should be different, but in this sense they all have to be the same. If they [AELCS] say everyone has to do it.”

Much of the work of goal setting fell to the centre director. She was responsible for ensuring the QEP report form was completed and that progress on the goals was underway in the centre. She herself began to coordinate the work of the other educators so that goals could be set and accomplished, fundamentally changing the nature of her work as supervisor. Knowing the expectation of AELCS that goals would be accomplished prior to the site visit, and knowing that the validator would assess their progress on the goals added a sense of urgency and pressure.

Locating resources to make and implement the changes that resulted from the QEP goals was often difficult, especially delegating tasks to educators, who themselves were expected to volunteer their time and energy to accomplish the QEP goals. At the field site this expectation was clearly established early in the process by the director, who stated to educators at an evening staff meeting that “We [the director and owner] expect that all of you will want to be involved.” At the field site, when work was delegated to educators it often took longer to get done than planned, due to the increased demands on the educators’ time. Part of the work of the educators was to remain “willing to help” at any time during the months it took to accomplish

the self-study guide and prepare for the site visit. As one informant commented:

“I find out what needs to be done from the director, from information at the staff meetings, and can see what is physically changing, like the library and the room changes. As we need to know, they will let us know. I rely on them [the director and owner-operator] to inform me of what frontline staff are needed to know and do for it. People on the floor [referring to frontline staff] can also figure out what is needed and where to find it.”

This “willing to help” work is explored further as part of the construction of the new professional under accreditation in chapter 7.

In summary, doing goal-setting work required that the educators familiarize themselves with the AQS. They drew on their work knowledge and understanding of practices at the local site to devise goals that could be authorized as legitimate by AELCS consultants, validators, and moderators. The work was concerted by AELCS, and occasionally involved subsuming the educators’ own knowledge and interests to the ruling relations of AELCS.

Although the texts of accreditation do not specify the exact goals that must be set, they still concert and coordinate the process of goal setting through the texts, tools, and categories they rely upon. These act in a standardizing manner, taken up and used by all child care centres, and in this way goal-setting work is normalized as the way to improve quality and accomplish accreditation.

### **Producing evidence.**

I describe the second new work process I observed as “producing evidence.” The work and tasks associated with producing evidence was foregrounded in the field site where the work of producing evidence for the required portfolio started out positively, with the director looking forward to it. She compared it to scrapbooking, noting that creating the evidence

portfolio would be an opportunity for them to show off their creativity and “what they do best” and “to make it look nice.” However it soon grew into a preoccupying, repetitive, and time-intensive task that was eventually completed with a great sense of relief.

Being able to produce evidence is extremely important, because the evidence presented is viewed by AELCS as proof of quality early learning and child care, and also proof that the centre is deserving of funding by ACYS. Only evidence that is concrete, observable, and documentable can be considered as having enough integrity to be included as proof that quality improvement is occurring. To this end, the educators use a standardized form provided in the self-study guide called the accreditation portfolio report to describe the evidence they are including in their portfolio. The report must be accompanied by the actual portfolio.

“The accreditation portfolio is your opportunity to assemble evidence of the policies, procedures and practices that your program uses to provide high quality early learning and child care. Most of the evidence will be in paper form, including notes, policies, handbooks, meeting minutes, samples of planning, photos, etc. . . . **It is the program’s responsibility to assemble evidence that demonstrates it meets each of the quality standards in preparation for the accreditation site visit**” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, pp. 2–3).

The portfolio must include a portfolio contents list, “a list of the various items that the validators will find when they go through the portfolio during the site visit—something like a table of contents” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 3). The accreditation portfolio report form itself is 28 pages long. Rather than being organized by the 10 quality standards, the report is divided by 13 headings including child development, policies, procedures and protocols, health and safety, manuals and handbooks, meeting notes, planning documents/ processes, program evaluation plans and reports,

strategic planning documents, administration files, resources for staff, resources for families, and community connections. An immediate challenge becomes clear—how to provide evidence that they are meeting each of the 10 AQS within the structure of the reporting form.

Each page of the accreditation portfolio report is divided into five boxes. The first box has a question related to the heading and some suggestions for the kinds of evidence the educators can include to demonstrate the answer to the question. For example, PR33 asks “what documents reflect your short and long range plans for your organization? For example: financial planning documents, strategic plan, service plan” (AAAELCS 2007a, Section 5, p. 25). Some questions stipulate a minimum amount or type of evidence that is required. The self-study guide says “and at the very least, those things listed as “must include” or “at a minimum” have to be in place *before* your site visit”(AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 3). The next box is entitled Our Service’s Evidence. Underneath it is a box labelled What We Need to Do with a box beside it where the date achieved is to be noted. The final box is entitled Validator Review, with space for comments.

Examples of evidence required in the portfolio report and portfolio include, “in addition to policies and handbooks, ‘evidence’ for different standards could be things like: letters from families, memos to staff, notices to families, surveys, photo albums, samples of children’s art” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 3). It is interesting to note that many of the minimums stipulated under some headings in the Portfolio Report appear to be derived directly from an old document created in 2004 by ACS entitled Licensing Standards and Best Practices in Child Care. This document was utilized widely by licensing officers and was distributed to all licensed child care centres in Alberta, intended for use by educators as a practical reference to meet the requirements set out in the Child Care Regulation. It included an explanation of each section of the Regulation, but more important to this discussion, it included measurable indicators and suggested best practice

associated with each section of the Regulation. When the Regulation was updated in 2008, this document became disused. However, many of the required best practices that previously were needed to meet the minimum requirements of the Regulation have made their way into the Accreditation Portfolio Report as required evidence. There is an evident contradiction here. Accreditation is purported to exceed the Alberta licensing requirements. In actuality, the Accreditation Portfolio Report in many instances only requires evidence that was previously mandated as minimum and required by licensing from all child care centres in Alberta. Still, the educators found the process of coming up with concrete evidence to satisfy AELCS difficult. A secondary informant said, “we can easily give a [written] explanation of what we do, but that wouldn’t count as evidence. . . . They need to see a hard copy of something.”

#### *The organizing work of producing evidence.*

“You can organize your portfolio in whatever way makes the most sense, as long as the connection between evidence and quality standards is clearly indicated. However, you must use the Accreditation Portfolio Report form provided in the self-study guide to describe the contents of your portfolio” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 3).

Much of the work of producing evidence in the field site was focused on creating the portfolio. This was bodily work for the director that included locating the evidence somewhere in the centre, physically going to get it, and compiling it in an orderly fashion. It also involved selecting evidence. The secondary informant executive director reported “when I was writing [the portfolio report] I was thinking . . . what is the evidence I am going to have to provide for this?”

Creating the portfolio was a time-consuming process. Part of the time was dedicated to figuring out how to actually put together and format the evidence. In the field site they finally settled on using binders to house the

collection of evidence. A lot of time was invested in mounting, labelling, and adding explanatory comments to each piece of evidence, and then inserting evidence into clear plastic sleeves and selecting a category or heading that it best fit under. The portfolio in the field site ended up requiring two three-inch binders with over 300 pages of “extensive evidence.”

Once complete, the director brought the portfolio to a staff meeting. She described the portfolio to the educators as a “huge accomplishment . . . in depth” and a place where they “pulled everything together.” She expressed her pride in it and noted that it is a fantastic representation of the centre: “This is our proof of what we do.” She acknowledged that the portfolio can’t capture all that the educators do in their daily work with children and families, saying, “It doesn’t justify how good of a job you do every day, but putting it all in a book, it gives a glimpse of the great job you do.”

Getting their evidence organized was a reductive–selective process in the field site. They discovered that not all the work they do can be captured as the categories of textual evidence required by the portfolio report. The director commented, “[the validators] have to spend time with the site visits [otherwise] how can you prove? There are some things they have to see.” When I asked her how she was providing evidence about positive educator–child interactions she responded, “Well it is on the checklists, but that is something they [the validators] [have to] actually sit in the rooms, it is what they observe, nothing we can prove in a more concrete way . . . but stuff on interactions. . . . I found it hard writing stuff down.”

The director questioned the validity of the AELCS requirement to produce concrete evidence as proof, asking, “well how do they know that we are doing this and not just writing it down? Yes we are doing it consistently, I know that we are, but how do they know that we are?”

Even though the educators in the field site seemed aware of the tensions caused by AELCS to produce evidence in a manner that might not be

a fully accurate accounting of their daily work, they still engaged in the work of producing evidence with the knowledge that the evidence they produced would be judged by the validators. I observed the educators categorizing and organizing the evidence in a manner that was intended to expedite the review process for the validators. As they were very much aware of the importance of “not losing points” and the importance of getting a good score on their evidence, I observed them trying to think like the validators, guessing what AELCS validators would want as proof. The director commented that it is important to save the validator’s time by “making it easier for them to see everything we do.”

In selecting what to use as evidence the educators have to consider that which will best represent them to AELCS and ultimately ACYS. The director in the field site saw the portfolio as an opportunity to “to put their best face forward.” I saw from my observations in the field site that there was an awareness of the importance of showing themselves in a good light to the validators. The following quote also speaks to the inherent competitiveness in the accreditation process. The director told me that they want the validators “to see these things because not all programs do it. For example the parties we have at the end of a project. We want to show that.” She continued, “documentation is a point of pride at the centre so of course we want to show it. It is amazing and it involves the families and we want to evolve it further . . . want to show the active communication [with families] as it is part of our philosophy and want to celebrate the children’s learning.” The portfolio stands in as their proof that “we are Reggio-inspired, project-based, that children guide their learning and that we use the environment as a third

teacher. They [the validators] will see this when they come in but the evidence *proves it more*. [emphasis added]"<sup>12</sup>

### *Accomplishing the work of producing evidence.*

The work process of producing evidence involved managing three sets of texts simultaneously. Educators in the field site worked with the portfolio report, the portfolio itself, and the table of contents of the portfolio. It took constant supervision and management to keep all three sets of documents in alignment. In the field site most of the work of producing evidence fell to the director. The director commented on her effort to make sure everything in the portfolio report matches the content of the portfolio binders. "Yah, so I am going through it and continuously working, going through the portfolio report and the portfolio to make sure they match. I am constantly going through things to make sure that everything is done."

The educators must, in this process, produce evidence and thinking that has to fit within the "frame of reference" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004) that is organizationally established by AELCS. "There is a sample accreditation portfolio in the sample section of the guide that will help you prepare your service's accreditation portfolio. It will give you an idea of the kinds of evidence the Validators will be looking for. In each category there are ideas that you can use to assemble your portfolio" (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 2). The educators I observed tried to make a match between their own experiences in the local setting and the institutionally organizing categories and criteria of the portfolio report. They were not always successful and

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<sup>12</sup> The field site labelled themselves as a Reggio-inspired centre. There is little in the way of commensurability between the Reggio Emilia approach and the particular definition of quality socially organized by accreditation. "Reggio breaks all the managerialist rules" evident in Alberta's approach to accreditation (Moss, 2001, p. 126). Reggio Emilia is world-renowned for its inspiring public early childhood education program. It has developed an enviable system without the need for quality assessment or accreditation systems, or other outcome indicators or prescriptive technical methods for justification or accountability.



sometimes the priorities coordinated by accreditation overrode their own interests. For example the director explained to me that she would rather have gone on the field trip with the children that day but she had to stay behind to write a policy required by AELCS that had to be included in the portfolio.

I asked the director to describe the process she used to fill in the portfolio report form. She described how she first read the questions and criteria. She covered up the examples AELCS provided on the form, and tried to list all her own ideas first. She tried to think of what they have as evidence of that criteria and note it down. Once she had used all her own ideas she looked at the examples on the form and also the portfolio report sample provided in the self-study guide. She thought to herself, “they [AELCS] are using that as evidence of *that* criteria? Okay we have that also and so then I will include it.” She admits that she pulled ideas from the sample, saying that this helped her “twig” to what they were actually doing and helped her generate more ideas. She thought a lot about what evidence they had that fit each category.

For the director, the work of producing evidence included trying to figure out what they did and had as evidence of each standard. Filling in the portfolio report form hooked her into ruling relations. She troubled over what AELCS suggested as evidence, but took it up and used it whether or not she thought that it was really appropriate evidence. In the end, she aligned her thinking to the samples provided by AELCS. She became active in producing and reproducing the social relations of the institutional discourse.

Helpful hints for producing evidence are included in the self-study guide as well, for example, “remember to date your evidence—indicate the date you reviewed, revised or created your document” and “one document may be used for more than one standard. In this instance, you can either make multiple copies and insert in the appropriate file folder or indicate on a

sticky note (for the validators) where the hard copy can be found and which standard it covers” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 2). The repetitive nature of the process is in evidence here. The time involved in producing evidence is also an issue. “Accreditation has piled on the paperwork . . . don’t want to get it so full of paperwork, who is going to do it? Frontline staff doesn’t have time so it is added to the director’s workload making them less accessible to staff and less time in the classrooms. Staff are less likely to read all the policies, just signing on the line and not really reading them” (governing council member).

Engaging in the work process, the educators in the field site became more competent at producing evidence. The educators learned what could be considered evidence. They also learned that they should save all forms of documents to use as evidence and that they could actively produce texts to use as evidence. The director described how they had been saving evidence since the centre opened because they knew that they would need it for accreditation. In the field site they were saving samples of emails from families, samples of the children’s art work, and their planning records. Here we see accreditation work orienting the educator’s thinking and concerting their efforts. I observed educators learning how to actively produce evidence for their portfolio. The director describes how they planned for a professional development activity to occur at a staff meeting. Knowing that this would meet one of the AQS, they took a photo of the staff meeting notice that had been posted in advance of the meeting and took photos of the activity because “I knew we would need this [as evidence].”

Their thinking was oriented to the AQS and the portfolio report headings and categories required by AELCS, as the educators I observed set about writing new policies and creating checklists and forms for educators to use daily, all in the bid to produce concrete evidence. Taking photographs of staff meetings and of events held for families was part of the textual

production by educators that took place as they engaged in the new accreditation work process of producing evidence.

### *Photographs as evidence.*

In a classic IE article, McCoy explicates the photograph as text and explores what is happening when we treat photographs as witnesses to the world (1995). She describes the use of photographs as evidence that creates a particular type of record. Analyzing the socially organized usage of photographs and using wedding photos as an example, she describes how photographs are activated within a particular discourse.

It is helpful to apply McCoy's thinking to the accreditation process, where educators are encouraged by AELCS to create and use photographs as documentary confirmation of concrete and valid evidence of quality care. Photos as evidence are activated in a socially organized sequence of activities that establishes relations between occurrences and particular moments in the local site, and an authorized account representing a good early childhood practice. The photo refines and uplifts that moment out of the everyday, hooking into the discourse of accreditation and creating quality. The photo is a trace relation to an actual occasion—what is produced is the essential ideality of quality practice (McCoy, 1995, p. 189). The director reflected on this process, saying, “for example the resource books, I rearranged and organized, then took a photo. We know it is not always going to look like that. And I know that all centres do that. And making sure the background is neat. That is kind of what everyone does.”

Photographic evidence allows validators to “see” or discover quality. AELCS validators use a distinct practice of looking at photos to recognize their essential truth as quality child care, and judge the photos as to whether they are clear and comprehensive evidence. The interpretive practices of the validators activate the photos as evidence and a valid record of practice. They read and recognize the visible features and character of the photos as proper

and valid evidence. The validator commented on how the educators incorporated photos effectively into their portfolio. "The pictures back up what they are doing. . . . This way they are really connected and demonstrates it has been done." The sense that the validators make of the photos justifies and organizes their upcoming courses of action in the accreditation process.

Validators must judge whether to accept that the photos provided in the portfolio represent "the way it is" (McCoy, 1995, p. 191). The director candidly discussed the fact that photos could be "staged." "For example, you have a photo of a staff down on their knees helping a child, they could have staged it, but I hope not." She continued, "I am finding that for all of these, for physical representations of evidence, I am staging things." I asked her to explain and she provided an instance. "For example I take a picture of the infant room and the beds are out. I am taking pictures of the cots, and I turn the nametags over so that the labels show. Yes we are doing those things, but I am still staging it. So they [the validators] can see every aspect of it. We are trying to take a picture of everything so that there are no questions and it is immediately clear for them when they come in." In selecting which photos to include in the portfolio educators are actively defining an ideal local event by revealing certain aspects of the real.

The portfolio produced in the field site included photographs of family events and celebrations, classroom whiteboards, and hallway displays. There were photos of children involved in cooking experiences and carolling at the local mall. The director explained, "For the health and safety section we have photographs of the labelled beds and the backpacks with the emergency contact information on them." The educators in the field site learned how to produce photographic evidence as a record of quality practice. As their consciousness is drawn in line with this new form of proof, they learned that to produce evidence in this manner it had to be given some forethought and planning. First of all they had to recognize the moment as worthy of a photo, recognizing that what they were doing or about to do would be recognized as

quality and fit into a category in the portfolio or under an AQS as determined by AELCS and that they should capture as evidence. Collecting photo evidence to meet AELCS requirements for concrete evidence is not entirely spontaneous. It takes some organizing. Photo consent forms had to be collected from parents. Cameras also had to be made ready (for example, had charged batteries). In the field site they often designated an educator to be in charge of taking photos and who could be counted on to know what images to try to capture. Producing photographs as documentary evidence of proof that they were meeting the AQS standards is new work for educators.

*Producing evidence in a continual process.*

Creating the portfolio requires inscriptive work “in which events in the ordinary world are reconceptualised and entered into documented reality” (G. Smith., 1988, p. 171). This inscriptive work is located inside relations of management and control. It is assumed that the evidence produced for the portfolio can create an orderly and sensible account of quality child care. Educators produce evidence in an ongoing sequence of actions coordinated by the AELCS study guide to accomplish accreditation. Their evidence-producing work is institutional—constructed for validators, moderators, and ultimately the governing council where it will influence the decision to grant or deny accreditation.

The work of producing evidence gets constructed as an ongoing responsibility of educators in the new relation of accountability that is established with AELCS. “Continue to maintain after your initial portfolio so you can easily demonstrate your quality practice and will be ready for re-accreditation” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 1).

The portfolio as evidence of quality care becomes a legitimate and authoritative form of communication between child care centres and the accrediting agency. The work process of producing evidence requires educators to produce a continuous series of representations or presentations

of self that demonstrate the proper professional and organizational motivations (de Montigny, 1995, p. 216). It has permanence, becoming a record of practice and a method of representation. In the work process of producing evidence, the evidence educators select represents them to the accrediting agency and to the Alberta government. The portfolio requires that they make a proper professional account of themselves and their work—“the onus is on your centre to provide evidence of its ability to meet the ACCAP Quality Standards” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1). The ostensible objective account of the portfolio rests on the implicit acceptance of accreditation’s organizational mandates by educators (de Montigny, 1995, p. 212).

Documenting, record keeping, and assembling evidence becomes evidence of professional early childhood practice; it is what proper educators are supposed to be doing. It demonstrates their ability to use the discourse of accreditation and its inherent technical language, to organize their daily activities into proper professional activities, and their willingness to incorporate its technical understandings into their daily practice with children and families (de Montigny, 1995, pp. 216–217).

Quality care is now bound to the textual accounts created for the portfolio. The educators’ texts generate accounts of and emerge out of organizational work processes. Daily practices with children and families are thus connected to organizational courses of action prescribed by AELCS which are themselves outlined step by step in documentary form as policies, procedures, and checklists (de Montigny, 1995, p. 217).

In summary, in the accreditation process the act of identifying, producing, and displaying evidence becomes naturalized as the only way to convince others that they are in fact “doing” quality care. The report forms and textual documents produced as the evidence portfolio and portfolio report become the educator’s route to visibility; the texts produced as

evidence become the official or authorized evidence of best practice and quality care. AELCS is the authorized reader of this evidence. Educators must convince validators from AELCS that what they have included in the portfolio is current, clear, and comprehensive proof of their practice, evidence that can count for that particular standard, indicator, or criteria. In this manner, educators become active themselves in producing and reproducing the social relations of the accreditation institutional discourse.

Through the work processes of producing evidence, texts in the form of concrete proof stand in for the mundane activities of daily child care work and become “proper” or quality child care. Inscription in the portfolio stands as representing the real work of interacting with, caring for, and educating young children, and all the events, circumstances, and actions that work encompasses. Accreditation depends on educators being able to use texts to make their work evident to “employ textual realities to mediate the details of their daily practice” (de Montigny, 1995, p. 209). In this manner, the local actualities of child care are being converted into textual realities to become institutionally actionable in a form that is authorized by the accrediting agency and the terms and conditions they impose on the creation of the portfolio, and through the authorized actions of the validators and moderator in the next steps of the process.

### **Continuous quality improvement (CQI).**

CQI is a foundational aspect of the accreditation process. With the self-study process at its core, accreditation processes rely on educators in every child care centre adopting this administrative prerogative. The main business of accreditation is CQI—the stated goal is “to review and enhance the quality of care in your centre” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1) and for educators to identify “areas where your centre is already doing well and areas where you know you need to improve” (p. 2).

Continuous quality improvement is a management philosophy that arises from Systems Thinking that originated in manufacturing and has since been applied to other systems such as health care. Accreditation now draws this previously unfamiliar discourse into child care. The self-study guide is littered with references to CQI, beginning with the explicit requirement of educators to be self-reflective about their work with young children. Standard 6 states “Reflection on practice is intentional and ongoing” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 9). Other standards address the inherent “plan, do, and review” character of CQI:

Standard 8 reads, “A program that seeks information about the needs of the children and families it serves and the community in which it operates on an ongoing basis and modifies itself accordingly is better able to meet those needs . . . ” (p. 11). Standard 10 states, “Early learning and child care services participate in ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes that support continuous quality improvement.”

“To provide high quality services a program must continually monitor itself, make changes and evaluate the impact of the changes” (p. 13). Standard 10.2 continues “. . . uses an annual review process to set goals for the coming year and to develop and implement action plans to address these goals for continuous quality improvement . . . procedures and responsibilities for implementing quality improvement plans are set during the annual review (p. 13). Through these standards, and the interrelated work processes of goal setting and producing evidence, accreditation imports into child care a new type of systematic evaluation as part of the CQI work of educators.

The whole self-study process itself is reflective of this discourse as it works to make everyone accountable to the AQS. All educators are expected to continuously seek ways to improve their own and their centre’s performance, and to achieve better outcomes. Accreditation and its CQI work require a commitment to self-reflection and self-improvement by the



educators. Strathern (2000) notes how audit culture works to change the identity of professionals and the way they conceptualize themselves. These themes are evident in the new work process of CQI, pressing towards professionalization and responsabilization of the early childhood workforce.

Being accountable to the accreditation standards and the goals and plans they have produced is all part of being a responsible and proper educator. “Good child care centres” undergo accreditation and engage in continuous quality improvement. As the annual report cycle and the three-year accreditation renewal cycle engages, continuous coordination of new work processes to meet the accreditation standards and their plans and goals begin to emerge as the central focus. Knowing they will be judged and being open to and willing to have their accreditation work observed, evaluated, and made accountable by external AELCS validators, mentors, and the governing council is also part of the educator’s role in the CQI framework in evidence here. Hence they are constructed as a particular type of educator—one who is reflective, open, and responsive to external audit and feedback from experts. Further discussion of this dynamic follows in chapter 7.

In this process, however, they also lose something important. Educators essentially give away the right to judge for themselves what they believe to be quality care and education. Power (1997) notes how in the process of audit, trust is displaced from the educators and vested in the experts. A strong message of accreditation is that external review is superior to educators judging for themselves. Experts in the form of validators, moderators, and the governing council members are authorized as able to tell educators whether or not they are actually providing quality care and education. This reflects an institutional distrust of the capacities of educators to self-regulate the quality of services provided, and denies the trust that families previously vested in educators to provide quality early learning and child care (Power, 1997). In this manner, educators are dominated by ruling relations that work upon their sense of self. Accreditation, although

purported to increase the professional status of educators, actually denies them the role of expert, awarding it instead to others.

As depicted in Figure 1, under accreditation the new work practice of CQI encourages educators to monitor and measure their work in terms of how well they have met the accreditation standards and the goals they have set in the process. Accomplishing the typical “plan, do, review” cycle of CQI processes in child care centres requires leadership and coordination, including locating and acquiring resources, and time to discuss and implement changes so they can demonstrate that they are working towards their authorized goals. In order to meet the reporting requirements of AELCS, child care centres participate in what Janz (2009, p. 92) terms the “institutionally induced surveillance” of continuous improvement. It requires internal tracking and monitoring of changes to ensure that accreditation standards are continuously met and improved upon. Annual reports and the three-year reaccreditation cycle hook the educator’s work into the systematic reporting sequence. The tracked and reported evidence of CQI eventually becomes statistics for AELCS and ACYS reports.

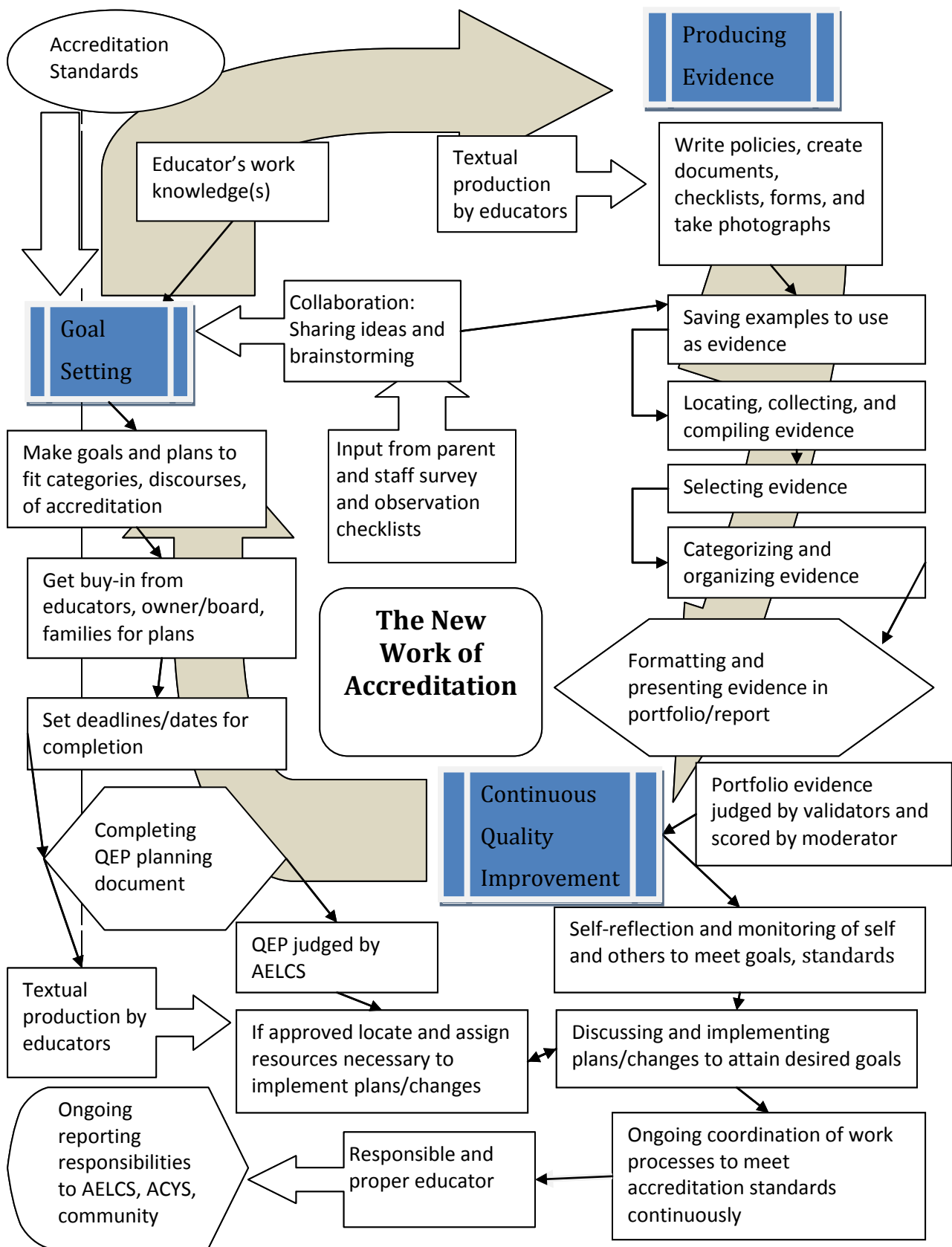


Figure 1. New work processes.

## New Work Processes as Ruling Relations

The three new work processes I identified coordinate the educators' work through ruling relations, making the daily individual work of educators accountable to a set of standards formulated externally, as rules and discourses created elsewhere are imported into the child care sector. Educators are being encouraged to bring their thinking and actions in line with these discursive practices and to agree to enact them. Accreditation can only do its work if taken up by educators as part of their daily work. As described by an informant at the field site, "[As a front line staff] I am pushing to keep my documentation to use for accreditation, doing all the planning, weekly forms and my flowcharts. I am keeping the forms and documentation as backup evidence for the admin team. I make sure that we are being open-ended, so we can show to others what we want the program to look like." Educators thus see the good sense of accreditation and wish to participate in, take up, and even perpetuate its ruling relations.

Through these new work processes we can see educators' consciousness and actions being organized by ruling relations. The child care centres are given autonomy in deciphering how they will identify goals and evidence and what their portfolio will look like. As a ruling relation, the discourse found in the self-study manual does not prescribe action but rather provides a framework, and guides the work actions in the centre that will be fitted into its terms of quality standards (Janz, 2009). However, the standardized forms for documenting goal setting and reporting their QEP, along with the portfolio report, hook educators into ruling relations. Rules are instituted by AELCS that establish what is good evidence and clear goals, and that establish categories and criteria for goals and evidence that govern educators as they engage in the self-study process. Embedded in the texts used to accomplish the work processes are standard forms and formats in which what the educators have to say about themselves is inserted into the

accreditation discourse and coordinated in a textual format. For example, educators must fill in boxes on forms by saying “What we do/what we need to do.” This scripting work coordinates what educators can say and report in the institutional mode. Numerous concerns were raised in the field site about the format of the forms.

Some of the anxiety in the field site about the forms seemed to arise from the educator’s strong desire to “get it right.” This concern stems from the pressure accreditation places on them. Achieving accreditation is a high-stakes endeavour with much riding on it—better wages for staff, the centre’s reputation, expectations from families, and also financial access to professional development and further quality enhancement grants.

On a number of occasions the director indicated that she was searching for clarification and wished for further direction from AELCS. She wished for more samples and examples on the forms. The director often referred back to the self-study guide for clarification, she visited the accrediting agency’s website, and asked for explanations from the AELCS consultant. In the process, the director was very reliant on the texts provided by AELCS, and when the texts were unclear or inconsistent, anxiety and frustration resulted. Again the coordinating aspect of texts is clear. Texts produced extralocally, carrying the ruling discourse, and intended for use at the local site, often caused confusion and uncertainty.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter described and made visible the three new work processes of accreditation that became evident during this research inquiry. I observed the work of educators in the care and education of young children being transformed as quality care was reconceptualized as the 10 AQS.

Three new work processes are evident from the observation of the actual lived experience of child care educators trying to achieve

accreditation. These processes are standardized and generalized by the tools and texts of AELCS. As organizing practices they are concerted by the AQS and AELCS procedures, creating a new common consciousness of child care work which forces new ways of thinking about and delivering quality early learning and child care. These changes to educator work in Alberta are gradual and emerging, becoming normalized by discourse external to early childhood, and as influenced by accreditation requirements in not just achieving accreditation initially, but also continuing afterward through the annual reporting requirement and the three-year reaccreditation cycle that has become established.

The mapping techniques of IE have helped to bring to light how the texts and tools are taken up and used in new work processes, and the hidden or invisible efforts by educators to “do accreditation” and engage in these three new work processes. The amount of work created by these new processes and their associated activities is not trivial. The energy, time, and resources required to set goals, produce evidence, and engage in continuous quality improvement are considerable. They require significant time, energy, and focus, often in circumstances where there are competing demands on educators.

The three new work processes described here exemplify the notion of work happening at the institutional interface (McCoy, 2006), helping to make evident the social organization of accreditation work in child care centres. Close examination of textual forms and how they operate in educators’ actual practices helps us understand the power of these texts in regulating the accreditation process and in instituting new work processes. The forms of action undertaken by the educators are shaped by the institutional organization of accreditation. Through these new work processes the governing institution of accreditation is produced and held in place by educators themselves. Using the concepts of IE, I have come to view accreditation as an extended sequence of work processes that link the work

of educators to others' work in other places. In chapter 6, I explore how the educators' work is linked to that of new experts to produce the accreditation decision. According to D. Smith (1990), large scale coordination is effected primarily through text-based forms of objectified knowledge. Based on mapping techniques, participant observations, and interviews in the field site, the new work of accreditation becomes visible. The data has demonstrated that through new work processes and by requiring certain modes of action, accreditation produces a reorganization of the work of educators. Quality is redefined as the 10 AQS, and the work of caring for and educating young children is reconceptualised as goal setting, evidence gathering, and continuous quality improvement. This chapter has explicated how caring and education work has changed to fit the social organization of accreditation.

## **Chapter 6: Accreditation and Expert Knowers**

In this chapter, I explicate, based on the data, how peers are elevated to expert status under accreditation, and how these new experts are created with authorized roles and specialist credibility, and whose work is knitted together in a text-work-text process to produce the accreditation decision.

### **New Experts as Knowers: The Formation of New Experts**

Accreditation creates the possibility of new expert knowers, whose account is authorized, and in which forms of new expert power are constructed. In holding the position, these new experts can speak as those who hold claim to speak for accreditation. I have already discussed the loss of educators' authority that accompanies accreditation. Discourses and new ways of organizing at the state administrative level such as NPM combine to "leach" organization, control, and power away from local sites and their particularities (D. Smith, 1999).

Strathern (2000) identifies the "creation of new categories of experts" (p. 62) that results from accountability audits. This trend is evident in accreditation as well. The implementation of accreditation in Alberta led to the creation of new experts in the accrediting agency, the technical support agency (mentor generalist, mentor specialist, coach), and in the ministry. New positions with specialized functions are required to carry out the work of accreditation. As a textually mediated process, the accreditation work each expert does is in and on behalf of texts, producing their activities as institutional (Turner, 2003). In the next section, I describe three key new expert roles with in the accrediting agency—the AELCS governing council members, moderator, and validators. The purpose of this description is to highlight the changing social organization of expert forms of knowledge produced by accreditation. These new roles have arisen in the accreditation process to coordinate the work of educators and to forward the activities of the accreditation agency. Following, I describe how these three roles, through



text-work-text processes, work in coordination to accomplish the decision-making process that is essential to accreditation.

The accrediting agency is governed by a board of directors called the governing council. AELCS governing council members are appointed by the ACYS minister after being nominated by their peers. According to the AELCS website, the governing council (GC) is charged with working in “conjunction with the executive director (ED) to establish and review policy and award accreditation certificates to applicant programs” (AAAELCS, 2011, “Nominations for Governing Council”). In their expert role, GC members are paid an honorarium for their service. They are expected to have an awareness of early learning and child care, and to bring expertise and specific knowledge that would support the accreditation process.

GC members do the work of experts, categorizing and dividing the “good” centres from the bad. By virtue of holding that particular position they are given the authority to judge the quality of child care centres based on standardized texts (which stand in for the daily experiences of educators). GC members come to know the child care centre and the work of educators based on texts, not on firsthand experience with it. Knowing in a textually mediated way is purported to bring objectivity and neutrality to the process.

Two other key new categories of experts were created when accreditation was introduced in Alberta. According to the AELCS website “the success and credibility of AELCS are dependent upon the performance of child care professionals who are engaged in the external assessment or validation of an applicant service by the Validators and Moderators. They are experienced professionals . . . committed to the advancement of quality child care services through the accreditation process” (AAAELCS, 2009, “About Us” section—Validators & Moderators). In general, all accreditation processes involve a site visit component. They also include an external examination component that is most often conducted by people who hold and do the position or service in another similar organization. When child care

accreditation was introduced, many long-term early childhood educators looked forward to these new positions as a way to advance their careers and as a new challenge. Some in the field however were concerned that the members of the current workforce, with 50 % certified at the base level only (Muttart, 2010), did not hold the necessary skills and knowledge required to take on the challenge of assessing the quality of child care programs.

“Validators conduct site visits and provide documentation to AELCS” (AAAELCS, 2009, “About Us” section—Validators & Moderators). Site visits are conducted by a pair of validators, one in the lead role and one in the peer role. For many centres, the validators are “the face of accreditation” (Ogston, 2003, p. 10). In accreditation planning documents, validators were envisioned as “knowledgeable, experienced, and objective authorities” (Ogston, 2003, p. 10). The minimum qualifications for a validator are certification at the Child Development Supervisor level and supervisory experience. There is an online application form for applicants interested in becoming a peer or lead validator that must be accompanied by a resume, two letters of reference, and a letter of interest from the applicant. Lead validators are contracted for their services and paid on a per-site-visit basis. Peer validators are not paid directly, but the program in which they work receives “release funds” per site-visit to compensate for the time the peer validator is away from the workplace.

Validators must be able to, and are counted upon, to produce an expert account of what they saw during the two-day site visit. What they see and report is important as it will facilitate the decision-making by others further along in the process who are elsewhere and elsewhen. Validators also have the authority and power to stop the site visit by calling the field coordinator at the accrediting agency and filling in the Site Visit Termination and/or Automatic Failure form. Grounds for termination include:

- “Licensing status change

- Failure to disclose a critical incident where a probationary license has been issued
- Insufficient evidence to remedy a critical incident (an action plan)
- Incomplete self-study documentation
- Interference by the owner or staff during the site visit
- The validator (s) is (are) witness to a staff person or provider with the child care service administering any form of abuse to a child in care
- The validator(s) safety is compromised (e.g. verbally assaulted by staff or parent or in the unlikely event of immanent natural disaster, health and safety risk such as a gas leak or volatile virus outbreak).”  
(AAAELCS, 2007b).

According to the peer validator I interviewed, validators are expected to show professionalism, efficiency, and good writing and observation skills. The lead validator emphasized that they must remain neutral. “I can’t say ‘that is not the way you should do it,’ or make recommendations for doing things differently.” As experts, validators must operate from a stance that shows proper personal dispositions and motivation. They may not act in a manner considered malicious, seek revenge for previous slights, or operate out of self-interest. Any concerns that they note must be from a place of understanding and applying the AQS. “The procedure is pretty specific, with minimums defined and the process defined.” The validator explained that they are confined to looking for evidence of each standard, and are observing educators for best practices as specified on the three observation checklists. It is important that validators are proficient at the use of the standardized texts, procedures, and reporting practices of the institution. The validator I interviewed noted, “The number of pieces of paper is a challenge . . . I wish I was more familiar with the forms, I could do it more efficiently then.”

According to the AELCS website, “The role of the Moderator is to make recommendations and provide advice to AELCS on whether a child care

service has achieved the standards required for accreditation” (AAAELCS, 2009, “About Us” section—Validators & Moderators). This involves adjudication of the evidence provided in the documentation of compliance with standards, and making a reasoned, written case for the recommendation of accreditation status (Ogston, 2003). Moderators are directed by AELCS to maintain objectivity, be balanced in their approach to the evidence, and to remain independent of the collection of evidence and the people who collect it. Their sphere of activity is intended to be separate.

Moderators must have certification at the Child Development Supervisor level or the equivalent, and have five years of recent active involvement in children’s services as an academic, administrator, or senior service provider. A number of competencies are listed for moderators, including commitment to accreditation and quality improvement, professional maturity, objectivity and respect for different philosophies and approaches, and the ability to read, analyze, synthesize, and write concise factual observations. Moderators are under contract with AELCS and are remunerated per report (AAAELCS, 2009, “About Us” section—Validators & Moderators).

Moderators work in concert with the other accreditation experts. Their work connects to others in an ongoing moving process in time—which points to the institution/ruling relation. In this work-text-work sequence the local actualities of the child care centre have to be converted into textual realities to become institutionally actionable (D. Smith, 2005).

The moderator’s work action is based on a textual reality that is constructed by the validators, rather than any actual experiences in the child care centre itself. The moderator is confined to attending to the categories required by the report template and the spreadsheet formula. These standardized templates organize what the moderator can say or write about; hence actualities within a child care site are selectively attended to. The

moderator must see how the evidence as it comes to her from the validators “fits” the categories and concepts of institutional discourse. What can be seen, heard, and said, what is neglected or subsumed, is determined by the standard phrases of the site wrap-up form and the codes on the observation checklists. The moderator’s work is controlled in conformity with the selective requirements of the boss text.

The moderator I interviewed referenced two “boss texts” (D. Smith, 2006) in the form of the report template and spreadsheet, and set text in motion through the process of inscription leading to institutional action (her recommendation of whether to grant accreditation or not). In this process the “actual becomes actionable” (D. Smith, 2011, personal communication). Activating the text is the moderator’s work. This is work that occurs at the intersection of everyday doings and the ruling relations.

In these roles, validators, moderators, and GC members are given the power to observe, assess, and judge, and to produce authorized accounts. These experts can speak from a location within the institutional frame of accreditation, from the standpoint of the agency’s authority. Training, instruction, and support from AELCS on how to engage in the formalized process of accreditation as an expert is provided, along with direction on how to use the texts, tools, forms, and reports inherent in the authorized accreditation process. The new experts learn how to read and write reports that accomplish the work of the accrediting agency in a standardized manner. A secondary informant told me that she “expects that all involved [from AELCS] have an appropriate level of expertise.” She suggested that AELCS should have some specifically trained validators to do the site visits at those centres with higher level of expertise.

The site visit wrap-up occurs at the end of the two-day visit and is an opportunity for the validators to provide the centre with feedback on the evidence that was observed to meet or not meet the 10 AQS. AELCS asks that

validators use a template for the site visit wrap-up. The template has “several indicators for each standard that are commonly used during the site visit wrap up.” Validators are prompted by the instructions accompanying the template to use the standard phases during the site wrap-up meeting and to “include at least one example of something you have seen or a comment for each standard that describes how the program is meeting the standard in its own unique way” (AAAELCS, 2007b).

In examining the validator’s Site Visit Wrap Up Form from the field site, it appeared that the validator had followed these instructions. Here we see the power that text has to coordinate, to hold people to acting in a particular way. It draws the validators into an ongoing course of action in a particular way by including the stable, standard format and phrases that enable their next action, and the action of the moderator and ultimately the GC members.

In summary, new expert roles have been created to accomplish the work of the accrediting agency. These new roles themselves are coordinated by the standardized process of accreditation. The actions of the experts are strictly confined to appear objective and neutral, but they do important work for the ruling relation. As we will see in the next section, their work is knit together in a particular text-work-text sequence to produce the accreditation decision.

### ***“Magically it happens:” The Text-Work-Text Sequence of the Accreditation Decision-making Process***

In Alberta, a majority of child care centres have achieved accreditation. According to the AAAELCS website, 86 % of child care centres achieve accreditation after their first site visit (2009). A secondary informant from the accrediting agency told me that a failure rate of 15 % is “normal” based on statistics from the Australian experience. After a second site visit the accreditation rate in Alberta rises to 98 %, meaning that almost every

centre that attempts accreditation eventually achieves it. In this section, I will explicate how the accreditation decision is produced. The expert knowers I just described are at work in the formation of the accreditation decision. Producing the accreditation decision in a standardized and seemingly objective manner is very important for the accrediting agency to demonstrate its contractual obligations to the ministry.

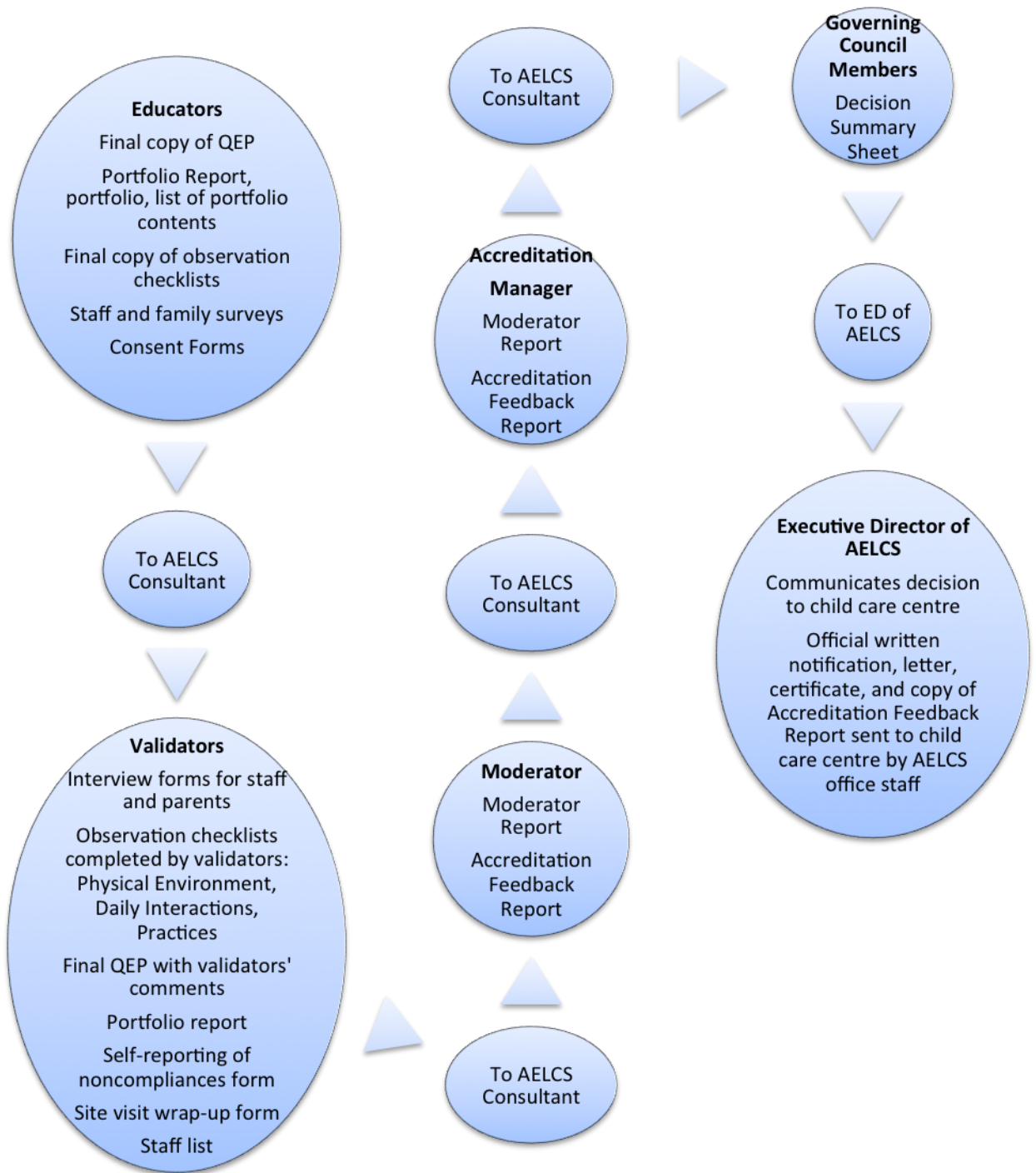
The focus on textual forms of work and work processes is central to IE inquiry and analysis. Mapping the steps in the accreditation process and accreditation texts in action made evident an extensive network of text-work-text processes. Through text-work-text processes the way in which the daily work of educators becomes the institutional reality of accreditation becomes visible. The accreditation decision is produced in one such particular text-work-text process. It is not produced in a single moment of decision-making, but through an extended text-based sequence of actions produced with intentionality by the ruling relations (Turner, 2003).

The accreditation decision is produced in a text-mediated sequence of action that the institution has standardized and authorized, not by magic as the field site informant above notes. The institutional action of conferring or denying accreditation does not just happen once—IE methods helped me to put together what AELCS staff members, validators, moderators, and GC members do regularly to produce the accreditation decision as an institutional process through texts. In IE, we view texts as present and active—as part of a course of action in which they play a part. As texts come into settings they bring meanings, usages, and intentions from other locations, and create the practices that produce what gets done in the local and translocal work processes. Texts in action have coordinative power. In the social process of accreditation, the systematizing work that texts will do in selecting, ordering, and assembling operations is conceived as projecting organization into ongoing sequences of people’s activities and bringing them into an active coordination with the activities of others (D. Smith, 1999, p.

142). The various texts used in the decision-making process are passed along and among formally designated categories of expert knowers, who themselves produce texts to warrant the next step in the process.

The work of the accreditation decision emerges in and is accomplished in various spheres of activity and locations by those designated by AELCS and the ministry as expert knowers. Texts connect the goal setting, evidence producing, and CQI work of local child care settings with nonlocal generalized relations to accomplish the accreditation decision-making process. For the decision to be made, texts produced by the validators connect what educators do to someone else's work somewhere else. Figure 2 outlines the texts produced and passed along the text-work-text sequence of the accreditation decision-making process.





**Figure 2. The text-work-text process of accreditation decision-making in the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services (AELCS) child care centre accreditation process between site visit request and final decision.**

In the accreditation decision-making process, texts produce “what to do next” in a temporal sequential process of text-work-text. The actual activities of the expert knowers in the accreditation decision-making process are dependent on one another through a sequence of activities in which “the foregoing intends the subsequent and in which the subsequent accomplishes the social character of the preceding” (D. Smith, 1990, p. 150) as depicted in Figure 2. Texts move along this decision-making production line, with stops at the accrediting office, which acts as central control and as transfer point for the text in between each expert.

Between the end of the site visit and the receipt of the phone call when the decision is revealed, the work of producing the accreditation decision is quite invisible to the educators. The director of the field site reflected upon completing the site visit, “the waiting is the hard part . . . at the end [of the site visit] they let us know that our program was pretty good . . . now we just take a leap of faith [in the process].” Once the validators leave the centre, a routine and standardized set of work processes begins that culminates in the accreditation decision.

### **Validator.**

Prior to a site visit, the lead validator receives from AELCS the centre’s QEP, a copy of their daily schedule, and the program description. The lead validator told me that prior to the site visit that she is supposed to “read over all the information, ensure that I have all the forms, and note any initial questions I might have. . . and make sure their QEP is complete.” She also received an accordion file from AELCS with the following texts:

- Blank Observation Checklists (three)
- Site-Visit Verification form
- Self-Reporting of Non-Compliances form
- Interview forms for staff and parents
- Site-Visit Wrap Up form and template

- AELCS Program Evaluation form
- Thank you card to be presented to the centre
- Site Visit Termination Information and Automatic Failure form

The lead validator is responsible for the “paper work” produced prior to, during, and collected at the end of the site visit. After the site visit she<sup>13</sup> will usually spend an additional four hours getting all the forms required by AELCS in order. She is required by agency procedures to submit all her documentation within five days of the site visit. The validators’ observations are confined to the organizational relevances categorized by the accreditation standards on the observation checklists and the portfolio report. The documentation of the observations that she submits is interpreted as fact by the moderator. The same checklists are completed twice by the educators in preparation for the site visit; however it is the observations completed and recorded by the validators that count as “reality” in the accreditation decision-making process. To complete the observations during the site visit the validators have to draw on their professional understandings of best practice. They must code their observations as BP-Best Practice, NOC-Not Observed Consistently, NO/E-Not Observed or in Evidence, and OP-Opposite Practice. She has to interpret what she heard and saw as evidence of the AQS. ‘Proper’ validator observations are not subjective. Accreditation demands that the validators’ observations are objective and impartial. The peer validator, examining one of the observation checklists commented, “this one I didn’t observe. So?” The lead validator responded, “to me that is NOE—the other evidence suggests that they would respond to these social situations appropriately.” “Okay,” said the peer, “can you write that in?”

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<sup>13</sup> All the child care educators, validators and moderators I interviewed were female. This also reflects the predominantly female-gendered make-up of the early childhood workforce, so I have chosen to use the feminine noun throughout.

To accomplish this work she must see and hear the evidence required in every agency she validates. “The professional is trained to produce out of this the order which (s)he believes (s)he discovers in it” (D. Smith 1987, p. 159). Prior to the site visit the lead validator receives a copy of the finalized QEP submitted by the centre to AELCS as part of the site visit request form. In the AELCS text entitled Site Visit Guide for Validators, validators are directed to review the QEP to ensure that “the items listed in the initial review and the centre’s evidence and your observations of their evidence are consistent with the QEP.” They are further directed to indicate on the form “if the evidence is observed and consistent put a check mark, your initial beside the check mark and a comment. If the evidence is not observed or questionable make a note to gather more evidence during the interview process for that particular item. If no evidence is found mark an X. Do not leave blanks” (AAAELCS, 2007b, p. 14).

“When the validators come out on the site visit they will examine the evidence you have in your portfolio and will record on a summary sheet whether or not the evidence you provided was ‘clear,’ ‘comprehensive’ and ‘current’ ” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 5, p. 4). The self-study manual goes on to define these three terms. In the context of accreditation current means “that the documents are dated and that the content reflects they have been reviewed, revised or written within the past year.” Clear means “understandable,” for example, written in plain language, typed, or hand written in a legible manner so that others can read and understand it. Comprehensive means that the “documents or evidence you provide includes sufficient information to demonstrate that you have met the standard” (AAAELCS 2007a, Section 5, p. 4).

These are examples of how validators are trained to write in institutionally recognizable ways. They are coached to translate what they see and hear into official accreditation discourse. Their report appears to be an objective accounting of what was observed. This training and instruction

of validators is important for the upcoming work that a moderator will do in the next step of the accreditation process, so the validator's work is produced in relation to the work of others and their doings elsewhere and elsewhere, and thus as institutional (Turner, 2003). The daily work of educators is produced and located in an extended work sequence and set of socially organized relations.

Validators have to learn to identify evidence of the AQS through the observation checklists and other texts of AELCS. They learn how to analyze and name discreet incidental behaviours of educators as best practice or opposite practice. The accrediting agency's procedures require the lead and peer validators to spend at least one hour combined doing observations in each of the classrooms over the two-day site visit period. To complete the three observation checklists required during the site visit they must capture a specific instance out of the busy life of a classroom to record as evidence of best practice. For example on the Interactions and Daily Experiences Checklist, ID #11 states that "Adults respond to children's efforts to communicate in ways that assist the child's communication skill development." The lead validator's notes in the box provided read, "Child: 'Jump leaves'. Caregiver: 'Yes, we were outside jumping in the leaves'." This notation is coded BP (best practice) and initialled by the lead validator. A moment in the daily life of the centre is expertly arrested such that the moment becomes a meaningful incident for accreditation purposes as a practice that meets or doesn't meet AQS (de Montigny, 1995). This process subsumes observed educator behaviours under accreditation discourse, making them accountable, observable, reportable—"codeable" within the accrediting agency's terms and order. In this way the observed behaviours of educators (their work and the reasoning of individuals) becomes an expression of the nonlocal ruling relations of the accreditation discourse (D. Smith, 1987). The validator's customary and standard coding practices render the ruling relations routine (Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

Validators are not specifically observing for poor practice; they are looking for positive practices according to the validators I interviewed, as stated on the observation checklists (AAAELCS, 2007a), such as “adults are appropriately affectionate with children” (p. 3), “adults show active interest in what children do and say” (p. 4), and “adults speak with not at children” (p. 8). However, by focusing on specific captured instances of educator behaviour as coordinated by the observation checklists, the validators are effectively unable to measure during the two-day site visit whether the centre is providing a *sustained* level of high quality care that reflects the process orientation towards quality. Additionally, validators attend to managerial practices of ruling as emphasized by the textual practices of the QEP and portfolio requirements for administrative, human resources, and standardized health and safety policy and procedures— in other words, the paper work. The new work processes of goal setting, producing evidence, and CQI are valorized by their concreteness in the validator’s processes.

These discrete bits of practice as evidence are strung together in the validators’ texts. The validators’ coding of these practices is substituted for actual practices, and then transferred to the site visit wrap-up template through a set of standardized phrases and terminology. Thus accreditation procedures used by the validators make only some things visible. Not all the work of and practices of educators become observable. For example, in the field site the educators stayed after the centre closed on Friday to move and pack away all their materials and equipment so the space could be used by the church school on the weekend. They came in early on Monday to reset the environment before the children arrived. This routine but essential work is not noted anywhere in the texts prepared by the educators or by the validators. The creation of an appropriate learning environment that supports children’s learning and development is expected by accreditation standards, but the skill, knowledge, and effort that goes into preparing an aesthetic learning environment for groups of young children is effectively

taken for granted. In this way only select aspects of the educator's work is made accountable, observable, reportable, and "codeable" by accreditation. Even though the categories in the observation checklist relate to the educator's behaviours and interest in providing quality care, the text-mediated process subordinates the educator's interests and efforts (Campbell & Gregor, 2004). Educators' actions are transformed into a particular coded textual version. The validators activate the observation checklists, determining which of the observed educator behaviours fit the prescribed categories. The validator's selection then appears to the moderator simply as the textual presentation of the educators' behaviours as quality care. The validator provides an objective and neutral retelling of the educators' subjective and often intuitive actions with children (Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

The validators' textual accounts of what they saw emerge from the accreditation agency's standard work processes. They have to ensure that the site visit proceeds based on the predetermined plan that is outlined in the Site Visit Guide for Validators (AAAELCS, 2007b). The lead validator commented, "the order that we do things in is flexible" but overall her course of actions at the site visit followed a determinant course of action that was ordered and meant to coordinate the validator's work. In illustration, on top of the classroom observation checklists completed in each classroom, the site visit validation process involves completion of five more separate checklists to ensure that validators have done all the tasks associated with the site visit. There is a checklist for the validator to complete prior to the site visit that lists all the documentation that will be reviewed ahead of time, one for use during the site visit that specifies tasks on day one and day two that need to be completed, and a Validator Site Visit Checklist which outlines the 10 steps that the validator must undertake to have completed the site visit in the authorized manner. The Validator Site Visit Checklist form must be filled in

and signed by the lead validator and submitted to the accrediting agency at the end of the site visit.

In addition, the Site Visit Verification Form lists each procedure carried out by the validators. To verify the completion of each task, it had to be initialled by both the centre owner-operator and the lead validator at the end of the site visit wrap-up. “This one is just verification that we did all the pieces,” said the lead validator to the director and owner-operator during the site visit wrap-up meeting. After the site visit ended she also had to complete the Accreditation Lead Validator Checklist. This document helps her track the numerous documents (noted on Figure 2) she has to submit to the accrediting agency within five days of the site visit.

Through her observations the lead validator determines what is relevant from inside the logic and sensibilities of accreditation—“the portfolio and the checklist are the guides for what I am looking for.” She is able to present her version of reality to the moderator due to her authorized position of validator. The text-mediated work of the validator is very important to the institutional production of the accreditation decision. She is creating a particular description, a description that will be useful to the moderator. For the decision to be produced, her work must structure, organize, and support all the subsequent work processes. She must think ahead to the upcoming work of the moderator to ensure her documentation enables the moderator to do the work in the next step of the process. She is directed in how to prepare proper documentation for the moderator in the Site Visit Guide for Validators (AAAELCS, 2007b). The validators prepare the particulars, concrete objective, and neutral examples of evidence in the form of standard phrases that intend a particular interpretation by the moderator. For example, the peer validator in reviewing the draft of the site visit wrap-up, referenced the template with their choices of standard phrases, saying “This is a good one . . . a positive working environment creates low staff



turnover . . . don't you think?" The lead validator responded "yes, lets add it, good idea . . . she [the owner-operator] was talking about that."

The moderator knows the methods used by the validators—the moderator I interviewed had previously been a validator, and thus the particulars that are assembled make sense to her (D. Smith, 1990). Hence the validator's work generates for the accreditation decision-making process the exact information needed by the moderator. The objective account created by the validators in this workup is useful organizationally (Campbell &Gregor, 2004). The moderator then has what is needed to support the grant accreditation or deny recommendation to GC.

### **Moderator.**

As noted earlier in the steps of the process, the moderator plays a pivotal role. In a practical, although not official sense, the moderator makes the decision through the recommendation process about whether a child care centre has produced enough evidence to warrant a positive decision. According to the AELCS website, "moderator recommendations are based on an examination of the evidence of quality presented in the self-study report, the Quality Enhancement Plan, and the Validators' observed documentation. The Moderator's observations and recommendation are presented as an accreditation report to the Governing Council of AELCS" (AAAELCS, "About Us" section, Validators & Moderators).

The moderator is working from an isolated position. She commented that sometimes it is like "working in a bubble by yourself." She has never seen the child care centre—she must rely on the validators' work to produce the reality of the child care centre's practice in order to carry out her own work. She commented, "they are my eyes."

After the site visit is completed, the moderator receives the QEP report with the validator's comments on it. She does not score the QEP in the initial accreditation cycle. It will be scored in future as part of the annual

report process and in the three-year reaccreditation cycle. The moderator I interviewed was still interested in the comments and observations made by the validators on the QEP during the site visit. She checked to see if the centre was making progress towards accomplishing the goals they laid out in the QEP.

The moderator receives a large number of texts that flow from the educators' self-study process and from the validators' site visit. In the text-work-text process she enters into a text-reader conversation with the material provided. These texts travel no further in the decision-making process. Instead she produces two extremely important standardized texts for the GC members—the accreditation feedback report and the moderator report, which is a standardized Excel™ scoring sheet that includes her recommendation to grant or deny accreditation. The moderator's consciousness is focused by the texts from the validator on particular examples that, based on her expert knowledge, are representative of best practice and thus are deemed to meet the AQS. These two reports are critical; they produce how the centre is represented to the GC members and determine whether the centre is deserving of accreditation or not. Once the moderator creates the reports, the centre is now known only in terms of the information she includes; the accreditation feedback report and the moderator report stand in for the actual daily work of educators. Through the work of the moderator, a ruling practice is being rendered routine. Her reports are used to construct an objective version of the centre using a specialized text. She is guided in her work as part of a complex organizational process.

To accomplish the work of the moderator report, the moderator synthesizes a series of organizationally relevant particularities which allow her to apply the formal category “deny or grant recommendation” for accreditation. An institutional requirement of accreditation is that applicant centres must achieve a grade of 80 % to be granted accreditation. This

requirement thus involves a double abstraction process that permits the validators' original observations to be coded and then be numerically represented in the moderator's report.

To achieve the translation into numbers, the moderator undertakes abstraction as an organizational process, activating institutional procedures that take place under the auspices of the decision-making process. The educators' work is made quantifiable within the managerial order. The moderator is provided with and is trained to use a set of analytical procedures that are selectively based on the validators' observations. The messy and unpredictable daily work of educators is glossed over and firstly categorized as best practice or not, and then neatly wrapped up as a set of scores. Points are assigned by the moderator to each coded indicator on the three observation checklists, and points are awarded for evidence rated by the validators as comprehensive, clear, and current in the portfolio report. Daily work with children is transformed into a mathematical measure. The moderator controls and acts upon the observations, and through coding and counting, ascertains what will be valued, and what stands in as an expression of the nonlocal ruling relations. The conversion to a numerical form also creates the appearance of neutrality. The moderator report consists of a scoring summary template for the portfolio report (worth 25 %) and the three observation checklists (worth 75 %). There is a uniform scoring procedure used by all moderators to ensure accuracy. The moderator I interviewed commented "So now by having that Excel™ spread sheet with all the formulas built in behind the scenes, there is probably more consistency between the moderators." An overall percentage is then calculated. Based on that score, the moderator activates the drop-down menu on the template and clicks either grant or deny. In this process of transformation, when a daily practice becomes a code and then a number or score, the work of educators is conceptualized and categorized and now constitutes reality, glossing over daily experience, and the educator's work is made invisible. Even though the

categories of the scoring form relate to the centre's practices as described by the validator, the centre's interests and daily work are transformed and subordinated by accreditation's institutional needs (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 37). The actualities are turned into textual realities that can be made actionable for the GC members. The moderator report is a vital link in the text-work-text process as it carries forward to the GC member the overall score and the moderator's recommendation to grant or deny accreditation via a drop-down box on the Excel™ template.

The second text produced by the moderator is the accreditation feedback report. This report comes to the moderator in the form of a blank template which is filled by the moderator and forwarded to the GC members for consideration in the decision-making process; later (after the accreditation decision is made) an exact copy is also given to the applicant centre. The moderator relayed that the report is generally "4–6 pages long, depending on the size of the centre." Comments and observations taken directly from the Site Visit Wrap Up Form produced by the validators are transposed almost identically onto the accreditation feedback report by the moderator; however, the information is organized differently. The Site Visit Wrap Up Form is organized by the 10 AQS standards. The accreditation feedback report is organized based on the tools and texts produced by the educators and validators. Applicant centres thus receive feedback on their portfolio report, their QEP, and the three observation checklists completed and coded by the validators. In this process the moderator rearranges the standard phrases provided by the validator to produce her report. "Part of my practice is at the end of reading everything and scoring the things I need to score and writing my report, I double check against the site visit wrap-up that the validators have done and I double check that the scoring matches with that information as well," said the moderator. The final section of the template is labelled Recommendations to the Applicant Program. The moderator can make general recommendations and also note items

“requiring immediate attention.” This she did thoughtfully—it is important to her. “I have the opportunity as the last piece of that report to say what would be requiring immediate attention from me. Then I hope they add it to their QEP and will work on it.”

This working up of the text is critical. Campbell and Gregor (2004) refer to it as organizationally/administratively useful work (p. 37), and again the standardized phrases gloss over the actualities of educator practice, creating a particular description of the centre. This workup allows decisions about granting or denying accreditation to be made rationally, efficiently, and equitably by constructing commensurable snapshot versions of quality care, all of which are purportedly measurable by the same standards.

#### **Accreditation Manager.**

Once the moderator completes the two texts they are forwarded via email to the accrediting agency. This next step of the text-work-text sequence is not listed in the official steps of the accreditation process, and hence is not visible to the educators in the field site. In this undocumented step in the process, the accreditation manager is sent the moderator’s documents by the accrediting office staff. According to the moderator I interviewed, the manager edits the report prior to its submission to the GC. “She just edits it so the language is consistent, formatting is consistent, and ensures the score sheet matches the report.” The GC member added, “Yes, the manager forwards them on and makes sure they are blind, just a file number. She is the stop-gap; if there is something that she thinks needs to be fixed she will send them back to the moderator to get fixed.”

In the text-work-text process this interchange works to standardize and neutralize decision-making process for the GC members. It is the last chance for the accrediting agency to work-up the texts prior to making the official decision.

### **Governing Council.**

In the text-work-text process of the accreditation decision-making process, the GC members have the final say. In the socially organized ruling relations of accreditation they have the ultimate power. They are unnamed and anonymous from the educators' perspective, holding in place the institutional relations of power.

About every two weeks, three members of the GC are sent a set of files from the accreditation manager that include the accreditation feedback report and the moderator report with its scoring spreadsheet, and the moderator's recommendation. The files represent the centres that have had a site visit, and for which the information from the educators via the validators and moderators has been worked up into a standardized format so that the GC members can apply their expert knowledge. A ruling relation is being rendered routine as the texts pass between moderator and GC members, and the centre is represented as objective through the standardized texts.

The GC member I interviewed said, "we have a working role as board members . . . then we have decision-making meetings, they are separate . . . we sign up for them . . . they are meetings that contain three of us and we are basically voting on whether we agree with the decision the moderator is making." Child care centres are identified only by their file number to the GC members. "I get the score sheet. There is no indication of who validated the site visit. I don't know who the moderator is and no indication as to what the program is."

GC members also produce a text—an electronic voting decision sheet prepared by AELCS to deny or grant accreditation. The voting sheet has a column for their decision and a column for comments. The GC member interviewed described the process she used in reaching her decision, explaining that she reads the accreditation feedback report first and looks to see the evidence that they have presented to meet the quality standards.

Based on this she can get a sense of what the child care centre has scored. She then refers to the moderator's report for the moderator's score sheet and recommendation, prior to making her decision to agree with or disagree with the moderator's recommendation. "I read the feedback report first, before I look at the score sheet. When I read the feedback report, based on the feedback that is on the sheet, I will have an idea what I think the scoring should be, and then I open up the score sheet [Moderator Report] and if I see a glaring difference than what I have just read, I may have some questions. That is how I judge whether or not it is consistent or if I need more information."

The scoring sheet is an institutional instrument. It is part of a decision-making process that follows specific rules about evidence of best practice and who is eligible for accreditation, based on the moderator's scoring procedures. GC members have to know how to act and take up these texts in an appropriate manner. The GC member's competence is needed and demonstrated. The GC member interviewed described how she carefully read and considered the texts she received to inform her decision. The GC member activates the text from the moderator. The activation of the text dictates a work process that constitutes a ruling relation.

The voting sheets are emailed back to AELCS and the results are compiled. We can see that the work of the GC members relies upon the work that came before in the text-work-text process.

GC decisions are usually made in isolation as GC members are dispersed geographically across the province. Decisions are usually unanimous, "usually we don't vote against moderator decisions" (GC member). Agreement from two of three GC members is needed to deny or grant accreditation. If there are any inconsistencies or a contentious issue with the file, a teleconference will be held so GC members can discuss the file together. The executive director (ED) or accreditation manager of AELCS will

join in the teleconference as well. Once the issue is discussed a decision is rendered. Aware of the power that her position yields, a GC member commented, “those accreditation feedback reports have some power to them, so we have to be careful.”

The ED or the accreditation manager will call the centre with the good news if successful. A secondary informant at the accrediting agency commented that the centres like “this human contact.” News of the successful achievement of accreditation is forwarded to ACYS, to ARCQE, and to AELCS office staff, where the child care centre’s name is posted on the AELCS website and added to the spreadsheet list of accredited centres. Successful centres are sent a certificate and congratulatory letter by AELCS office staff. They also receive a copy of the accreditation feedback report with the moderator’s recommendations.

If unsuccessful, the child care centre receives a letter from the ED at AELCS, outlining very specifically why the centre was not granted accreditation and the steps that it must take prior to reattempting. A secondary informant notes AELCS wants accreditation to be “an educative process, so child care centres are generally allowed six months prior to having another site visit to address the lack of evidence of meeting the quality standards” (Secondary informant, AELCS). In an attempt to cut costs and increase efficiency, since February 2011, if it is determined by AELCS that the shortcoming is mainly documentation or evidence missing from the portfolio, the centre may submit the paperwork to the AELCS office for review and no additional site visit is required.

The concept of the decision in the accreditation process is explicated here as a complex sequence of text-coordinated action that produces a new textual reality for the purpose of designating centres as accredited. In granting or denying accreditation, the power of the validators, moderators, and GC members is realized through the use of specific texts, tools, and



institutional procedures. Through the acts of textual production that occur in distinctive phases of action by the validators, moderators, and GC members in a particular text-work-text sequence the accrediting decision is produced. Their texts become a matter of record in the decision-making process.

As the texts are passed along in the decision process, they are transformed and worked up by each new reader. The nature of the relationship between the validators, moderators, and GC members is such that a factual narrative of the quality of the centre in question can be produced, based on their authorized roles. The moderator can rely on the validator to produce an accurate assessment of the quality of the centre without entering the premises because of the presupposed power the validators are prescribed that allows them to define the everyday world of child care from inside an authorized expert location, with the narrowly defined textually based evidence to bolster their case. Likewise the GC members rely on the moderator for a recommendation to grant or deny accreditation, with the knowledge that the objective, neutral process has been maintained. "So we try to keep the accreditation process as clean as possible. The three steps [validator to moderator to GC members] help get rid of that [biases and personal beliefs]" (GC member).

Validators, moderators, and GC members operate in spheres of activity that socially organize the accreditation decision. Each step in the process is reliant on what textually came before. There are numerous points in the accreditation decision-making process where work processes intersect. Pence (1996) calls these points "processing interchanges." She describes them in this manner: "processing interchanges are organizational occasions of action in which one practitioner receives from another a document pertaining to a case . . . and then makes something of the document, does something with it and forwards it on to the next organizational occasion for action" (p. 60). The interchanges, accompanied by a precise division of labour and distinct prescribed roles, help accomplish the

expert decision-making that is the work of the accrediting agency. In these interchanges the moderator and GC members “know” the work of educators as meeting or not meeting the AQS through texts. The texts that move along the interchanges represent or stand in for the educators. Moderators and GC members have only text-based knowledge of the centre upon which to base their decision.

To accomplish the accreditation decision their textual activities are concerted in a specialized bureaucratic way. The texts produced in the accreditation decision become the record of the work of the accrediting agency. The written comments and observations made by the validators during the site visit can be referred to if issues arise for the moderators or GC members later in the decision-making process. The texts then become the basis of statistical reporting done for the ministry. “We report weekly the number of centres in each region that are accredited or reaccredited, that are denied, the number of second site visits required . . .” reports a secondary informant from the accrediting agency, showing me a detailed Excel™ spreadsheet on her computer. The production of and publication of the decision allows the agency to accomplish the contractual obligation established by the ministry for the accrediting agency to accredit a required number of child care centres each year.

### **Tensions in the Accreditation Decision-making Process**

No conflict of interest must be allowed to sully the decision-making process. The accrediting agency has specific processes in place that are intended to decrease the likelihood of conflicting interests.

To ensure no conflict of interest, child care centres have the opportunity to indicate validators that they do not want to perform the site visit from a list of validators provided by AELCS. The instructions on the Accreditation Site Visit and Conflict Check form direct educators to “please indicate if you have any potential conflict of interest with any of the

validators listed below.” The director in the field site explained, “I don’t know yet who the validators will be. There were three that we crossed off due to conflict of interest. One was my teacher and the others were people that the girls [educators] knew.”

Validators are also made aware of the name of the centre and have the opportunity to self-select using a conflict of interest form if they do not want to do a site visit at a certain child care centre because of past experience with it. The lead validator I interviewed also noted that to avoid potential conflict of interest in her own region, she is assigned to site visits in other regions of the province. The moderator also has the option to opt out of moderating the site visit from a specific centre if a potential conflict of interest is evident.

Also as noted above, the GC conducts blind decision-making, although not always perfectly, as the GC member interviewed says. “When I read a report I might know that they are from Calgary, based on the fact that there is something that refers to them visiting the Space Science Centre there, or sometimes I know they are rural because of something that they are doing, typically you can pick up on a bit of on their geography but that is it.”

Validators and moderators must have the appearance of neutrality for the objective process of producing the accreditation decisions to appear to be working well. “You can have all the forms and all the processes, but the reality is when you are looking at a program, looking at quality, there is a subjective piece to it. Having all the stages helps remove some of that. Each one looks at it with a different background and opinion. I do think we have improved that a little bit, sometimes I would get them [reports] and get a bit of a feeling for either the moderator or the validators’ belief systems, and so moving from the validator to the moderator, they can peel some of that out so we can get back to looking at the standards and how they demonstrate them, and sometimes when I am looking at them you are not always aware of

that, you think you are objective but when someone else reads your work you realize that that has a slant to it”(GC member).

In the text-work-text sequence any error or bias is transferred along the chain of activity. Sometimes problems such as “justifiers” which are not seen as objective observations are evident in the reports, as the GC member notes. “The moderator’s report shows it coming from the validator, when they know the program had tried hard but didn’t make the mark . . . sometimes there are justifiers written in. For example, a program didn’t go through transitions well; however there was mixed age grouping that contributed to this. Lots of programs have mixed age groupings, you either did it or you didn’t, and there are always factors, so validators need to focus on what happened that day, not justify it” (GC member).

The experts in the text-work-text sequence of the decision-making process are policed by those above them in the hierarchical decision-making process. A formalized feedback loop is built in by AELCS to concert efforts towards objectivity and to reduce the appearance of bias and personal beliefs. For example, it is standard procedure for the moderator to give feedback to the validators on the quality of the site visit wrap-up and the coded observation checklists produced during the site visit. “I complete a feedback form about the information that I received from the lead and peer validators, I include any suggestions to them on more information that may have been useful to me in the process or anything that may have been a conflict of information, I note if there have been any discrepancies between what one comment is in one document and what another comment is in another.” In turn, the moderator explains that she receives feedback from the accreditation manager. If “she needs to do any edits or make any changes to my report, she would send me an email or call me and ask me to explain why I made the decision I did.” Work like this shows the active coordination of complex relations within the accreditation process.

As the quote earlier reminds us, the decision-making process is not completely transparent from the outside. For example, educators are not made aware of the numerical score that they received from the moderator; AELCS does not release this information. Also, educators at the field site are not aware of how the observation checklists and the portfolio report are scored by the moderator. The abstracting process that moves an observation to a code and then to a number is not public knowledge. The moderator I interviewed said, “the program never sees the scoring spread sheet. They see the report that says these are all the things that we saw you doing that give us evidence that you are meeting the standards.” The moderator I interviewed was reluctant to discuss the scoring. “I don’t know if I can share that with you. I thought about it last night and I didn’t know if that was confidential information.”

In summary, denying or granting the accreditation certificate is one of the main points of accreditation. As explicated here, based on interviews, textual analysis, mapping, and observations in the field site, the standardized decision-making process of the accreditation agency is carried out through a functional complex of coordinated work processes and relations, not in a single moment (Turner, 2003). The work processes of the validator, moderator, and GC members, with the support of the accrediting agency, are knit together to create the accreditation decision. The capacity of the text to rule depends on it carrying a message across sites (from centre to validators to moderator to GC) coordinating actions here with there. The official texts of accreditation are in play, in a sequence, in the decision-making process. It is not a neutral or fully transparent undertaking, as assumed by many educators. The data collected reveals how the texts of the accreditation decision-making process are in service to the accrediting agency, not in the service of the centre.

The importance of this decision to child care centres cannot be denied. In the field site there was a strong overall sense of the importance of

gaining accredited status. In fact there was a sense of urgency. Achieving accreditation means a change in status and reputation in the community, and access to significant funding. Granting accreditation is also important as a means for the accrediting agency to demonstrate that it is meeting its contractual obligation to the provincial government in the accountability regime of new public management.

In this chapter, I explored the process by which new accreditation experts are formed as knowers who have authorized and privileged knowledge. The experts, who are formerly peers, help produce the accreditation decision through a standardized text-work-text sequence. The knitted work of the expert's processes become synonymous with quality early learning and child care, producing accreditation as an institutionalized quality assurance program. As demonstrated by the text-work-text sequence of the decision-making process, educators' work is transformed into what can be counted as evidence for accreditation, a form by which it can be surveilled, reported, and ruled, and hence becomes bound up with and implicated in the ruling relations. Ruling is often "done in the interest of even handed and accountable administration" (Manicom, 1995, p. 11). Not understanding this means that despite good intentions, educators participate in ways of knowing concerted by ruling relations as they undertake to "do accreditation."

## **Chapter 7: Accreditation as a Socially Organized Way of Knowing**

In this chapter, I map the new relationships created by accreditation—new relationships to parents, the accrediting agency, government, and community through paperwork procedures, funding procedures, what educators have to produce for accreditation, and through the new forms of organization of work. These relationships organize accredited centres as accountable and capable of delivering quality child care. Educators are responsible for delivering quality child care. Next I explore the professional role that is produced for educators by and through accreditation and how it requires educators to “buy into” the quality improvement discourse and the notion of professionalism implied in it. It is necessary to discuss the work that accreditation does in the formation of a particular form of early childhood professional; a professional who activates accreditation as they talk, write, and think about their own accreditation work is produced by the ruling relations of accreditation, so educators themselves become constituents of their own ideological representation. This leads to exploring accreditation through Smith’s conception of an ideological code, and how accreditation as it is socially organized is emerging as a standardizing schema through which the work of child care is now becoming understood in Alberta.

A significant finding of this research is that accreditation is a different form of knowing, where the experiential and intuitive work knowledge of educators is subjugated and the new work processes of goal setting, producing evidence, and CQI are forefronted. The knowledge base of accreditation comes from imported discourses of business, manufacturing, and NPM which impose ruling relations on educators as they go about the work of accreditation. Local sites must fit into the relevances produced elsewhere instead of the other way around. The data leave me unconvinced

that the way of knowing intrinsic to accreditation is the solution to defining quality in the inherently inefficient, labour-intensive, unpredictable nature of child care. In the final section, I discuss the social organization of knowledge in accreditation as purportedly neutral and objective and the implications of this for the working knowledge of educators, and conclude that accreditation works as a tool for ruling relations but is less able to accurately capture the subtleties and complexities of the daily work of educators.

### **Looking Up into the Ruling Relations**

In the next section, I outline the specific evidence of the socially organized relations involved in the accreditation process. Drawing on primary and secondary informant interviews, textual analysis, and mapping techniques, I explicate how child care centres are hooked into new social relationships to which they are now accountable. When child care centres apply for accreditation they may not be aware of the ruling relations of accreditation because they are not immediately evident or known, as they are beyond the educators' previous experience. I try to discover and describe how accreditation coordinates new social relations that stretch beyond the local, and that hold child care centres accountable to new forms of management, control, and tracking. These new relationships are characteristic of institutional work organization, which surfaces the interlinking relationships that regulate, control, and standardize how work is done in the local site and coordinated across different local sites (Pence, 2011). New relationships are coordinated within child care centres, between child care centres and families, between educators themselves, and with the community. Strict tracking and reporting requirements between child care centres and the accrediting and technical support agencies and the provincial government draw child care centres into a new kind of accountability relationship. Accreditation coordinates a new relationship of competition between child care centres in Alberta.



Referring to Figure 3, we see frontline educators working directly with children and families in a manner that endeavours to support their multifaceted and diverse needs. The introduction of accreditation is made tangible by the executive director's reading and activation of the self-study guide and doing the work of implementing its tools, checklists, and forms to meet the accreditation standards as she takes up its concepts and directs the introduction of a new mode of operation between educators and families. This new mode of working, and specifically the introduction of a text—the mandatory standardized family survey—requires a change in the manner that families are encouraged to engage in the child care centre program. Educators thus are faced with adapting to a new social relationship with families, one in which their efforts are interpreted as customer service and product delivery, with the product being “quality care.”

#### **New social relations with families: parents as consumers in the child care market.**

In Alberta, parents must rely on the market for the provision of child care services. Child care is not viewed as a public service, but in an expression and response to discourses of neoliberalism it encapsulates the belief in the capacity of state-regulated market mechanisms to meet community needs for child care services (Press & Woodrow, 2005). The influence of neoliberal thought is evidenced as “all aspects of social behaviour are now reconceptualised along economic lines—as calculative actions undertaken through the universal human faculty of choice” (Rose, 1999, p. 141).

An ambition of accreditation is to further reinforce the market of child care. As a result of marketization, educators are positioned as the suppliers of a commodity to be traded in the child care market, and parents are positioned as consumers rather than partners. Markets are grounded in the rational choices of individual consumers. In this discourse, consumers engaging in choice within the child care market will lead to better child care

centres. Proponents believe that discerning consumers will select and then purchase services from an accredited centre. The discourse of the child care market is sold as legitimate by the depoliticization of child care, where the market solves the private problem of child care. In business, the value of the product produced is determined by the market, but child care centres are not producing a product whose value can be determined by the market. In child care “the ‘production process’ is concerned with basic human processes whose aim is to integrate children into society and build some basic skills and competence” (Dahlberg & Asen, 1994, p. 162). The market will never be able to determine the value of the work carried out in child care centres.

Parents are the buyers of child care space, yet children consume the daily experience of child care. The exercise of market choice is problematic if the child is the ultimate consumer of child care (Press & Woodrow, 2005). Parents, of course, make decisions about child care based on many variables. However choosing care and returning to work may not be a real choice—affordability and cost of care and availability of spaces limit choices also. In the field site educators saw themselves in a position to help educate parents, especially in selecting appropriate child care. The help they offered was grounded in the rhetoric of choice. “They are not only seeing us, they are seeing other centres as well, we say good, go review other centres and make the best choice for your family”(field site informant). The director of the field site added, “I tell them, take your time, go look at other centres and if another centre better fits you, that’s great, every family is different, and every family’s needs are different, if this centre is not for you, just let us know.”

Research indicates that parents may not have sufficient information to distinguish the level of quality care and education their child is receiving. Parents overestimate the quality of the child care they purchase relative to assessments of objective measures of quality. In a large American study, 90% of parents rated the programs as very good while the trained observers of the programs rated most of these programs as providing only mediocre care

(Helburn et al., 1995). Parents have a limited knowledge base for comparing child care choices and may not admit to selecting poor-quality care to protect themselves from feeling guilty (Barracough & Smith, 1996). The AELCS GC member I interviewed adds, "Parents often don't know they are not getting quality until [they move their child and] they get it. The child appears happy so the parent thinks it is good, and now they can't believe the difference. Like when they [child care licensing] shut a centre down, and the parents are saying 'it was great, my kids loved it'. From the parental view, all you are looking at is 'is my child happy when I come to pick them up, can I afford it, and are staff nice to me?'"

Larner and Phillips (1994) found that parents paid little attention to licensing requirements and educator training, and believe that the educators' nurturing ability is more essential than training. In interviews parents did not rate practical issues such as cost and location very highly, but in practice those factors were crucial. They conclude "that it will not be easy to convince parents to actively express their views of the child care they want and need . . ." (p. 58). Thus it is unlikely that parents will assert upward pressure on the market for improved care and education of their young children (Press & Woodrow, 2005).

For accreditation to work it relies on providing consumers freedom of choice and differentiating between the services provided by different child care centres. The accreditation program purportedly helps parents as consumers to make informed buying decisions. Informants had some doubts about the value of accreditation as a guarantee of quality. "I have worked in centres and wondered how it was possible that they got accredited, they are putting on a good front . . . accreditation is good but it is not the norm out there. It may be a bit of bullshit, a little bit. Parents are sending the kids to an accredited centre but it may not be a guarantee. Some centres may not follow the rules; they are just trying to look good" (field site informant). Another field site informant commented, " [Accreditation] is perceived by outsiders as

top quality care . . . the community thinks it is though, people working in the field and who are passionate about it are saying no, no, no, [accreditation] is not the right way to do it, but the majority of the community is on board. They hear the highlights of it . . . and think that it is great, they are accredited they have gone through the process . . .” The director of the field site believed that, “Parents need more than a list of accredited centres, they need to do their research, they need a list of good questions to ask because accreditation . . . accreditation standards aren’t that high, we don’t see it as the be-all, end-all, it is just the basics for us.”

Surveying families may seem innocent enough, but the family survey undertaken as part of the self-study is an element of an accountability system built into child care accreditation which collects subjective perceptions about quality from stakeholders designed to identify, quantify, and deliver what families “really want” (Rankin, 2004), hooking child care centres into the dominant discourse. The survey is used to determine whether users are pleased with the services. Customer satisfaction becomes a service goal and the basis for evaluating quality. The owner-operator commented that she had parents with high expectations at the centre. “Some are looking for the cheapest and closest centre and then so be it,” but most “are high maintenance and have an expectation of quality . . . we want them to be happy and comfortable with the centre. Their demands help keep our practice from sliding.” In this discourse, good quality child care attracts and satisfies customers, and quality becomes about fully satisfying customer requirements (Moss, 1994). It is analytically imperative to consider the implications of surveying families in this manner, as the survey is implicated in construction of the family as consumer.

Customer satisfaction surveys such as these, and the ways in which they value parental input, are built upon assumptions drawn from the business sector that purport the importance of consumer choice. As we saw above, it may be wrong to assume that parents will use their purchasing

power to shape the child care marketplace. In business, customer satisfaction is used to increase market share and drive corporate profits upward.

Unhappy customers can make or break a business, and satisfied customers are essential to profitability. What are the challenges of applying business sector strategies to a sector like child care where market forces are largely absent or skewed? Child care centres may not be motivated by profits and market share and the funding structures not fully driven by customer service orientation; instead subsidy and accreditation funding is based on targeting and needs standards, and centres are legally bound to meet legislative requirements (Centre for the Study of Social Policy, 2007).

An implicit objective of accreditation is to import business efficiencies around being responsive to customers. The survey as a useful tool of the discourse signals a centre's responsiveness to customers. This language is evident in the AQS and the self-study guide. Improvements are expressed in terms of improved quality, better-informed parent-consumers, and increased responsiveness of services. Can a customer service orientation coexist with the education and care of young children? Accreditation purportedly puts to use the new knowledge generated by surveys to inform practice and reassure families that quality care is occurring. Accreditation delivers accountability, reassuring taxpayers that they are getting value for the money invested, and mandates the need for child care centres to (continuously) demonstrate improvements for consumers.

In itself this language of producer and consumer starts to coordinate a new relationship between the child care educators and families. AQS Part B, Outcomes for Families, Quality Standard 4 states that, "Families are supported as the primary caregivers for their children," and Standard 5 states, "Relationships with families are supportive and respectful" (AAAELCS 2007a, Section 2, pp. 7-8). These beliefs about families draw on the discourse of family-centred practice. Family-centred practice has been adapted from the fields of medicine and rehabilitation and special needs education, and

widely adopted by early childhood educators who have been taught about it in preservice education courses on working with families. I note a strong contradiction here with the way that families are constructed as consumers by the accreditation survey. This does not match with the image of families in the AQS. The standards suggest a partnership approach to working with families; however the use of the survey negates this approach, replacing it with a producer-consumer relationship, and in this discourse “the customer is always right.” Relations of ruling are evident as the educators’ actions and activities are coordinated to accreditation requirements of the survey. The use of the survey intends a transformation of parents from partners in the care and education of their children into customers.

The implications of this transformation in social relations means that educators are then the producers of a product that they must sell to parent consumers to keep them happy. This is resulting in a trend towards value-added child care services, for example, child care centres offering more formalized types of dance, language, and music lessons to meet the demands of parent consumers. In the field site, the idea of dance and music lessons was floated to parents at a family meeting and was greeted with enthusiasm by the parents, with one parent offering the name of a person in the community that could offer lessons at the centre. The business ethic of good customer service may come to supersede educator’s ideas about enacting quality care and educators are facing real pressure to change the very essence of daily work and ways of knowing. If parents as consumers are “always right,” this sets up educators to be at the mercy of demanding parents. In the process they may lose their sense of professional knowledge—their own knowing may be overridden by what parents want for their individual child. If educators do not respond as parents want, they risk getting negative feedback on the next parent survey. Negative feedback from parents could jeopardize their accreditation status, especially if AELCS doesn’t think they have set appropriate goals to address parental concerns.

New relations with the broader community are also organized as child care centres attempt to meet accreditation criteria for partnerships, community involvement, and stakeholder engagement. In the portfolio report, centres must document the efforts they make to participate in and involve the broader community. Standard 9.1 necessitates that “there is a clearly defined process for involving community stakeholders” including requirements for community consultation, and Standard 10.1 specifies that child care centres report back to these stakeholders annually (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, pp. 12–13). In the field site, this began with goals and attempts to strengthen the child care centre’s relationship with the church community from whom it leases space. The centre also documented field trips to places in the neighbourhood and participation in community events. There are photos in their portfolio of community visitors such as the librarian and public health nurse engaging with the children. Accreditation requires new, more formalized reporting relationships with the community than previously existed, serving its accountability mandate.

### **Educators in new social relations.**

Educators are observed and surveyed as well, and their willingness to be surveilled and to enter into a continuous process of self-monitoring and self-reflection is constructed as what “good” and proper early childhood professionals do to meet the demands of consumers through the accreditation requirements. As one informant from the field site noted, “I have to be a bit more proactive in my job, make sure that all the required forms are signed and that all the information and processes are followed and that all the information is correct.” Another said, “day-to-day you just have to do your job. Being in the classroom helps out with accreditation. Accreditation is really evaluating you as frontline. It all comes down to the frontline, your interactions are worth 80 % of the accreditation grade . . . this is what they are watching for . . . so really the frontline people can make it or break it . . . it comes down to the interactions you have with the children and

with each other. We [the accreditation team] have to inform everyone of the importance of these interactions.”

The self-study guide encouraged the centre director to coordinate the efforts of frontline educators, introducing a new relationship and mode of supervision into her work as she took up its concepts and activated its coordinating potential in her subsequent actions with staff. She had to find ways to draw her educators willingly into the organizing and authorizing practices and discourse of accreditation.

As described earlier, the textually mediated accreditation process leads educators to produce accounts of their work in the textual formats and language (checklists, QEP, portfolio report, and portfolio) that they learned would be regarded as legitimate and authorized by AELCS consultants, validators, and moderators, and ultimately the governing council. As they were hooked into new social relations with new experts, they aligned themselves with the accreditation discourse in an effort to “look good” for the accreditation site visit. In this way, their work processes could be judged and valued by AELCS experts in a routine process and manner as part of the ongoing discourse of accreditation ultimately leading to the decision to confer accredited status.

AELCS is in turn authorized by the provincial government as the official accrediting agency, granting or denying accreditation status, and as this research has demonstrated, contributing to the organization of work done at the level of frontline educators. According to their website (2009), “Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services (AELCS) is a not-for-profit organization, funded and contracted by Alberta Children and Youth Services to deliver accreditation services to child care and out of school care programs that have engaged in an intensive self-study of their practices. Our role is to assess child care programs against quality standards of care.” Child



care centres are drawn into a subordinate position in a hierarchal relationship with AELCS.

The Alberta government Ministry of Child and Family Services “owns” the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program (ACCAP). The program and tools belong to the ministry, and it is supported in the Child Care Branch of the ministry. A ministry official explained to me that they choose to contract out child care accreditation services, so that the department remains more at arm’s length. This ensures that the department has an independent body that delivers services and oversees the accreditation process, and can appear neutral and objective. The ministry however retains control of the funding portion of the accreditation program to avoid the appearance of conflict of interest that might result in negative optics. This stance reflects a trend in NPM labelled decentralization, which describes the separation of the provision of services from that of purchasing them. Separating these functions is a method that shapes the relationship between the provider and the purchaser of services, and often this relationship is formalized through quasi-contractual agreements (Yamamoto, 2003).

AELCS is under contract with ACYS to deliver accreditation. This contract is awarded and vetted in a competitive tendering process under the procedures and guidelines the provincial government uses to procure services. The tendering process is intended to be transparent and fair. If the government so chooses, they can award the contract to another agency, as they did in 2009–2010, contracting the accreditation of school-age care programs to the Canadian Accreditation Council. Since then, AELCS has regained the contract for school-age care programs, as well as continued to hold the contract to accredit child care centres and family day home agencies. The contract is designed as a number of “deliverables and targets” that are administratively relevant. The target includes specific numbers for categories of types of accreditation service, and deliverables are mainly in three areas including communication of accreditation information to child care

communities and to the public, providing accreditation services to new child care services, annual reporting, and reaccrediting those centres that reach the three-year mark. For example, in the year that this research was undertaken, according to a secondary informant AELCS is contracted to accredit a maximum of 50 child care centres and reaccredit 240 child care centres. If it exceeds this number it will not receive additional funding from ACYS, so accordingly, internal tracking by AELCS is essential.

AELCS, as the contract holder, is responsible for meeting these objectives and is evaluated by ACYS on how well it meets these targets and deliverables. A tension arises as there is pressure for their work to become less about ensuring child care quality, and more about meeting the targets and deliverables and producing evidence for the provincial government for its management and evaluation. For example, in the 2009-2010 budget year, according to a secondary informant AELCS had met its reaccreditation targets by February, so even though there were centres ready to go through the reaccreditation site visit process, no reaccreditation visits were conducted in March and the agency moved pending visits into the next fiscal year (after April 1).

The ministry is also responsible for licensing and monitoring child care centres in Alberta through 10 regional Child and Family Service Authorities (CFSAs). Regionalization of children's services in Alberta occurred as part of a government restructuring in an effort to decentralize and increase the efficiency of service delivery. According to the Government of Alberta (2009) "the CFSAs deliver child and family services on behalf of the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Each CFSA is an agent of the Crown under the Minister's direction. The business and affairs of each CFSA is governed by its board. . . . The CFSAs are responsible for services related to child intervention, child protection, foster care, adoptions, children with special needs, prevention of family violence and day care support services."

Licensing officers from the CFSAs visit child care centres to ensure that they are in compliance with the Alberta Child Care Licensing Act and Child Care Licensing Regulation. Centres applying for accreditation must have a valid provincial Operating License and demonstrate that they have consistently met the licensing requirements that apply to their service (AELCS, 2007). Child Care Licensing and ACCAP work in concert to draw centres into compliance with government mandates, legislation, and funding requirements. For example, licensing officers send licensing status change reports to ACCAP, where they are tracked in a spreadsheet.

The relationship between accreditation standards and licensing requirements is explained in this manner in the self-study guide:

“By definition, accreditation and licensing have different functions. Licensing provides a legislated “floor” below which no child care service is permitted to operate. It typically includes factors such as space, range of equipment, number and ages of children, staff/child ratios and training requirements for staff. Such factors *contribute* to quality.

Accreditation builds on this legislated “floor” to look at factors that *determine* quality. The emphasis is on staff practices and actual outcomes for children and families. It shifts the focus from meeting minimum standards to continuously striving towards providing higher levels of care” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 1, p. 2).

Although this statement seems clear-cut, there are numerous overlaps between what licensing mandates through regulation and the voluntary requirements to achieve accreditation. One example is the accreditation requirement stipulating that child care centres create a no-smoking policy, when the Child Care Licensing regulation already orders that a license holder ensures that no person smokes on the premises and that staff members may not smoke at any time or place where child care is being provided. If licensing is monitoring this regulation, the requirement for a no-smoking policy seems

redundant and leads credence to complaints by informants that at times accreditation is “a waste of time” and requires “pointless” policies. “What they have us doing right now is a lot of make-work stuff,” said a secondary informant. It is interesting to note that accreditation does not require that the three elements of quality commonly referred to as “the iron triangle” (group size, education level of staff, and the child-to-educator ratio) are any higher than the minimums set by licensing.

Although purported to build on licensing’s minimums and ensure excellence in child care services, my review of the self-study guide found only three places where child care centres were specifically asked (if possible) to demonstrate quality standards higher than those for licensing. These include: an indicator on the Physical Environments Checklist that indoor space exceeds the regulatory requirements (of three square metres per child), one indicator in the QEP out of 120 (Standard 1, Indicator 1.2) requiring that “programs exceed minimum health and safety standards,” and one request in the portfolio, out of 45 indicators of evidence (PR 11), for the centre to indicate “what documented policies do you have that indicate you exceed regulatory requirements?” Failing to provide evidence of these three indicators would not jeopardize achievement of accreditation status, as child care centres could still obtain the required score of 80 %. This means that some child care centres may achieve accreditation without actually exceeding any of the minimum licensing requirements.

This gives credence to one of the biggest complaints of child care informants that accreditation is “too basic” and that its requirements “do not go far enough.” A secondary informant agreed. “It still feels pretty basic to me; I don’t see anywhere where accreditation exceeds the basics.” It also helps to explain the high accreditation rates. The owner-operator of the field site noted however that it would be a challenge for many centres to meet higher accreditation requirements. “Most centres are just meeting the basics. . . . Most centres couldn’t do it if the bar was any higher, they can

barely do it as it is.” Many informants felt that the accrediting agency should implement spot checks similar to the unannounced visits that licensing officers perform. “I think it should be a bit more like licensing, not an expected visit, AELCS should pop in twice a year and ask for continued evidence of what is happening, to see accreditation standards continuing. They are not supposed to stop but some centres do.” An AELCS informant responded that this is something AELCS would like to do, but it is not part of their current contractual agreement with ACYS and would be expensive to implement.

AELCS also serves as a tracking and reporting functionary to the province. For example, AELCS reports the child care centres that have requested site visits to ACCAP. ACCAP then checks with Licensing for any issues. If all clear, this is communicated back to AELCS and the site visit is allowed to proceed. AELCS is also required by its contract with the province to monitor the forward momentum of child care centres seeking accreditation by a process termed “case management.” This requires AELCS to contact child care centres seeking accreditation monthly to check on their progress. ACCAP is notified if child care centres do not request a site visit prior to the 15-month deadline, in which case their funding may be jeopardized.

According to ACYS (2011a), child care centres are eligible for two levels of funding from ACCAP depending on their accreditation status: preaccreditation or accreditation funding. Preaccreditation funding is available for a maximum of 15 months from the time the centre applies for accreditation, as the child care centre works through the self-study guide and by which time a site visit must be requested. Preaccredited centres are eligible for \$4,000 in quality funding grants (paid quarterly). Staff support funding (wage enhancement) is provided based on the three Alberta Staff Certification levels. Child Development Assistants receive \$1.44/hr, Child Development Workers receive \$2.70/hr, and Child Development Supervisors

receive \$4.42/hr. This funding is paid monthly. Child care centres also receive a benefit contribution grant of 16 % of staff support funding. Child Development Assistants and Workers are eligible for up to \$1,000 per year in professional development grants.

Centres are eligible for accreditation funding at an enhanced level once they have officially been accredited. Accredited centres are eligible for \$7,500 annually in quality funding grants (paid quarterly). Staff support funding (wage enhancement) is increased for Child Development Assistants to \$2.14/hr. Child Development Workers receive \$4.05/hr and Child Development Supervisors receive \$6.62/hr. This funding is paid monthly. Child care centres also continue to receive a benefit contribution grant of 16 % of staff support funding. Child Development Assistants and Workers continue to be eligible for up to \$1,000 per year in professional development grants in fully accredited centres. There is also a Staff Attraction Allowance of either \$2,500 or \$5,000 paid to staff depending on experience, hours worked, and certification level. To continue to receive funding the centre must renew its accreditation status annually and be reaccredited every three years.

According to educators in the field site, the funding provided by accreditation is very important and beneficial. "Accreditation gives you extra funding to take courses. I think that is just wonderful. Now they have the wage top up. That makes a difference. So it is positive." Another field site informant commented that she "hopes to see accreditation funding become more. It is probably maxed out. Will it go higher with the incentives? I doubt if it will go to \$7.00 or \$8.00 more an hour. More funding is a key point of accreditation . . . we will move from preaccreditation funding to accreditation funding and this will mean a \$2.00/hour increase for me. I get \$4.05 for pre-accreditation funding now. I wonder if the government can maintain the funding, if not they will start losing employees. I can't live on less than \$20.00 an hour, currently my wage means I have to live with my parents, but I can't do that until I am 40! Most make barely above minimum wage!"

Another educator said that she was aware of the benefits that accreditation provides, “like more workshops for staff, so they can keep learning. Professional development funds from accreditation help pay for the sessions. PD costs money and I can’t afford it myself. I can only stretch my paycheque so far. It is well known that day care does not pay well. Accreditation provides an increase in salary, but PD funding is the real benefit.”

Child care centres submit monthly claim and report forms to the CFSA office in their region (ACYS, 2011a) to receive the wage enhancements. The importance of tracking, reporting, and accurate numbers is expressed by a ministry official, saying, “the numbers come from us. The numbers are accurate here . . . because it is about the funding, knowing expenditures on a monthly basis and the forecast for future months and coming up for the fiscal year, so that we know the numbers of centres being accredited or reaccredited and the number of programs coming up for the year so we could budget accordingly and that is where you get the number—83 million dollars [referring to the ACCAP budget for the 2011–2012 fiscal year]. It is all based on the numbers.”

ACCAP also conducts financial audits of child care centres that receive accreditation funding as part of the Alberta government’s quality assurance framework. This is to ensure that money received by child care centres is used within the required parameters of the ACCAP program, that child care centre funding claims are accurate, and that educators receive the funding that they are entitled to for wage enhancement and professional development funding. According to ACYS during 2009-2010 budget year, 164 child care programs were audited.

The new funding program under accreditation represents a significant change in Alberta, where conservative governments have been reluctant to directly fund private businesses. “In the past the Government of Alberta has

resisted stakeholder requests to provide funding for the wage enhancements of front line day care staff due to concerns about subsidizing private businesses with public money, in the case of privately owned commercial day care centres” (Cleland, 2002, p. 14). The Cleland/KPMG report (2002) recognizes that wage enhancements would be easier to implement if the majority of child care centres were nonprofit as they are in most other provinces.

This new form and process for funding draws child care centres into a new relationship with the provincial government. Prior to accreditation, and since the demise of the provincial operating allowance in 1999, aside from payments on behalf of low-income families through the provincial child care subsidy program there was no direct government funding of child care centres. Cynical informants suggest that accreditation is a way for the Alberta government to legitimize insertion of funding into the system, complaining that an infusion of capital was long overdue. The government’s efforts to “level the playing field” between for-profit and nonprofit child care resulted in accreditation being a choice for all Alberta child care centres.

Seeking accreditation in Alberta is a voluntary choice. However, the social organization in which the centre is embedded, including the positioning of childcare in the marketplace rather than being viewed and funded as a public service, works to decrease child care centres’ real choices around participating or not. As demonstrated by the high uptake of the ACCAP program, the package of funding incentives offered by ACYS acts to regulate the decision of child care centres to become accredited.

Accreditation and its discourse of quality assurance organize the owner-operators’ decisions to seek accreditation, and also draw child care centres into a competitive stance with each other. If a centre can’t get accredited it may not be able to compete for staff or attract families. An AELCS governing council member commented, “For programs that haven’t



made it through the accreditation process it definitely makes it more difficult for them to compete.” For example, Alberta Health Services offices distribute lists of accredited child care centres in their new moms groups. I would speculate that child care centres not on the list are unlikely to be chosen by families trying to arrange child care. Staff may be unwilling to remain in an unaccredited child care centre if they can get a job in an accredited centre and be eligible for the wage enhancement. Accreditation structures an inherent hierarchy of child care centres in Alberta, changing the previous social organization of centres with each other—now centres that are accredited are “better” than those that are not. Centres that achieve accreditation are encouraged to use their status as a marketing tool to recruit families and staff. They are also promoted to the community on the AELCS website.

Accreditation funding and the social organization and ruling relationship it produces draw child care centres into another type of reporting relationship with the provincial government. The monthly work hours of educators are tracked and reported to the government on monthly claim forms. Direct child care hours, when educators are directly responsible for the care and supervision of children, are eligible for wage enhancement funding. Educators can also receive wage enhancement for up to eight hours of programming and meeting or maintaining accreditation standards per month, so this item is tracked and reported also. Provincial government “Turnaround Documents” are coded based on the educator’s position, and proof of hours worked must be provided by the child care centre based on the educator’s attendance records. This is an example of how the administrative textual practices of accreditation transform the experienced local and particular practices of child care and the work of educators with children and families into standardized forms so that it can be ruled (Manicom, 1995, p. 7).

Reporting and tracking between AELCS, ACCAP, and Licensing coordinate child care centres to ensure accountability for service delivery and funding based on the Alberta government's terms and conditions. Here we can see how accreditation operationalizes the orientations and practices of NPM, injecting accountability and promoting this as a better way for government to govern and control child care centres. Accreditation imports these business-style practices, catalyzing a new mode of social organization into which child care centres are drawn, often unwittingly.

AELCS informs ARCQE when child care centres apply for accreditation. ARCQE was established in November 2004, after consultation with the provincial child care community determined that centres would require assistance and "technical support" to proceed through the accreditation process and be successful at achieving accreditation. Recognizing that accreditation would require "capacity building" and involve "new work for the sector," ARCQE was launched almost in parallel to the opening of the accrediting agency, with the purpose of providing assistance to child care centres as they went through the self-study process and prepared for the site visit. Initially the ministry funded a significant portion of the supports, providing 40 hours of "coaching" time at no cost to a child care centre once it applied for accreditation. Centres needing assistance prior to applying could also involve ARCQE, through a fee-for-service plan. Licensing officers would often recommend this if centres did not appear ready to tackle accreditation. Over the years, as ARCQE's contract with ACYS has been renegotiated, there has been a continuous decrease in government funding, with the government's goal to have ARCQE become a strictly fee-for-service agency. As reported by a secondary informant from ARCQE, there is currently no funded support for child care centres from ARCQE. The informant insists that centres that choose to begin the accreditation process now, compared to previously, are at a disadvantage as government works to

improve “efficiency of services” and as the number of accredited centres grows and the funding level decreases.

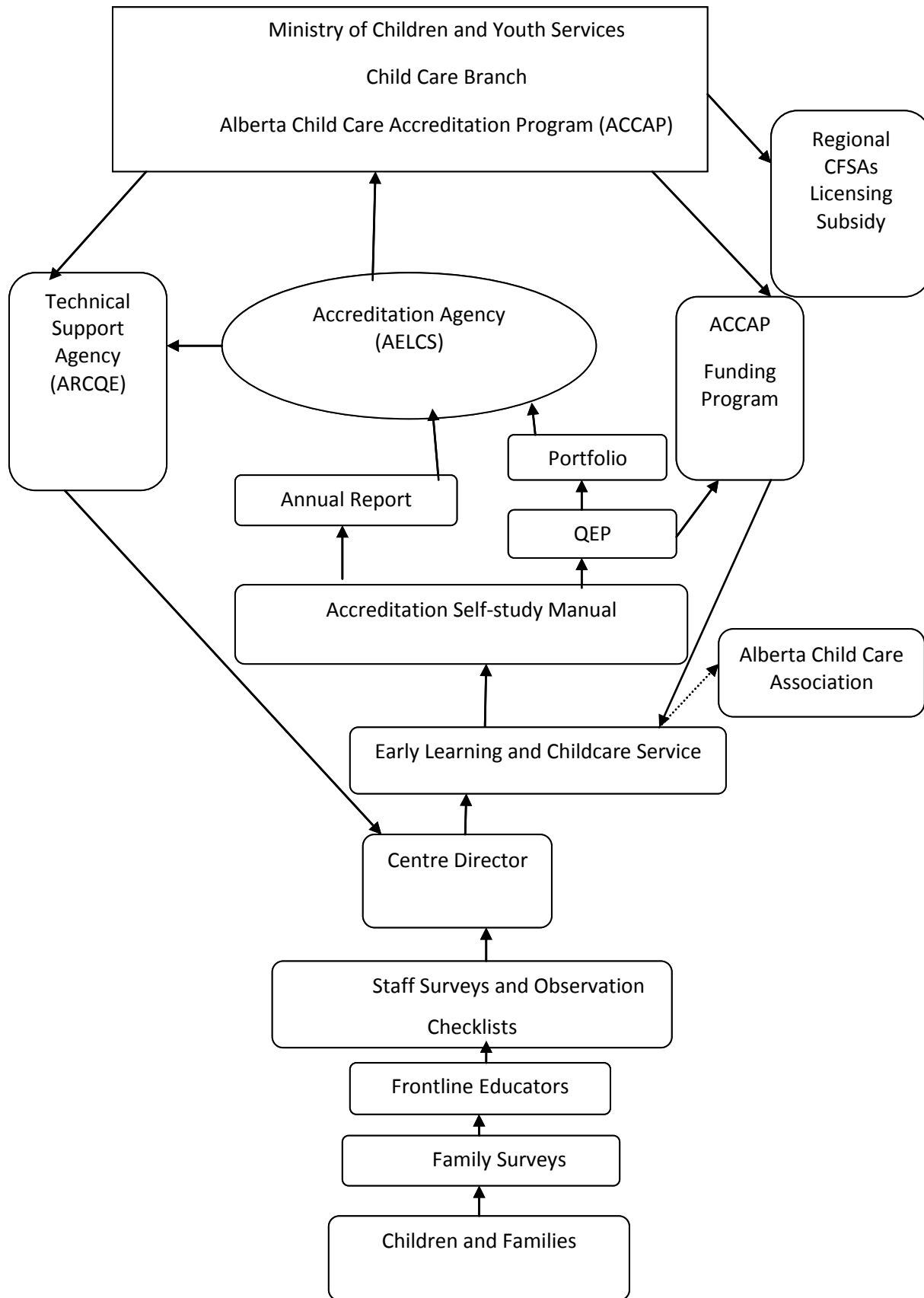
### **New Social Relations as Coordination**

Enacted here is an enormous and complex coordination effort between all parties involved. Through the ACCAP program, AELCS, and ARCQE, ACYS hooks child care centres into a concerted organizing nexus that is already underway as they engage in the accreditation process. These coordinating bodies, with their own local work processes focused on efficiency and accountability, are already in action and working as ruling relations to draw child care centres into the accreditation process on the government’s terms and conditions. Locating accreditation texts within this ongoing sequence of action implicates them in the coordination of child care centre efforts to gain accreditation. These social processes have generalizing effects.

In Figure 3 the generalizing and standardizing effects of the social relations of accreditation become evident. According to IE, it is the replicability of texts that provides for standardization and ruling. The necessity for this standardization is noted in planning documents for the accreditation agency. “The standardized collection and reporting of information facilitates the familiarity of all players with the accreditation process, assurance of the use of comparable evidence across accreditation studies and the assessment and continuing refinement of the accreditation process” (Ogston, 2003). AELCS counts on the texts of accreditation being taken up and used in a similar manner across all child care centres in Alberta. Multiple replications of exactly the same checklists, surveys, portfolio reports, and other accreditation texts are essential to the standardizing of accreditation work processes across time and various child care locations. Texts insert institutional relationships into the accreditation process. As noted earlier, as texts are read and worked-up they orient educators. Texts

are key components of the accreditation process; they are produced, passed on to others, and then become the basis of the educators' new work processes. As we trace these "texts in action" in the local settings of child care centres, we begin to recognize how texts and textual systems coordinate these new social relationships at a distance and across time. The ubiquity of discourse and its authorization by the ruling relations allow accreditation discourses to function as universal knowledge. It is the drawing together of knowledge, text, and power in IE that makes visible socially organized ruling relations.

The standardized tools and texts of accreditation are expected to produce a standardized and verifiable version of quality child care service delivery. This allows us to generalize beyond a particular research field site, as we can look institutionally at the generalizing processes of ruling through accreditation. Closely examining and describing how the accreditation process was accomplished in one child care centre can act as the basis for describing how the accreditation process becomes a set of generalized relations and textually coordinated practices across the province. As illustrated in Figure 3, this allows us to look up from the standpoint of educators and see the complex of socially organized relations instituted by accreditation that are coordinating thoughts and actions through new work processes, discourses, and texts. As described, much of this work is coordinated by new experts. It is relevant for educators to gain awareness of these new relationships and their coordinating effects. As a result of accreditation, educators will be learning how to navigate this new field of relationships from a new, socially organized professional role.



**Figure 3. Looking up into ruling relations—the hierarchy of socially organized relations instituted by the accreditation process for child care centres in Alberta.**

## **The Work of the “New” Professional Educator doing Accreditation**

Accreditation is supposed to function as a mechanism for increasing the professionalism of early childhood educators. This is an explicit goal. The child care workforce is depicted in the academic literature as requiring stabilization and capacity building (Osgood, 2009). Human resource issues in the early childhood sector have been extensively researched, with the nationally focused Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) in a leading role. Recruitment and retention challenges have been well documented (CCHRSC, 2009). Human resource issues tied to professionalism, such as wages, and working conditions in Canada have been studied, with the best example being the “You bet I care!” research carried out between 1998 and 2000 and reported in 2000 by Goelman, Doherty, Lero, LaGrange, and Tougas. The Canadian Child Care Federation has produced a code of ethics and a set of occupational standards for early childhood educators. This demonstrates the discursive work that has been done to define and standardize the core role of educators and directors. There is a well-developed body of literature related to the professionalization of the early childhood workforce (Osgoode, 2006, 2009; Fenech, Robertson, Sumsion, & Goodfellow, 2007; Fenech & Sumsion, 2007; Grieshaber, 2002). A full discussion of this literature is beyond the boundaries of this research; however, I did observe that specific to accreditation in relation to professionalism that it works to position educators as a certain type of professional. I explore this “new professional” in the next section.

Educators who are knowledgeable and responsive are desired, as this is perceived to enhance quality child care. Accreditation discourse explicitly reflects a desire to “increase the visibility and credibility of the early childhood profession” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 2, p. 1) and to “improve

child care by promoting high standards of professional practice” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 2, p. 1). The educators at the field site have taken up this language and were using accreditation to help frame themselves as professionals. For example they said:

“I hope that accreditation helps them [families] figure out we are more than glorified babysitters.”

“With accreditation, we look more professional in the parents’ eyes.”

“[Accreditation] makes us look more like teachers.”

“Accreditation shows recognition from the government as well.”

It is possible to understand the appeal of this discourse. Early childhood advocates have been insistently working for a more professional view of the field for decades now, hoping that an increased sense of professionalism would lead to increased wages and accompanying feelings of worth for the profession. The techniques of IE provide the researcher with the opportunity to examine “the powerful relations and social processes in which [an educator is] implicated and in which her consciousness and ‘self’ emerge and are shaped and formed ongoingly in the courses of action and activities in which she is an active participant” (Turner, 2003, p. 77).

Pence defines professions as “legally credentialed bodies of specialists whose training and practical experience participate in a scientifically and/or technically developed way of knowing that they bring as a practice to the local settings of institutionalized work organization” (Pence, 2011, p. 15). In Alberta, the provincial government has legislated through the Alberta Child Care Licensing Act and the Alberta Child Care Licensing Regulation (Alberta Government, 2007a, 2008), three levels of professional certification for early childhood educators—Child Development Assistant, Child Development Worker, and Child Development Supervisor. As noted in the introductory chapter of this research, to be certified as a CDA one 45-hour course in child

development must be completed. CDW certification requires completion of a one-year certificate in Early Learning and Child Care or equivalent, and the highest level, CDS, requires the completion of a two-year Early Learning and Child Care diploma program or an equivalent level of training.

These requirements are comparable to those in other provinces—for example, no province requires that all educators have post-secondary education. However, because of a shortage of trained educators during the boom years, the Alberta government diluted the certification requirements by opening up and extending the definition of equivalent to include educational credentials not as directly linked to early childhood. For example, those with a Social Work degree can be certified at the highest level, and those with a Nursing degree or an Arts degree in sociology or psychology can receive Child Development Worker certification. Although these credentials may involve learning about some aspects of caring, and include some coursework in child development, neither prepare graduates to provide care and education to young children in group care settings. Testimonial evidence from the field suggests that this change has negatively impacted the level of care young children are receiving; especially affected are process quality factors related to sensitive interactions and appropriate child guidance strategies.

Recent statistics show that 50 % of staff in licensed child care centres in Alberta are certified at the CDA level, having completed only one 45-hour course, and 4 out of 10 are certified at the highest CDS level (Muttart Foundation, 2011). The limited amount of professional education received by educators from post-secondary institutions in one 45-hour course, or from training not related specifically to early childhood, may limit their ability to form a strong internalized sense of professionalism, and accreditation discourse rushes in to fill the gap.



I have already described the reconceptualization of care and education as 10 quality standards, and the reorganization of the work of educators under accreditation in relation to goal setting, producing evidence, and CQI, and how this aligns to institutional interests. Professionalism is socially organized by accreditation as the “responsibilization” of the workforce (Strathern, 2000) through its CQI initiative. Strathern (2000) notes how audit culture works to change the identity of professionals and the way they conceptualize themselves. These themes are evident in the new work process of CQI, pressing towards professionalization and responsibilization of the early childhood workforce, where under accreditation quality is every educator’s responsibility and all are empowered to take a role and commit fully to the process. For example, the AELCS self-study guide prompts, “all staff can be involved in brainstorming and gathering evidence for the portfolio” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 4).

In this discourse, responsible educators volunteer for accreditation and truly want to provide more than required by minimum regulation. For example, an informant in the field site described how she “voluntarily joined the centre’s accreditation team to learn more. When I started my knowledge was slim to none. I was not forced; I asked if I could help.” Another noted the commitment required, saying, “not only Level III’s (Child Development Supervisors) or only level I’s (Child Development Assistants), it has to be all individuals committed to it wholeheartedly, not half-heartedly.” As described earlier in this chapter, responsible educators are open to being watched and evaluated, and accept that they can do better. Under Standard 6.3, the first indicator reflects the responsible, reflective educator who continually looks for areas of improvement. “Reflection on practice is intentional and ongoing” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 9). The self-study process itself is intended to help staff “feel ownership and take responsibility” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1). A quote from an educator in the self-study guide highlights the process of responsibilization. “The self-study format gave staff the

responsibility to analyze their job performance and, as a result, improve on their own by remembering their training” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 4, p. 1).

This is echoed by an informant from the accrediting agency who believes that because of accreditation, “there is a significant increase in professionalism by doing the self-study and actually looking at strengths and improvements in a constructive and educative way.” Through the ACCAP program’s ruling relations, educators are rewarded with wage enhancement funding by taking responsibility for professional development and continual improvement, staying current, and applying best practices. According to the discourse of accreditation, all Alberta educators (with or without specific early childhood credentials themselves) have the responsibility and potential to offer high quality child care, if they carefully and thoughtfully do what the accreditation self-study guide tells them to do. Through the self-study they are encouraged to engage in a process of becoming more professional— a proper and responsible professional who works on self (self-improvement through reflection and continuous improvement).

### **Self-reflection.**

There is something indisputable, common sense, and natural to the suggestion that educators should be thoughtful and reflective about their work (Smyth, 1992, p. 284). “Not to examine one’s practice is irresponsible . . . to monitor one’s performance is a responsible professional act” (Ruddick, 1984, pp. 5–6). However, a certain type of self-reflection is coordinated by accreditation. When it comes to improving quality it is up to educators to “think” their way to it. Thompson (2010) gives evidence that the assumption that critical reflection always leads to best practice should be examined. In her experience, self-reflection often leads to a “tick box” mentality. As Fendler (2003) confirms, some reflective practices may simply be exercises in reconfirming, justifying, or rationalizing preconceived ideas.

From the data in this study there is evidence that self-reflection has become co-opted and institutionalized by accreditation. The hijacking of self-reflection transports the seemingly positive connotation of this practice to the purely practical; the practice is transformed from the intrinsic to the instrumental or technical. In accreditation, self-reflection through the texts of the self-study guide is directly linked to the technical work processes of goal setting, producing evidence, and CQI. Self-reflection appears, on the surface, to free up educators from external control mechanisms by allowing them to participate in conversations about their practice, and providing autonomy to do what they like to increase the quality of care. Rather accreditation's self-reflection coordinates the technical and organizes reflection through new work processes.

Reflection is organized as answering questions about practice in a manner that forwards the ability of AELCS to judge evidence, not necessarily creating opportunities for educators to grapple with large, important issues of relevance to them. For example, in the portfolio report educators are asked to reflect on the following questions: "How are you documenting children's progress? What are the procedures you use to ensure medication is administered safely? What are the practices in place to ensure staff practice thorough handwashing routines . . . ? Do your meeting notes clearly document your discussion with staff?"

Through the social organization of accreditation, reflection plays a strictly utilitarian role (Goodman, 1988). Reflection for accreditation becomes a means of "focusing upon ends determined by others not an active process of contesting, debating, and determining the nature of those ends" (Smyth, 1992, p. 280). I observed educators working to secure immediate, practical, and concrete answers to these questions as they ticked the boxes. Instead of opening up, self-reflection is used as a way to ensure conformity to narrow constructions of quality. Reflection then is hooked into the

accrediting agency's and the ministry's notions of quality standards, and is used for surveillance and tracking of performance.

Through the dominant discourse, educators are convinced that accreditation is what professionals do to ensure quality. In this manner, educators are dominated by ruling relations that work upon their sense of self. As described earlier, accreditation, although ostensibly supposed to increase the professional status of educators, actually denies them the role of expert, awarding it instead to others such as validators, moderators, and GC members with official authorization to judge best practice.

In this discourse it is up to individual educators to "get better" at their jobs, which essentially removes the focus from institutional issues. It is the responsibility of educators, through their motivation and commitment, to raise the quality of child care, often as noted without specific early childhood education themselves. Individualizing the problem of quality by leaving it to educators to reflect on may lead to a hopeless search by educators for solutions to problems that lie outside their control and reflect broader social, economic and political issues.

Professionals control themselves through internalization rather than external coercion; as Grieshaber notes (2002) accountability systems create a "docile yet productive" work force (p. 162). The new professionals working under accreditation are, as Foucault may suggest, self-reflective, self-investigative, self-regulating and self-disciplining (Fendler, 2001). Under the discourse of accreditation, professionalism is supposed to be experienced as increased self-control and responsibility, even though AELCS retains a form of coercive power, especially through the standardized textual format of the self-study guide. The director in the field site tried to put this feeling into words, saying she felt accreditation "is too laid back but so structured. Everyone's accreditation plan should be different but in this sense they all have to be the same."

As the director tried to describe, although encouraged to speak for themselves by the texts of the self-study guide, (for example filling in the “what we do” boxes), there is no room for alternative voices. Dorothy Smith (1999), in describing the power of theory to subsume divergent voices, but also applicable to this discussion, says “there is no space, operating under the text’s instruction, for an alternate ‘we’ ” (p. 153). Professionalism as responsabilization takes on a certain kind of coordinating in and through accreditation, as increased control of educators and their practices, with an accompanying removal of expertise to the extralocal from the local setting. This leaves behind in the local site a particular professional who is open to scrutiny, change and continual improvement—one who is expected to remain objective and neutral as he or she performs and behaves in ways authorized by accreditation and its cadre of experts, and who meets institutional goals, reframing accountability away from the institutional and on to themselves, the individual educator, accepting the responsibility as their own. Accreditation persists as a mechanism of occupational change and control to promote organizational and governmental objectives. This notion of professionalism as responsibility leaves educators with little alternative except to act in the “appropriate and proper ways,” producing the appropriate conduct and “best practices” as coordinated by the ruling relations of accreditation. This dynamic concert the substitution of organizational for professional values, where bureaucratic and managerial controls are imposed from outside the local child care site to ensure accountability and performance targets for the accrediting agency and the provincial government.

The vaguely defined notion of best practice “as a set of procedures that exceed the minimum requirements set out by Licensing” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 8, p. 2) is influential in narrowing of the new professional under accreditation. The concept of best practice draws on the notion that actions are rationally based on reason. Best practices are intended to act as a

benchmark for educator behaviour, justifying the educator's actions as suitable and correct. They operate as a way to assess educators' practice against a standard that is infused with the ideals of accreditation, and assumes that all educators are not just aware of these but adopt and enact them unquestioningly. There is no mental reasoning or judgement involved; educators can simply implement and follow best practice as prescribed by accreditation. In the field site, educators were observed and judged for best practice during the self-study portion by the director and again during the site visit by the validators.

In this discourse, if unprofessional behaviour occurs it is the result of the educator being unaware of the best practice, and can be easily remedied by reminding them of the best practice. For example: on the Interactions and Daily Experiences Observation checklist ID14 requires that "When talking with children, adults kneel, bend or sit at the child's level to establish eye contact". On the program's initial review this is coded as NOC (not observed consistently). The director notes in the "What we need to do box" to "Remind staff to ALWAYS get down to children's level when speaking to them." Later for the program's pre-site visit review the director re-codes it BP (best practice), implying that this simple reminder worked to change practice.

In centres that have achieved accreditation, child care educators are expected to go to work and provide quality care and education as usual. But is it as usual? In essence, accreditation has both narrowed and expanded their job descriptions. It has expanded them to include goal setting, producing evidence, and CQI. Surveys and observation checklists narrow and concert the evaluation of their work through a frame in relation to accountability, accreditation discourse and knowledge, and the business discourses of standards, goals, and quality improvement. That this frame is only capable of capturing certain aspects of the work of educators is never addressed (Nichols, n.d.). The embodied and emotional work of caring and educating young children is glossed over. The care and education work of

educators is judged and evaluated via this particular schema and its accompanying standardized paper trail of texts and forms as required by accreditation. Thus, this version of professional accountability discourse becomes the necessary means of providing and framing quality child care.

### **The Social Organization of Accreditation Knowledge**

Manicom (1995) maintains that “in western industrialized societies, administration, management, government are accomplished through work processes that rely on distinctive organized ways of knowing these aspects of the world that are to be ruled. Not only does ruling *rely on* specialized knowledge, but a central task of ruling is to *organize and generate knowledge in a form that is useful for ruling practice*” (p. 9). Accreditation uses observation checklists, quality enhancement plans, and evidence portfolios to organize and generate new knowledge about educators’ work that is useful to the ruling relations—for example, in the accreditation decision-making process—and becomes the authorized way of knowing educators’ work.

In the experience of accreditation, educators learn a way of thinking about the world that is recognizable as the accreditation way of thinking, and learn to practice this way of thinking in a manner that subsumes the actualities of their daily experiences with children and families and the educators’ own interests. They learn how to treat their world of work as goals, evidence, and standards in the cycle of continuous quality improvement. They begin to think ahead to the next time that they will need evidence for an annual report, or how an experience with children if documented in an authorized form can be used to meet an AQS or QEP goal. Accreditation knowledge shapes the educator’s plans and decisions in a way that didn’t happen before. By carefully observing the educators’ daily experiences doing accreditation, we begin to see how the educators’ knowing is organized in the everyday through institutional and text-mediated relations.

Dorothy Smith (1990) reminds us that objectivity is a set of procedures that serve to separate the discipline's body of knowledge from its practitioner's work knowledge. "The ethic of objectivity and the methods used in its practice are concerned primarily with the separation of knowers from what they know and in particular the separation of what is known from knowers' interests, "biases," and so forth, that are not authorized by the discipline" (p. 16).

Accreditation is purported as the objective way of knowing quality. Accreditation is a technology that is intended to produce objective information about program quality. Quality assurance programs like accreditation are an institutionalized effort to produce and judge quality. Centres are expected to objectively construct the product (quality child care) as data (evidence) and then measure it against an external set of standards (Rankin, 2004). In this way, accreditation purportedly becomes a neutral formula for quality based on the 10 quality standards; in this discourse these selectively identified indicators are viewed as able to adequately capture all the elements of quality. Following D. Smith (1990), this form of thought is embedded in and expresses social relations and organizes people's activities.

The theories, concepts, and methods of accreditation assume a capacity to make an objective accounting of educators' work with children and families; however they have been built up on and organized around a way of knowing that is foreign to most educators. The frames of reference that order the terms and knowledge of accreditation originated elsewhere (in business, in manufacturing, in new public management). The accreditation standards help to coordinate how child care centres should operate in a more business-like (read efficient and effective management) manner. For example, Standard 6.2 states that "there are clear written policies and procedures for managing the day to day operations of the program" (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 9). The standard continues, "the program employs sound business practices and follows generally accepted accounting



principles” (AAAELCS, 2007a, Section 3, p. 9), with “improved management” as a goal (AAAELCS 2007a, Section 2, p. 1).

Customer surveys, setting goals, measuring progress, and producing evidence of accomplishing goals and CQI are all part of a broader discourse of business management and new public management that did not originate in child care. On their own, the work processes of goal setting, producing quality, and continuous quality improvement seem like common-sense approaches to enhancing the quality of a product. However, when viewed through the coordinating and controlling lens of child care accreditation, and when they narrowly frame how educators now must think about quality child care, they are troublesome in their ability to draw the discourse of business deep into child care centres in a standardizing and narrow manner. “The instrumental language, assumptions and ideology of management predominate, and business values (competition, entrepreneurship, individualisation) increasingly permeate every aspect” of child care (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005, p. 43).

This discourse appears very influential in the accreditation process and operates to instigate and organize new work for educators. Typical business processes such as goal setting, producing evidence, and CQI become synonymous with quality early learning and child care. For example, in an article challenging the effectiveness of widespread goal setting in organizations, Ordonez, Schweitzer, Galinsky, and Bazerman despair that “goal setting is one of the most influential paradigms in management literature” (n.d., p. 1). They warn that “there are many ways in which goals go wild” (p. 16) and advocate a cautious approach to goal setting that is not evident in accreditation. “Goal governing” as apparent in accreditation has become a new way to direct and control services—rules and regulations and detailed plans are replaced by clear goals and strategies for evaluating goal attainment (Dahlberg & Asen, 1994). “The market oriented goal governing model is anchored in the world of private enterprise” and is based on the

idea that educational institutions, including child care centres, should be governed by market demand (p. 161). The focus on specific goals linked directly to AQS may distract and draw limited resources away from the broader, centre-wide goals of caring for and educating young children. For example, educators are concerted to set a goal every year related to the child care centre environment in order to access quality enhancement funding from ACYS, and also are instructed by AELCS that they will “score better” if they include a goal for each of the 10 standards. One informant balked at these restrictions, concerned that she could apply the funding to other, more critical areas, and that it felt like they had to create goals for each standard, just for the sake of ensuring a good score, while they would prefer to focus on a few critical goals in a specific area over the upcoming year.

Accreditation imports these discourses unquestioningly as the educators’ own. Educators do not see how these discourses are put together because they are determined elsewhere. Prior to accreditation educators did not speak about quality standards, quality enhancement plans, and evidence portfolios. They have had to learn to speak and use the abstract, constructed categories in order to do their work and to “look good” for accreditation, importing values, assumptions, and ambitions that are not as neutral and objective as the accreditation discourse would claim. The conceptual and objectifying practices for knowing about quality child care of accreditation (its ruling knowledge) make it possible to put in place objective, extralocal methods of control and ruling action.

### **Ideological Circle**

This social production of knowledge is linked to textual production, which in turn is linked to power. This relationship of knowledge, text, and power produces what D. Smith refers to as an ideological circle (1990a). In accreditation “an interpretive schema is used to assemble and provide coherence for an array of particulars as an account of what actually

happened; the particulars, thus selected and assembled, will be interpretable by the schema used to assemble them (D. Smith, 1990a, p. 139). Accreditation texts are read as totalizing accounts of experience and events as explicated on the forms and reports required by the self-study process. The language of the accreditation reports reflects the rhetoric of standards, accountability, best practice, and the market ideology of child care in Alberta. This becomes the new everyday work of educators as they set goals, collect evidence, and demonstrate change and improvement. This ideological code allows us (the field, parent consumers, the government, and the public) to read accredited child care centres as accountable and effective, in the process, legitimizing the market approach to child care which is part of the broader neoliberal policy approach in Alberta and that serves the agenda of the ruling relations.

Many of these processes of textually mediated knowledge production become authoritative, while leaving behind what educators know—accreditation is now the best way to know about caring and educating young children. I observed educators learning to use these objectified forms of knowledge to transform their own everyday experiences into standardized forms. They left their own stories behind. It is important to remember that early childhood classrooms are complex social worlds, not simply places where accreditation standards can be neatly put into practice. We can ask of accreditation, as asked by Novinger and O'Brien (2003, p. 12) "where is the passion, the excitement, the vision of possibility, the connection to lived lives?"

Instrumental business-like language is not generally what you hear when speaking with frontline educators about their caring and education work with children and families. During the course of this research I heard delightful stories from educators that reflected a depth of caring and understanding of individual children and their family situations. Their narratives reflected a relationship of trust, concern, and caring with children and families that has developed over time through daily interactions and

their strong sense of shared responsibility. Stories they shared with me for example about the joy of successful potty training, excitement shared with a family over a wedding announcement, and the deep satisfaction over joint explorations of learning topics were deeply reflective and insightful, demonstrating both the subtleness and routineness of the daily work of early childhood educators. These stories are not evident in the texts and tools of accreditation. They were not carried forward into the standardized boxes of the observation checklists, the QEP, or portfolio. These stories are lost or glossed over by accreditation texts, discourses, and work processes.

Dorothy Smith (1990) describes a notion that she refers to as bifurcation of consciousness. She explains this in relation to her own experience as a single mother and as an academic. In these roles she experienced at least two ways of knowing, experiencing, and doing—one way that is located in the body and space it occupies and moves in, and the other located in objective discourses that appear logical and commonsense. Knowing children physically and bodily as educators rock, comfort, nurture, play, and learn with them becomes subordinated to knowing children through AQS as neutral, objectified standards. Accreditation bifurcates the consciousness of educators; it separates educators from what they love about what they do— there is no place for evidence of this love in accreditation.

In chapter 7, I described how with texts in a mediating and coordinating role child care centres are hooked into a series of social relationships to which they are now accountable. The new relations of accreditation require a particular professional, a responsible educator. The responsible educator coordinated by accreditation undertakes a certain kind of technical reflection that is linked directly to setting goals, producing evidence, and CQI. This educator is open to being watched and evaluated by external experts, and accepts that she can do better. Under the ruling relations of accreditation, early childhood educators carry out their work in a manner that imposes a new sort of professionalism and sense of self. In

summary, the accreditation way of knowing draws previously unfamiliar discourses into the daily work of educators, creating a new way of knowing quality child care. I have discovered that there is a vast difference between the socially constructed world of accreditation with its goals, evidence, and continuous quality improvement, and the messy, chaotic, and emotional work of caring for and educating young children. Accreditation as an accountability tool serves the ruling relations, but is less able to encapsulate the complexities, intricacies, emotions, and intuitively taxing daily work of educators.

## **Chapter 8: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

The aim of the study was to journey along with a group of child care educators as they worked through the accreditation process and to explicate the social organization that coordinates this experience. This final chapter summarizes some of the main findings that arose out of the research and discusses their implications. Although it was framed as a promising advancement, summarized next are the tensions and disjunctures that educators must navigate as a result of the introduction of ACCAP in Alberta, some of which maybe starting points for resistance and activism. The contribution of this thesis to the literature is addressed next. I conclude with evidence of the need for further research on child care accreditation as a result of the influence of changing accountability practices, including the influence of new public management.

### **Summary of Research Discoveries**

#### **Local actualities of child care transformed into new textual realities.**

Chapter 4 highlighted the internal local work assumed by educators to accomplish accreditation, and how that work is coordinated by AELCS and government mandates. The steps that educators undertake to complete the self-study portion of accreditation were described analytically, based on participant observation, text analysis, mapping techniques, and informant interviews. Through the coordinating presence of AELCS texts such as the self-study guide, this research has documented the way that educators activate the texts through their daily doings. They learn to depict certain aspects of their work practices as text in a specific format, which can then become institutionally actionable. This research surfaced the textually

mediated nature of accreditation that coordinated the educators' work processes.

### **Three new work processes.**

As quality care became defined as the 10 AQS, the work of educators was shaped towards demonstrating to AELCS that their daily practices with children and family met these criteria. Educators undertook a series of activities to complete the self-study portion of accreditation. Three new work processes were identified that were previously not accomplished in this standardized and prescriptive manner. In the field site, educators dedicated significant time and energy in new ways to setting goals, producing evidence, and engaging in CQI to accomplish accreditation. Educators have to do work in these forms to have their caring and education work recognized as relevant by AELCS and the ministry.

Goal-setting work takes the frame of the QEP and requires educators to select goals that will demonstrate progress towards meeting an AQS, proving that they are engaged in quality improvement and satisfying the ruling relations of the accrediting agency. Translating their often intangible work into concrete goals that fit the categories required by AELCS was challenging for the educators in the field site. Producing evidence in the form of the portfolio report, the evidence portfolio, and the portfolio contents list was preoccupying and time-consuming activity. AELCS authorizes only certain forms of evidence to be used—those which are concrete, observable, and documentable. Aware that their evidence would be judged by the validator, the educators in the field site learned to select and plan for the collection of evidence—for example, taking photographs and saving texts to include in the portfolio. This evidence stood in for the routine and everyday activities of care and education, and was organized by AELCS as the natural way to demonstrate quality child care. Accreditation coordinates the review and enhancement of quality care as a cycle of continuous quality improvement. The self-study guide activates and scripts the CQI cycle, relying

heavily on educator motivation and commitment to self-reflection and self-improvement. CQI processes import into child care a new type of systemic evaluation that reflects accountability discourse.

I have demonstrated how these new work processes often undermine the interests of educators, and are emerging as strong influences on decision-making in child care programs in Alberta. As organizing and concerting forces they work to create a new common consciousness which compels new ways of thinking about and accomplishing a particular kind of quality early learning and child care in Alberta.

### **Hooking into new relations of accountability.**

This research draws attention to how educators are hooked into new relations of accountability through accreditation. In chapter 7, I highlighted the extralocal influences that frame accreditation work at the local level. I described the influential discourses of business and new public managerialism that operate through and in accreditation texts and talk. As a result of the social organization of accreditation, educators are drawn into a consumer–supplier relationship with families, which undermines trust and jeopardizes family-centred practice. Child care centres are drawn into a competitive relationship with each other, resulting in pressure to provide value-added programming that may not reflect the best interests of children but meets consumer demand. New relations with the broader community are organized as child care centres attempt to meet accreditation criteria for partnerships, community involvement, and stakeholder engagement. This is undertaken to demonstrate to the public that accreditation funding is not wasted; taxpayer dollars are being spent responsibly. Through ongoing tracking and reporting processes child care centres are hooked into a relation of accountability to AELCS and ACYS. To achieve and then maintain their accredited status centres must submit to the ruling relations of these extralocal authorities.



### **Producing the accreditation decision.**

I described the production of new experts under accreditation—how peers are elevated to experts and how the work of these new experts is knit together in a text-work-text sequence to produce the essential accreditation decision. It is not produced in a single moment of decision-making but is created within a text-mediated sequence of action that the institution has standardized and authorized. This sequence and its ability to produce a commensurable snapshot of quality based on a particular description of the centre grounded in the three new work processes means that 98 % of child care centres achieve accreditation after the second try. The production of an accredited centre is important work to the accrediting agency, which must report its successes as met targets and contract deliverables to the ministry.

### **Accreditation as a way of knowing.**

At the end of chapter 7, we begin to see how accreditation is a force that socially organizes educators' knowing in a particular manner that often operates to subsume their own interests. Accreditation as a ruling relation draws previously unfamiliar discourses into child care centres and organizes and generates knowledge through texts such as the observation checklists, the QEP, and evidence portfolios in a form that is useful to the authorized experts of AELCS. This becomes the authorized way of knowing. Accreditation becomes a "technology for knowing objectively" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 39). Drawing on D. Smith's notion of "bifurcation of consciousness" we see how the educators' interests and intuitive knowledge is glossed over as educators begin to orient to this way of knowing and to the three new work processes required by AELCS. As demonstrated in the field site, educators learn to use the not-so-neutral language and categories of the authorized way of knowing.

### **The Promises of Accreditation: Tensions and Contradictions**

"I think we are lucky to have accreditation."

“It is good because of the [wage enhancement and professional development] grants and it gives us something to strive for.”

In this research I have tried to explicate what is actually happening for educators as they undertake accreditation work in their centres. In this explication, serious tensions and disjunctures become evident. In the next section I discuss some of the main issues that, once made visible by the research, offer a starting point for advocacy and action on behalf of educators.

### **The promises of accreditation.**

In the “age of quality,” where the word quality appears in many places attached to an infinite number of goods, activities, and services (Moss, 2001, p. 129), everyone wants to offer and to receive quality child care. Child care accreditation is a very appealing and seductive program solution, and the temptation to adopt its discourse is strong. There is no doubt that the introduction of accreditation was done with the best of intentions, but the Alberta government, by investing in ACCAP, values it over other program and funding solutions, and ignores other critical questions in determining what works to enhance quality child care. As the selected and seemingly inevitably correct solution to the “quality problem,” accreditation offers not only a neat fit politically and managerially, it is presented as “timely, rational and reasonable” (Osgoode, 2009, p. 740). Accreditation was greeted with a sense of hope and optimism by educators in Alberta (Golberg, 2005). The discourse of accreditation makes many promises and appears to provide a neat win-win situation for all stakeholders. Children are promised higher quality daily experiences in child care and families are promised choice. Educators benefit from higher wages and professional development opportunities, which promises increased value and status to the profession as a whole, and the child care centres presumably benefit from a boost to their reputation. The community is supposed to benefit from the increased sense of accountability and reassurance that their tax dollars are being well invested. Accreditation

helps create the impression that the government has ensured that all children placed in child care centres in Alberta will receive quality care. However, there is no research evidence to suggest that the quality of care has increased since the implementation of accreditation. Parents, as they are constructed as consumers, may not have the ability to choose quality child care, and the increased expectations of centres to set goals, provide proof that they meet the AQS, and use the textual tools of accreditation are not making it easier for educators to provide quality care. In fact, accreditation may act to obscure critical systemic issues in the provision of quality child care in Alberta from the view of educators. The promises and commitments made by accreditation to higher quality care, increased parent choice and support for educators are not, in actuality, being fulfilled.

### *Accreditation and Increased Quality?*

Even with accreditation in place the quality of early learning and child care in Alberta remains uneven (Muttart, 2010). Text analysis undertaken for this research show that there is little evidence that accreditation actually requires child care centres to provide elements of quality at a higher level than the minimal provincial licensing standards, hence the continued criticisms from educators that accreditation requirements are still too basic. For example, the three elements of content quality (educator education, child-educator ratio, and group size) that produce the well-researched and easily measured “iron triangle” of quality are no higher for accredited centres than the current minimum licensing standards required by any licensed child care centre in Alberta. Many of the minimums required by accreditation were previously applied by Alberta Child Care Licensing through the Licensing Standards and Best Practices in Child Care document for all licensed child care centres. Instead accreditation has reorganized the care and education of young children, limiting it to the 10 AQS and emphasizing three new work processes that require educators to set goals, produce evidence, and engage in CQI. Accreditation measures only a particular approximation of quality

child care, one which privileges the technical and managerial aspects of care that are amenable to surveillance, documentation, and quantification, serving the accountability requirements of the accrediting agency and the ministry.

### *Accreditation and Parental Choice?*

Part of the work of accreditation is to bring choice to parents in the child care market place (Cleland, 2002) since parents are expected to decide between an accredited or unaccredited program for their children. The introduction of the standardized parent survey contributes to the construction of parents as customers using their free choice, rather than partners in care—informed, rational, parent–consumers should select an accredited centre. However, accreditation discourse reflects a disingenuous notion of customer choice; with long waiting lists for services and a shortage of child care spaces, parents may not be able to actually choose the centre they want. When parents are constructed as consumers, many disadvantages are evident—the lack of information on quality care as noted in chapter 7, low expectations, lack of comparators, and lack of political and economic power (Centre for the Study of Social Policy, 2007). Under accreditation, family-centred practice is subjugated. In the field site, work was undertaken by the educators, that may begin to shift their focus from working in partnership with parents (for example documenting children’s project work to inform and educate parents about their children’s learning) to a focus on happy/satisfied consumers through the addition of value-added services like dance, music or language lessons and which may result in a new social relationship with families. Under accreditation, educators may be faced with a growing tension between these competing views of the appropriate relationship with parents.

Moss (2007) notes the risks associated with defining quality as consumer preference when authority is derived from being a customer rather than a caring parent; this construction bypasses important questions about the whole character of consumerism and fails to address the wider

collective responsibility of child care to the broader public good. Accreditation thus reinforces child care as a private choice of parent-consumers in a competitive market, effectively ignoring the moral issue of leaving child care in the market rather than positioning it as a public service, as is K-12 education in Canada.

### *Accreditation and Improved Conditions for Early Childhood Educators?*

Margie Carter (2008) asks if child care quality is improved or assured by a growing set of accountability requirements and expectations placed on educators. How do we support educators to improve quality? Will requiring more standards, goals, and evidence documents “improve outcomes” for children and families when educators are still burdened with little training, and low-paying jobs in an under-resourced sector? Accreditation discourse offers educators a promise of rescue from neglect (Osgoode, 2009), which is seductive. Child care centres may operate with different particulars and circumstances, and each centre may vary slightly, but there remains a set of impoverished resource conditions under which all Alberta child care centres operate and accomplish their daily work processes (cf. Manicom, 1995). These circumstances become part of the resource conditions under which accreditation is accomplished by educators. However, accreditation legitimizes the practice of ‘doing more with less’ by promoting the idea that quality can be assured by the setting of standards (however low), parental choice, and encouraging workers to emulate professional-consumer relationships (despite the low status of their work). Under these new social relations, the needs of the child care workforce continue to be neglected.

Although accreditation wage enhancement funding provides a necessary and well-deserved increase in the take-home pay of educators, child care centres themselves are still operating with very little budget flexibility—new work processes are still undertaken within a context of resource limitations and with no imposition of higher standards for

accredited centres (such as a requirement that a higher percentage of educators be trained at the Child Development Supervisor level or accreditation-mandated smaller group sizes or ratios). As demonstrated by this research, these new work processes do not make it “easier” for educators to demonstrate quality child care, but may actually refocus educators away from their own interests and align their consciousness instead with the terms and conditions of the accreditation agency and provincial government. The effort to undertake this new work is time-intensive and may not be sustainable for many resource-poor child care centres.

This research has made apparent that the tools of accreditation such as the checklists, QEP report, and the evidence portfolio are inadequate in their ability to capture and accurately reflect what educators do, except for very basic technical criteria. The subtle, intuitive, and embodied work of educators resists the textualization process required by the three new work processes explicated. A secondary informant from the accrediting agency admitted that the “tools won’t change as fast as practice.” She went on to stress the need for more annual professional development training of validators and moderators for increased inter-rater reliability. But it is not just a matter of inventing a better tool or observing educators more carefully or in a more standard fashion. The implicit belief embedded in the accreditation discourse that child care quality can be easily reported and measured has to be challenged. Accreditation, through the explicit texts of the self-study guide, implies that quality care can be achieved no matter the level of training of the educators (one 45-hour course or expanded educational equivalents), or how tight the budget of the centre. The self-study guide makes it the educators’ responsibility alone to enact the standards in a measurable and demonstrable way. This emphasis on measurable standards and the technical means that the more subtle and intuitive aspects of educator work are ignored as unmeasurable and

unmanageable, creating the public impression that the work of educators is self-evident, easily observed, and documented.

Accreditation individualizes the problem of quality. However many of the solutions to enacting quality lie outside educators' individual control, and reflect broader social, economic, and political issues. For educators, speaking out against the commonsense and seeming facticity of quality prescribed by accreditation standards means contesting the established discourse of quality. It is hard to contest when you are the beneficiary of the wage enhancements and other benefits the ACCAP program provides. Not buying into the accreditation program may be perceived as being ungrateful, and there is a common feeling in the sector that asking for more from government now that they have accreditation will be viewed as "getting greedy". Accreditation still relies on educators to be professionally dedicated and to put up with poor conditions and low pay because of their commitment to the children and families they serve. Through its imperative to professionalize the sector, educators are expected to act like professionals without being paid or provided the status that other caring professionals receive.

This research has demonstrated how accreditation enacts a particular form of ruling relations that socially organize the local actualities of educators' work, introduces new work processes, new relations of accountability, and new ways of knowing quality. As a standardizing ruling schema it has created change within the child care sector in Alberta. One of the serious implications of using accreditation as a way of producing a particular version of quality is the way child care accreditation is socially organized to gloss over important systemic issues like low wages, educators' work conditions, real improvements in quality care, and the effects of child care remaining in the marketplace.

Based on this research and the new understanding of the social organization of child care accreditation that it facilitates, educators and advocates for quality child care should be asking questions such as “What is our vision for quality child care in Alberta? Where does accreditation support or fall short of this vision?” They should be questioning the rhetoric of professionalism and the officially sanctioned version of individual responsibility it implies while obscuring the systemic issues that plague the sector to which they are committed. They should be contesting the technical and matter of fact “make-work” processes of goal setting, collecting proof, and the CQI cycle, and instead insist on collectively making changes to their practice based on deep and important questions about what it means to care for and educate young children—what is the purpose of child care educators in the life of children and families, and how can educators work with them from a place of integrity and authenticity that reflects their intimate and intuitive working knowledge of local actualities?

My research indicates that the way that educators know children and families may be different from accreditation’s way of knowing. Support may be needed for educators to:

- counter the ostensibly neutral dominant discourse of accreditation by bringing evidence of their passion, possibility, excitement and wonder; care, courage, hope, and wisdom to the vision of quality care that is glossed over by accreditation’s texts and tools;
- consider whether accreditation reflects the true actualities of their local work of caring and educating children and their relationships with families, and ask for additional educational opportunities that truly support the acquisition of applicable knowledge and skills to make their job more manageable;
- question the origins and solutions imposed by the undefined best practices discourse;



- support educators to reflect on the image of children, families, educators, and child care centres that are constructed by the social relations of accreditation; and
- discuss the complexities, diverse values and multiple perspectives that are inherent in their caring and educational work and that are made invisible by accreditation.

In this way, educators can broaden and deepen the discussion of the particular version of quality child care in Alberta ruled by accreditation.

### **Contributions of Thesis**

Accreditation is an influential and coordinating force on and in the Alberta child care sector. This research made a commitment to making the conditions of educators' everyday work under accreditation "known and knowable as a basis for action" (Campbell & Gregor, 2004, p. 128). Starting from the standpoint of their experience of accreditation, I have endeavoured to bring the "beyond-their-experience into the scope of ordinary knowledge" (Smith, 2005, p. 221). In examining the workings of the social, I intended to contribute to their growing awareness of the new work imposed by accreditation, to make visible how educators' daily work lives are affected by the institutional priorities of accreditation in the name of quality enhancement. It is my hope and ambition that with this new "in-common" knowledge and the understandings produced by this research, educators and advocates can begin to express their valid concerns for the welfare of quality child care under accreditation.

This research is also of potential benefit to the accrediting agency and the ministry. By engaging in a thick descriptive analysis of educators carrying out accreditation work, details about what actually happens appear. The material effects are highlighted, and the implications can be used to inform future accreditation requirements. The research demonstrates the ways in which accreditation is working as an accountability tool for institutional

purposes, and its shortcomings as a tool for educators to improve upon their practice. As this research study concludes, the Alberta government has contracted a consultant to undertake a review of the accreditation standards and the self-study tools. Some consultation with the child care sector has been undertaken. I hope that this research and the experience of educators it explicates will help inform the review. A full program evaluation of ACCAP is long overdue and much needed to further inform the field of the effectiveness of the program.

The lack of research on accreditation generally and on child care accreditation specifically in Canada is evident. As one study alone, this research barely begins to uncover what there is to learn about the implementation of accreditation in Alberta child care centres. However, to the early childhood literature on accreditation it contributes an empirically grounded critical examination of accreditation. As a growing trend in the child care quality enhancement movement, accreditation deserves this in-depth and nuanced consideration. This study begins to flesh out the lived actuality of the accreditation experience of educators, documenting the textually mediated and coordinating work processes that socially organize the route to achieving accredited status.

### **Contribution to IE Research**

As evidenced by this study, IE has proven to be a rich and fruitful innovative research method that effectively troubled the generally accepted discourses of accreditation. As a “collective work” (D. Smith, 2005) the existing growing body of IE research will benefit from the contribution this research makes. Smith is fond of saying that the project of IE is like exploring a mountain chain. Each IE study, as a relational way of viewing the world, contributes to our understanding of the mountains by building a map starting in a local standpoint and exploring upwards. My goal has been to understand the ways in which the accreditation process works to mediate the lived

experiences of child care educators in ways that may work against their ability to voice concerns about child care policy in Alberta, and to pursue their own visions of quality care. By applying the conceptualizations of the method and analytic strategies to explicate the social organization of child care accreditation, we see one more aspect of the same chain of mountains. I tried to stay true to the research directions and concepts offered by Dorothy Smith and other IE researchers, in the hope that this study is helpful to others employing IE to study other institutional practices and relations.

Although this research study was carried out in one particular child care setting, the findings are relevant and applicable across other child care centres and other social service and health agencies engaged with accreditation work. The quality standards, along with the standardized tools and texts of accreditation, are expected to produce a uniform and demonstrable version of quality child care service delivery. This allows us to generalize beyond this particular research field site, as we look institutionally at the generalizing processes of ruling through accreditation. Closely examining and describing how the accreditation process was accomplished in one child care centre can act as the basis for describing how the accreditation process becomes a set of generalized relations and textually coordinated practices across the province.

### **Conclusion: Further Research**

The changes introduced by the implementation of accreditation in Alberta deserve further attention. It is imperative to continue our discussion on accreditation as it is becoming “a pervasive institutional strategy of ‘quality’ improvement” (Janz, 2009, p. 91) in child care in Alberta and elsewhere. The purported need to measure quality child care creates tensions for educators who have to try to fit a mode of work that is not easily quantified into a format that permits surveillance, reporting, and tracking to be accomplished by extralocal authorities. This research, by “hitching a ride”

along with early childhood educators and explicating these new, concerting, translocal relationships, has begun to make visible how accreditation is socially organized and actually happening in Alberta child care centres through its textually mediated coordinating processes.

Along with the important discoveries made by this research, accreditation is instigating other changes within the child care sector that have yet to be made visible by empirical research but will have lasting impact on the care and education of young children. There is still much to learn about the social organization of accreditation, its influence on the daily experiences of young children and their families, and its impact on early childhood educators. The continued influence, organizational power, and demands of the discourses of accreditation, business, and new public management requires thoughtful analysis and explication as they continue to create new forms of accountability in child care and other sectors. It is important to look carefully at how these discourses are enacted in the everyday by people's doings as they actively participate in the building of these new ruling relations. Realizing that accreditation valorizes the technical and obscures important systemic issues means that further examination of the effects of reconceptualizing the care and education of young children as 10 standards is necessary. It is essential to continue to make these changes and their socially organized nature empirically evident, and to further explore how ruling relations emerge as influential and tangible for educators, children, and families by continued research on child care accreditation.

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## Glossary of Institutional Ethnography Terminology<sup>14</sup>

**Coordinate**—The activities of individuals are organized and coordinated purposefully by forces within society. In IE, “the focus on coordinating is extended to language so that it is understood as coordinating individual subjectivities, providing us with a way to avoid using concepts that hide the active of thought, concepts, ideas and so on in people’s heads” (Smith, 2005, p. 223).

**Discourse**—Translocal relations that coordinate the practices of individuals as they talk, write, read, watch and so on in particular local places at particular times. People participate in discourse and at the same time their engagement reproduces it. Discourses can constrain what people say or write and what they say or write reproduces and modifies discourse.

**Experience**—Experience originates in people’s bodily action and being, and refers to what they come to know on this basis.

**Institutions**—Complexes of organizations and discourses that are organized around certain functions such as education or health care.

**Institutional Ethnography**—A feminist research strategy that uses everyday experience as a focal point to explore the actualities of people’s everyday lives and experiences to discover the social as it extends beyond experience.

**Power**—Power is generated in institutions through the coordinating functions of language and texts.

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<sup>14</sup> The following terms are used frequently throughout this research. Terms and definitions are drawn largely from the work of Dorothy Smith on institutional ethnography (D. Smith, 2005, 2006).

**Ruling Relations**—New and distinctive modes of organizing contemporary society, the complex of extra local relations including the specialization of organization, control, and initiative. Ruling is a way to understand how power is exercised in local settings to accomplish extra local interests. Ruling relations travel through/in texts, knowledge, experience, discourse and institutional practices.

**Social Organization**—Refers to distinct forms of coordinating that materialize and are reproduced again and again which act to purposefully concert and coordinate people's actual practices and activities.

**Social Relations**—This term does not refer to interpersonal relations, instead it orients us to view people's doings in particular local settings as sequences of actions that hook them up to what others are doing elsewhere and elsewhen.

**Texts**—Texts are any kind of document or representation. They have the ability to be reproduced, transferred, copied and disseminated by different users at different times in different places. The active text organizes the institutional processes and relations that govern and regulate the society we produce and live.

**Translocal**—External to the local, across geographically separate sites.

**Translocal Relations of Ruling**—Powerful outside forces that shape how people live and experience their everyday lives.

**Work**— In the generous definition of work proposed by IE, work is not confined to paid employment, instead we learn about the actual way that people go about participating in institutional processes.

**Work Knowledge**—What people know in their work and how it is coordinated with others.



## APPENDICES

## **Appendix A**

Letter to Alberta Association for Accreditation for Early Learning and Care Services to Recruit a Field Site

Date

Dear

I understand that your centre has recently applied to AELCS to become accredited. Hence, I am writing to ask if your child care centre would be interested in participating in a research project with me on the topic of Child Care Accreditation. I am currently working to complete the requirements of a PhD in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. I would like to observe the steps you and your staff undertake to achieve Accreditation as part of a research project I am engaged in for my graduate thesis. The project is designed to examine the effects of accreditation on those involved and to gain insight into what going through the whole accreditation process is like for Alberta child care centres.

The project would involve a series of ongoing observations and interactions of 15-30 hours with you and the staff in your centre, beginning with your initial application for accredited status and concluding when accreditation is achieved. My role is to basically “hitch a ride” along with you as the process unfolds, making observations and asking questions to clarify my understanding of the steps involved and their effects in the centre. I would ask to observe in the classroom, sit in on the meetings and work done by you and your staff to achieve the steps in accreditation. I am also interested in the paperwork associated with accreditation and would ask about and observe how each accreditation document is handled in the process. I would also like to observe any mentor visits and the validation site visit. At times, I would take notes and use a digital recorder to capture our conversations and interactions.

Your centre's participation as a field site is entirely voluntary and there will be no disadvantage from not participating. If you consent to be involved, your centre's anonymity will be maintained and I will use pseudonyms to represent you and all your staff and families in all work that is written about the research project. You can withdraw from the study at any point up until the conclusion of the field site observations. I will keep the recordings, transcripts and interview notes locked in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of this research study and when appropriate destroy them in a manner that safeguards privacy and confidentiality. A draft copy of the research report may be made available for participants to review.

I do not see any harm or predictable risks resulting from this research, in fact it may be beneficial to be involved in the study. Please feel free to contact me at 780-497-5171 or email me at [lirettet@macewan.ca](mailto:lirettet@macewan.ca) if you have any questions. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr Alison Taylor at 780-492-7608.

If you are willing to participate, please complete the attached consent form allowing AELCS to give me your contact information. Once I receive your permission from AELCS, I will contact you by phone to discuss further. Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Tricia Lirette

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participants rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at 780-492-3751.

## **Appendix B**

Letter to Field Site and Consent to be a Research Field Site

April 19, 2010

Dear Owner-Operator,

I am writing to ask if your child care centre would be interested in participating in a research project with me on the topic of Child Care Accreditation. I am currently working to complete the requirements of a PhD in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. I would like to observe the steps you and your staff undertake to achieve Accreditation as part of a research project I am engaged in for my graduate thesis. The project is designed to examine the effects of accreditation on those involved and to gain insight about what going through the whole process is like for Alberta child care centres.

The project would involve a series of ongoing observations and interactions of 15-30 hours with you and the staff in your centre, beginning with your initial application for accredited status and concluding when accreditation is achieved. My role is to basically “hitch a ride” along with you as the process unfolds, making observations and asking questions to clarify my understanding of the steps involved and their effects in the centre. I would ask to observe in the classrooms, sit in on the meetings and work done by you and your staff to achieve the steps in accreditation. I am also interested in the paperwork associated with accreditation and would ask about and observe how each accreditation document is handled in the process. I would also like to observe any mentor visits and the validation site visit. At times, I would take notes and use a digital recorder to capture our conversations and interactions.

Your centre’s participation as a field site is entirely voluntary and there will be no disadvantage from not participating. If you consent to be

involved, your centre's anonymity will be maintained and I will use pseudonyms to represent you and all your staff and families in all work that is written about the research project. I will keep the recordings, transcripts and interview notes locked in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of this research study and when appropriate destroy them in a manner that safeguards privacy and confidentiality. A draft copy of the research report may be made available for participants to review.

I do not see any harm or predictable risks resulting from this research, in fact it may be beneficial to be involved in the study. Please feel free to contact me at 780-497-5171 or email me at [lirettet@macewan.ca](mailto:lirettet@macewan.ca) if you have any questions. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr Alison Taylor at 780-492-7608. Please complete the attached consent form to indicate your decision. If you are willing to participate please return the consent form to me. Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Tricia Lirette

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participants rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at 780-492-3751.

## Informed Consent to be a Research Field Site

Project title: Child Care Accreditation in Alberta

Investigator: Tricia Lirette

\_\_\_\_ **Yes**, I agree to participate in the research project.

\_\_\_\_ **No**, I do not chose to participate in the research project.

I give my consent for (name of Centre) \_\_\_\_\_ staff, (board members if applicable) and families to participate in this study. I understand that the Investigator will spend time in the centre observing and interacting with staff and families as necessary. I consent to the staff and families being observed and interviewed for this research study. I understand that on occasion the interviews and interactions will be recorded and notes will be made. I understand that only the investigator, Tricia Lirette, and her research supervisor, will have access to the recording and transcripts of the interview. I understand that all information provided will be kept confidential.

I understand that participation in this study begins upon application for accreditation and ends when accreditation is received and that 15-30 hours of field study observations may occur over a number of months. I understand that I am free to withdraw the centre from the study at any time up until the conclusion of the field site observations, and/or to refuse to answer specific questions.

I understand that there will be no predictable risks involved in this study, I may, in the centre may benefit from reflecting on the experience with accreditation.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions

regarding participants rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at 780-492-3751.

Two copies of this form have been included. Please sign both, indicating that you have read, understood, and agreed to participate. Return one signed copy of the consent form in the enclosed envelope and keep the other copy for your records.

Name of Participant (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C Field Study Log

Date	Length	Purpose	Data
April 16/10	75 mins	Meet with Director, Owner-operator and educator to discuss feasibility of using centre as field site, tour of centre, gave me policy binder to copy	Typed notes
Excited and relieved, seems very feasible, want to use my expertise also, think about my role carefully.			
April 19/10	90 mins	Observe parent meeting	Typed notes
April 21/10	90 mins	Observe staff meeting	Typed notes
Accreditation on the agenda for the staff meeting.			
April 22/10	180 mins	Orientation to infant-toddler room	Hand written notes
Initial reaction to observations very positive, staff with small group of infants.			
April 23/10	20 mins	Observe Pedro's birthday celebration/wrap up of project	Hand written notes
Parents in attendance to celebrate conclusion of project. Documentation on display, special birthday cake for snack. Pedro is missing!			
April 27/10	120 mins	Review checklists, spoke briefly with Director	Typed notes
Have to still discuss with her, how did she go about completing them? By herself? What did she have to know to do them, How long did it take?			
April 28/10	180 mins	Orientation to preschool room	Hand written notes
Spent PM in preschool room, only small group of children with one staff. Spent time with the children at tables, some facilitation happened, also responsible for sleeping room.			
May 4/10	60mins	Finish reviewing checklists	Typed notes plus notes added to April 27 <sup>th</sup> notes on checklists
Sat in library room, staff in there on breaks, is this possibly a place/time/opportunity to chat informally with the staff about accreditation and get their			



thoughts on it? Should I do initial thoughts and them after thoughts?			
May 7/10	120 mins	QEP meeting with director and educator (on leave)	Taped, and handwritten notes
Director seemed to already have some ideas of what they needed to do. Where did these come from? How does she know? Did this with input from educator, Educator kept a running <i>to do list</i> for her as we went through each standard. Much repetition/overlap of ways that standards are met. Did this process prior to distributing the surveys to parents and staff? Based on what?			
May 12/10	90 mins	Observe staff meeting	Hand written notes
Although the Director had mentioned that Accreditation was on the agenda for this meeting, it was not discussed. It appears that other <i>burning issues</i> were the focus of this meeting. I was surprised by the change in focus, that seemed to have been driven by observations made by owner-operator as well as feedback she had received from the staff during their 3 month and 6 month evaluations. Owner-operator described to the staff how upset and angry she was with lack of communication and following established procedures.			
May 14/10	150 mins	QEP meeting with Director and educator (on leave)	Taped and handwritten notes
<p>First meeting after the staff meeting, both Director and educator mentioned that they were both sorry and glad that I was in attendance. Wanted me to know that they (all the centre staff) are not perfect and for me to see all the challenges that they have. I reassured them of the confidential nature of my research.</p> <p>Went on to review rest of QEP plans. At end of meeting we had a very frank discussion about accreditation, in their words how “disheartening it was” to know that some centres were receiving accreditation that were not anywhere as high in quality as they are. Review and transcribe this part of the interview. Now that QEP draft is almost complete what is next step? Call director to review parent and staff survey. Was disappointed to hear that they had distributed them without me in attendance.</p>			
May 19/10	105 mins.	Meet with Director re: parent survey and staff survey	Typed and handwritten notes
Reviewed the process she used for distributing the two surveys, spoke frankly about what precipitated the lecture during the May 12 <sup>th</sup> staff meeting. Arranged to come in next week to speak with educators.			
May 26/10	210 mins.	Chat with educators on their lunch breaks about accreditation, set of basic questions to get their opinions	Taped and handwritten notes

Met with four staff from the preschool room. Then went to ask Director to meet with me on Friday re; history/background of application and also process she used to complete the checklist. She had time right then so we talked for 45 minutes. Arranged to go back Friday and meet with two staff from the infant/toddler room.			
May 28/10	90 mins.	Interviewed Educator from infant-toddler room	Taped and typed notes
Observed infant toddler room transition to naptime, interviewed educator, other educator not available today.			
June 2/10		Staff meeting	
Director called to say that it might not be worth my time to attend, will only spend a couple of minutes on accreditation. I decided not to go and then regretted it. Perhaps I missed some good conversation?			
June 3/10	60 mins.	Interview educator and chat with Director	Taped and typed notes
June 22/10	240 mins.	Interviews with four staff at ARCQE	Taped and typed notes
Interviews with AELCS office staff, trying to focus on linkages and text in sequence. Need further analysis of the notes, try to map it. Follow up with AELCS about interviewing validators and observing the site visit. Follow up with contacts at ACYS.			
June 23/10	10 mins.	Phone call to Director	Handwritten notes
June 25/10		Family BBQ –goal for QEP, did not attend.	
Director reported a very good turnout, over 100 people and the families had good things to say about the staff at the centre.			
June 30/10	90 mins.	Staff meeting	Hand written notes
July 20/10	5 mins.	Called Director re progress on Portfolio, set time to meet	Phone call, handwritten notes
July 21/10	120 mins.	Met with Director and Owner-operator to discuss process of completing the Portfolio report.	Taped and typed notes
July 28/10	5mins.	Phone call to Director	Handwritten notes

Set up appointment.			
July 29/10	60 mins.	Meet briefly with Director. Plan to review Portfolio Report and binder.	Handwritten notes and taped and typed notes.
Ask director to review Checklist and QEP steps? Left copies with her to review by August 18 <sup>th</sup> . Reviewed checklists and looked briefly at Portfolio.			
Aug 19/10	5 mins.	Phone call to centre	Handwritten notes
Spoke to Owner-operator. Invited me to drop in next week to see completed Portfolio. Director at home putting finishing touches on it.			
Aug 27/10	5 mins.	Phone call to centre	Handwritten notes
Spoke to Director, set up an appointment, indicated that she had reviewed the maps of QEP and Checklists, noted that there is a staff meeting on Sept 1 <sup>st</sup>			
Aug 31/10	60 mins.	Meeting with Director	Handwritten notes, taped
Reviewed where they are at, a small change from AELCS on dates now site visit is scheduled between Sept 20 <sup>th</sup> and October 1. Sept 1 <sup>st</sup> staff meeting watching a movie about the Reggio Birds Project, upcoming meeting on Sept 8 <sup>th</sup> for families and staff to discuss accreditation, discussion of the steps in the mapping process.			
Sept 9/10	60 mins.	Staff meeting	Handwritten notes, taped and typed notes
This is the last staff meeting prior to the site visit. They review a number of small issues to prepare.			
Sept 16/10	5 mins.	Phone call	No record
Just checked in with Director briefly, she is confident that the site visit will not be on a Monday, due to the issue of giving just 24 hour notice. Is finishing up the portfolio, ensuring that the content list matches the content.			
Sept 16/10	5 min.	Phone call to ED at AELCS	No record
Left a message asking who the validators are going to be so that I can contact them to arrange an interview			
Sept 17/10	15 min.	Phone call to Supervisor	No record

<p>Called Alison to update her on my progress and to discuss the upcoming site visit. I am really nervous about blowing this, and not attending to the “right” things, no second chances! She assured me that it was just a part of the whole process so not to put too much pressure on myself. We reviewed the questions that I would ask the validators and she reminded me to pay attention to the textually mediated nature of the process and how staff is taking it up. We discussed the next steps after the site visit and agreed that I should do interviews with all the people involved right up to the decision at AELCS (moderator, governing board). And that I should interview one person at the government level.</p>			
Sept 19/10		<p>Review of AELCS materials in regard to validators role and responsibility. Review of chapters in Smith related to interviews and participant observation.</p>	
<p>Doing this really helped me feel more prepared although still nervous, especially about where I will fit in that day. I don't want to stick out like a third wheel. Realize that I must call Director to ensure that they will permit me to sit in and observe the validators interviews with staff and possible with a family. I wonder if Director will be nervous having me observe? Will the validators be nervous too? Not used to being observed? Devised a record sheet based on the sample accreditation site visit schedule provided in the AELCS material, so I can track the time spent on each aspect of the site visit over the two days.</p>			
Sept 21/10		Email from ED of AELCS	Print copy in binder
<p>ED provided me the name and contact information for the two validators. She agreed that I should contact them directly.</p>			
Sept 21/10		Email to validators	Print copy in binder
<p>Heard back from lead validator. She agreed to participate in the interview. We sent a number of emails back and forth discussing the timing and place for the interview. She spoke to peer validator, and let me know that she had also agreed to participate. I have decided to interview them together, onsite at end of day 2 of the site visit.</p>			
Sept 24/10		Email from Lead Validator	
<p>Received an email from the lead validator wondering if the centre was aware of the site visit dates? In her previous email she had noted that at the end of the second day, Friday would be better for them to meet with me. So I then jump to the conclusion (logical but unsure if correct) that the site visit will be Sept 30 and Oct 1. I reply that Friday is fine for me and that I will ask the centre for a space to hold the interview on site. Not sure if she thinks that I have told the centre the dates as part of setting up the interview? I reply that I don't think the centre is aware, as they had agreed to call me when they received the 24 hour notice, and that I had not heard from them yet. Assuring her that I would not disclose the dates to the centre. The</p>			

only two people I mentioned the Thurs/Fri to were J. and M. at MacEwan. I did this so that I could make arrangements for my missed classes. Or maybe the lead validator realized too late that she had mentioned a specific day to me? Could she be wondering if she still has to call the field site to give notice?			
Sept 27/10	5 mins.	Called Director, no word yet from AELCS	
Sept 29/10	5 mins.	Director called. Got notice for site visit from AELCS, will meet with all staff at 6:00pm to get centre prepared.	
	90 mins.	Observed preparation for site visit the evening before.	Handwritten notes
Sept 30/10	7:30-5:30	Site Visit	Hand written notes in notebook. Some sections taped (staff interviews)
Oct 1/10	8:00-1:30	Site Visit	Handwritten notes in notebook. Some sections taped (interviews with Director and Owner-operator)
	1:50-3:00	Interview with Validators	Handwritten notes in note book
Oct 8/10	60 mins.	Interview with Director and Owner-operator	Taped interview, handwritten notes
Met in office, wanted to get their impressions of the site visit.			
Oct 29/10	5 mins.	Director called to say that they had received confirmation that they had been accredited. Notification was by way of a phone call the day before.	Hand written note
Oct 29/10	50 mins.	Visit to field site during their fall family event. Lots of children dressed for Halloween and parents participating in a celebration. I brought a rose for all the staff to thank them for cooperating with me during the study. Thanked Director and Owner-operator for helping me as well.	

<b>Interviews with Secondary Informants:</b>			
Jan 20/11	90 mins.	Interview with moderator for AELCS	Taped and transcribed
Jan 20/11	90 mins.	Interview with member of AELCS Governing Council	Taped and transcribed
April 18/11	90 mins.	Interview with Informant from ARCQE	Taped interview, transcribed
April 18/11	60 mins.	Interview with Informant from accredited centre	Taped interview, hand written notes
May 4/11	90 mins.	Interview with Informant from ACYS	Tape recorded, hand written notes
June 29/11	120 mins.	Observation in preschool room, meeting with Owner-operator	Tape recorded, handwritten notes

**Observations and related activities that informed my work knowledge:**

- Meetings with Executive Director of AELCS (two times prior to starting study- Feb 17, 2009)
- Observation at CAFRA meeting (notes)
- Attended conference presentation by ACYS Staff at Celebrating Child Care Conference in Calgary-April 9, 2011
- Attended conference presentation by AELCS staff at MacEwan Child Care Conference –May 7, 2011
- IE Weekend Workshop, June 2010 with Dorothy Smith at OISE
- IE Weeklong Workshop, June 2011 with Dorothy Smith and Susan Turner at OISE
- SSSP Conference, August 2011 IE Preconference session in Las Vegas
- Attended keynote presentation by Dorothy Smith at U of A December 2011

## **Appendix D**

### Consent Letter from Field Site to Alberta Association for Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services to Access Information

(Note: the letterhead, signature, and contact information on this letter have  
been removed to maintain confidentiality)

August 02 2011

Attention: AELCS

Re: Ms. Tricia Lirette

Good Day,

Please note that I give Ms. Tricia Lirette of MacEwan University permission to access and  
communicate freely regarding our accreditation process on file with your agency.

Additionally, I respectfully request you supply her with any information pertaining to her  
studies at the University of Alberta.

Please contact me directly if you have any questions with regard to this letter.

Kind Regards,

## **Appendix E**

Invitation Letter and Consent to be Interviewed for Phase 2 Informants

October 1, 2010

Dear

I am writing to ask if you would be interested in participating in an interview with me on the topic of Child Care Accreditation. I am currently working to complete the requirements of a PhD in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. I would like to interview you as part of a research project I am engaged in for my graduate thesis.

If you are interested, the interview would have three parts. We would meet for approximately one hour to discuss the accreditation process. I am specifically interested in how the documents related to the process are used and handled. Part two, involves a follow up conversation or phone call. After I have studied the audio recording and notes from the interview, I may ask you to clarify one or two points from our discussion. Part three involves you reviewing the notes for accuracy if necessary.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and there will be no disadvantage to not consenting. You would be free to withdraw at any time up until the conclusion of the data gathering phase. If you decide to withdraw your participation after the interview, any data collected from you would be withdrawn from the study.

If you consent to be involved, your anonymity will be maintained and I will use a pseudonym to represent you in all work that is written about the interview. No evaluation or value judgement will be made on your participation. You have the right to refuse to answer any particular question or questions. I will ask your permission to tape the interview, to have the



interview transcribed and to make notes of our conversation. I will keep the recordings, transcripts and interview notes locked in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of this research study.

I do not see any harm or predictable risks resulting from this interview. Please feel free to contact me at 780-497-5171 or email me at [lirettet@macewan.ca](mailto:lirettet@macewan.ca) if you have any questions. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr Alison Taylor at 780-492-7608. Please complete the attached consent form to indicate your decision. If you are willing to participate please return the consent form to me. Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Tricia Lirette

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participants rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at 780-492-3751.

## Consent to be Interviewed

Project title: Child Care Accreditation in Alberta

Investigator: Tricia Lirette

\_\_\_\_ **Yes**, I agree to participate in the interview.

\_\_\_\_ **No**, I do not chose to participate in the interview.

I give my consent to be interviewed for this research study. I understand that the interview will be recorded and notes will be made. I understand that only the investigator, Tricia Lirette, and her research supervisor, will have access to the recording and transcripts of the interview. I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be assigned to me.

I understand that participation in this interview is made up of three parts, an interview of an hour or less, possible follow up questions for approximately 15 minutes and an opportunity to review the interview notes for accuracy. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time up until the conclusion of the data gathering phase, and/or to refuse to answer specific questions.

I understand that there will be no predictable risks involved in this study, I may, in fact benefit from reflecting on my experience.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participants rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at 780-492-3751.

Two copies of this form have been included. Please sign both, indicating that you have read, understood, and agreed to participate. Return

one signed copy of the consent form in the enclosed envelope and keep the other copy for your records.

Name of Participant (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix F**

### Sample Interview Questions for Phase 2 Interviews

Intro statement:

Interested in mapping your process with the documents related to accreditation, non evaluative, discuss purpose of study and review consent form and get signature

- Background: Title/position:Contact number:
- How long in position:
- Main responsibilities / role in relation to accreditation (everyday work)

Describe the steps you take in your role?

- What forms, information comes to you and from where?
- What forms, reports are required by your role?
- Where (and from who) does it come from?
- Where (and to who) does it go to next?
- What do you look for when it comes in to you?
- How do you know it is complete or incomplete?
- What are you thinking about with the form/document?
- What do you do with it? Why?
- What they do with, for and on account of the text?
- Ask how the text intersects with other texts that are used/created?
- How it is read?

What are the next steps?

- What is your organizations relationship to ACYS? Relationship with others in relation to child care accreditation?
- What are some of the common problems you encounter?

- Copies of any policy information/forms related to accreditation? - where can I access these?

Consider in analysis:

What working knowledge and thinking work are evident?  
What are the connections and how are they enacted across sites?  
Watch for omissions, institutional capture, ideological accounts.  
How texts coordinate and concert work.  
Social relations?  
How do texts and how they are handled illuminate organizational priorities?  
Look for texts in sequence

## Appendix G

### List of Documents Reviewed

Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services. (July 2003–June 2004a). *Background info*. Retrieved from [http://www.abccaccred.ca/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=category&sectionid=1&id=1&Itemid=31](http://www.abccaccred.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=category&sectionid=1&id=1&Itemid=31)

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Alberta Government. (2005b). *Our children our future: Alberta's five point investment plan*. Retrieved from <http://www.assembly.ab.ca/lao/library/egovdocs/2005/alchs/152187.pdf>

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Alberta Government. (2008). *Creating child care choices: A plan to support our families*. Retrieved from [http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/childcare/doc\\_spaces\\_Preschool.pdf](http://www.child.alberta.ca/home/documents/childcare/doc_spaces_Preschool.pdf)

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## **Appendix H**

Consent for Educators in the Field Site to be Interviewed and Observed

May 12, 2010

Dear

Your child care centre has recently agreed to participate in a research project. I am currently working to complete the requirements of a PhD in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. I would like to observe the steps you and other staff members undertake to achieve Accreditation as part of a research project I am engaged in for my graduate thesis. The project is designed to examine the effects of accreditation and to gain insight about what going through the Accreditation process is like for Alberta child care centres.

I am writing to ask if you are willing to be observed and interviewed. The project would involve a series of ongoing observations and interactions with you and other staff in your centre, beginning with the initial application for accredited status and concluding when accreditation is achieved. My role is to basically “hitch a ride” along with you as the process unfolds, making observations and asking questions to clarify my understanding of the steps involved and their effects in the centre. I would ask to observe in the classroom, to sit in on meetings and work done by you and other staff to achieve the steps in accreditation. I am also interested in the paperwork associated with accreditation and would ask about and observe how each accreditation document is handled in the process. I would also like to observe any mentor visits and the validation site visit. At times, I would take notes and use a digital recorder to capture our conversations and interactions.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and there will be no disadvantage from not participating. If you consent to be involved, your anonymity will be maintained and I will use pseudonyms to represent you

and all other staff and families in all work that is written about the research project. No evaluation or value judgements will be made of your participation and you may withdraw from the study at any point up until the conclusion of the field site observations. If you decide to withdraw any observation data you contributed would be withdrawn from the study. You have the right to refuse to be observed at any particular time or times for the duration of the study. I will keep the recordings, transcripts and interview notes locked in a secure place for a minimum of five years following completion of this research study and when appropriate destroy them in a manner that safeguards privacy and confidentiality. A draft copy of the research report may be made available for participants to review.

I do not see any harm or predictable risks resulting from this research, in fact it may be beneficial to be involved in the study. Please feel free to contact me at 780-497-5171 or email me at [lirettet@macewan.ca](mailto:lirettet@macewan.ca) if you have any questions. You may also contact my research supervisor, Dr Alison Taylor at 780-492-7608. Please complete the attached consent form to indicate your decision. If you are willing to participate please return the consent form to me. Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Tricia Lirette

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participants rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at 780-492-3751.

## Informed Consent to be Observed and Interviewed

Project title: Child Care Accreditation in Alberta

Investigator: Tricia Lirette

\_\_\_\_ **Yes**, I agree to be observed.

\_\_\_\_ **No**, I do not chose to be observed.

I give my consent to be observed and interviewed for this research study. I understand that the observations may include classroom activities, accreditation meetings and work, including mentor and validator visits. I consent to discuss the accreditation process and the observations with the researcher. I understand that some discussions will be recorded and notes will be made. I understand that I can choose not to be observed at any particular time and can withdraw from the study at any point up until the conclusion of the field observations. I understand that only the investigator, Tricia Lirette, and her research supervisor, will have access to the data from the observations. I understand that the information I provide will be kept confidential and a pseudonym will be assigned to me.

I understand that there will be no predictable risks involved in this study, I may, in fact benefit from participating in the research.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education and Extension Research Ethics Board (EE REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participants rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EE REB at 780-492-3751.

Two copies of this form have been included. Please sign both, indicating that you have read, understood, and agreed to be observed. Return one signed copy of the consent form in the enclosed envelope and keep the other copy for your records.

Name of Participant (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix I

### Chronological Map of Activities Undertaken by the Field Site to Accomplish the Accreditation Process

\*Where actual dates are not noted otherwise denotes an approximate order of events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Texts</b>
Dec 2009	Centre opens	Child Care Licence Received
	Thinking ahead and predicting that they will apply for accreditation	Create centre policies and handbooks in accordance with accreditation requirements
Jan 2010	Apply for Accreditation	AELCS Application Form
	Apply for pre-accreditation funding from AYCS	ACYS Accreditation Funding Grant Application and Supplemental Form A for each staff member
April 2010	Application accepted	Self-study Guide arrives with letter
	Begin to submit monthly turnaround documents to ACYS for wage enhancements, benefit contribution grants	ACYS Monthly Claim and Report Form
	Generate an initial list of goals for the centre to accomplish	
April 5/April 20, 2010	Initial classroom observations completed	AELCS Observation checklists Physical Environment  Daily Interactions  Practices
April 19, 2010	Initial meeting for families, asks for input on goals	Agenda and minutes of meeting produced
May 10, 2010	Family surveys distributed	Note for parents explaining purpose of survey, photocopy of survey (provided by AELCS) for each family sent home

	Read over returned surveys, send reminder out to families to return	Monthly newsletter
May7/May 14, 2010	Working on draft QEP- brainstorming session	QEP report form from self-study guide, creating to do list
May 17, 2010	Staff Survey distributed	Photocopy of survey (provided by AELCS) distributed to each staff
June 2010	QEP finalized	QEP calendar created
June 25, 2010	Submitted QEP to AELCS as part of site visit request form and accompanying documents	Site Visit Request Form including:  Updated QEP  Program description  Room schedules
June 28, 2010	Confirmation received- AELCS confirms receipt of site visit request	Email from AELCS
June 30, 2010	Staff meeting	QEP calendar shared with educators  Agenda and minutes of meeting produced
July 2010	Feedback received from AELCS on changes required to QEP	
July 6, 2010	Receive confirmation of two week site visit window in September	Email from AELCS, site visit readiness form
	Working on portfolio and portfolio report, gathering and producing evidence	Portfolio report form
July 2010	Writing required policies	Self-study Guide
July 27, 2010	Final pre site visit review classroom observations	Observation checklists  Physical Environment

		Daily Interactions Practices
Aug 2010	Creates binders for portfolio Created Table of Contents for portfolio binders	
Sept 2010	Invite families to meeting about accreditation	Centre newsletter
Sept 9, 2010	Staff and family accreditation meeting (no families attend)	Portfolio binders brought to meeting and shared with educators
Sept 29, 2010	Receive 24 hour notice of site visit	Lead validator makes phone call to the centre
Sept 29, 2010	Evening preparation of centre by educators for site visit tomorrow	Large flip chart list created by director up on wall of all tasks that need completing Director collecting all texts required for validators: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Portfolio report</li> <li>• Portfolio Binders</li> <li>• List of portfolio contents</li> <li>• Final copy of QEP</li> <li>• Final copy of observation checklists</li> <li>• Staff and family surveys</li> <li>• Consent forms</li> </ul>
Sept 30/Oct 1, 2010	Two day site visit by validators	Prior to site visit validators receive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centre's daily schedule</li> <li>• Program overview</li> <li>• QEP</li> <li>• Blank checklists (three)</li> <li>• Signature form</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self reporting of non compliances form</li> <li>• Interview forms for staff and parents</li> <li>• Site visit wrap up form</li> <li>• Program evaluation form</li> <li>• Thank you card</li> </ul>
Oct 2, 2010	Submit Program Evaluation form to AELCS by fax	Program Evaluation form
Oct 29, 2010	Receives official word that they have been accredited	Phone call from AELCS
Nov 2010	Receive letter and certificate of accreditation	Package from AELCS