

Building a Strong and Equal Partnership between Childcare and Early Childhood Education in Canada

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Split early childhood education and childcare systems (ECEC) have historically been a common phenomenon, but today many countries are moving towards more coherent approaches to ECEC. Canada, however, has continued to maintain a divided ECEC situation. Reviewing Canada's ECEC in 2004, the OECD suggested that greater integration of kindergarten and childcare would bring real advantages. In 2007, Ontario, Canada's largest province, began to develop integrated "full-day early learning" for all four and five year olds. In the initial phase, several key challenges have emerged: first, merging the public kindergarten system with market-driven childcare; second, financing the new program; third, maintaining stability in user-pay childcare as four and five year olds move to the new program; fourth, determining staffing models, bridging differences between kindergarten and childcare staff; and fifth, managing the phase-in. How Ontario meets these challenges will have major implications for the future of ECEC programs across Canada.

Key words: Canada, Ontario, childcare, kindergarten, early learning, integration, OECD

Historically, programmes for young children and formal education have developed separately with different systems of governance, funding streams and training for staff. ...Conscious of the need to bring the traditions together, *Starting Strong* (OECD, 2001) recommended a "strong and equal partnership" between early childhood and the education system. (OECD, 2006, p. 58)

When the OECD's (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) international early

childhood education and care (ECEC) review team came to Canada in 2001, they found quite separate "care" and "early education" systems. Canada has both regulated childcare providing care for children of working parents and kindergartens for five year olds offering early childhood education, but not designed to fit parents' work schedules. Split care and early education systems are identified as characteristic of ECEC in many countries although in some—Denmark, Sweden, Finland—ECEC programs for young children have become coherent systems with dependable funding, common staffing and administrative structure. In other instances, as Moss and Bennett (2006) describe, there is "one set of services providing childcare for working parents, the other set early education for children aged 3 up to compulsory school age" (p. 1).

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How early childhood programs are organized has a considerable impact on children's lives and those of their parents. As Neuman (2000) notes:

The number and nature of children's transitions in their early childhood is linked, in part, to the structure, quality, and coherence of ECEC services in the country concerned. Children may experience several *vertical* transitions prior to the transition to school—e.g., when they move from home to ECEC or from one ECEC setting to another as they get older. Children may also experience *horizontal* transitions, those which occur during a given day. Children attending part-day (e.g., play groups and some nursery provision) or school-based programmes—which do not cover their parents' work day—may experience horizontal transitions to another form of ECEC, perhaps out-of-school or leisure-time provision. (p. 5)

In Canada, ECEC services are not only divided between care and education, but provide access only to a limited portion of preschoolers. Canada's regulated childcare programs, primarily intended to care for children of working parents, cover 19.3% of 0-5 year olds although 75% of mothers are in the paid labour force (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007). Kindergarten programs designed to provide early childhood education are part-day and do not begin until age five in most of the country. This leaves most preschool-age children younger than five years without early childhood education and many working parents without coherent care, often requiring them to use patchwork arrangements that mean multiple transitions for children. According to the OECD (2004) review team of Canada, the following was recommended:

Build[ing] bridges between childcare and kindergarten education, with the aim of integrating ECEC both at ground level and at policy and management levels...The aim is to conceptualize and

deliver care and education as one seamless program to young children...In the view of the OECD review team, greater integration of kindergarten and childcare would bring real advantages in the Canadian context. (p. 71)

Since the OECD review in 2004, Canadian progress toward the kind of high quality, universal, blended ECEC suggested by the OECD has been limited. In the past few years, at both national and at sub-national (provincial) government levels, ECEC policy and program directions have swung—"two steps forward, three steps back, then one step ahead again" as "new policy and increases have been replaced by downsizing, and expansion, followed by cuts, then—in some instances—growth again" (Friendly, Beach, Ferns, & Turiano, 2007, p. vii).

Among the shifts, advances, and retractions, however, appreciation for the value of high-quality early childhood education has emerged in a new way in Canada while the need for childcare for working parents continues to be a pressing issue. A 2006 public opinion poll found that "there is a strong public consensus that childcare programs are beneficial both in terms of the benefits they provide to children in early development and in preparing them for school, as well as in helping parents, particularly those with lower incomes, participate in the work force" (Environics Research Group, 2006). In this climate, there is new interest among policy experts and government policy makers in the idea of treating "care and education as one seamless program to young children" or at least of "build[ing] bridges between childcare and kindergarten education" as the OECD recommended (OECD, 2004, p. 71).

This paper discusses the background and beginning of the move to full-day early learning programs for all four and five year olds in Canada's most populous province, Ontario. News of the plan was first made public during the 2007 provincial election in a story in Ontario's biggest newspaper, the Toronto Star. According to the news story

(Monsebraaten, 2007, September 6):

The Ontario Liberals are promising to extend kindergarten to a full day...The \$400 million full-day kindergarten plan would enable parents to save childcare costs. [The Premier] will promise to appoint a new “early learning adviser” to tell the government how to implement universal full-day pre-school before the end of its second mandate in 2011. The kindergarten plan would begin in either the fall of 2009 or 2010 with full-day senior kindergarten for 5-year-olds, and would be expanded to junior kindergarten for 4-year-olds the following year. (p. A1)

There were few initial details about the new program but since it was announced there has been considerable public debate and extensive interest among educators, advocates, and others in Canada with an interest in early childhood education and care. The Ontario project is of significance to Canada as a whole; Ontario is Canada’s most economically developed province, home to 38.5% of Canadians in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2007) and first to introduce both public kindergarten (1883) and regulated childcare (1946). A successful and popular Ontario program could bring a model for bridging childcare and early childhood education to other regions of Canada.¹

This paper considers the possibilities for a program that blends childcare and early childhood education in the context of the historical, social, and political realities that have shaped Canada’s social and education programs. It describes the context and history of ECEC, the characteristics of childcare and kindergarten in Ontario, the key challenges, and what is known about best practices in ECEC policy that may influence the future of policy and programs for children across Canada.

The Canadian Context

The Social Context for ECEC

Several key Canadian demographic trends have implications for how ECEC programs are delivered. Key trends—not all unique to Canada—include high participation in the labour force by mothers of young children; an ethnically and racially diverse population, especially in urban areas; a shrinking child population; and an obstinately high rate of child poverty.

Canada has experienced a 30-year trend towards employment for both fathers and mothers while their children are young. In 2005, 69% of mothers of children younger than 3 years were employed, as were 76% of women whose youngest child was 3-5 years and 83% with youngest child aged 6-15 (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007). Second, while Canada has long been a diverse nation, it is now one of the most diverse in the world. Census data from 2006 indicate that immigrants make up about 20% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada, 2007). A majority of new immigrants settle in large urban areas; in the largest cities, more than 50% of kindergarten children in some classes are born outside Canada or are from recently immigrated families (Larose, Terrisse, Bédard, & Karsenti, 2001). Third, all regions in Canada are experiencing shrinking child populations, a trend with significant implications for the future labour force. Since the 1990s, the number of children—particularly under age six—has been in decline (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007). A final part of the ECEC context is that Canada—one of the wealthiest countries in the OECD—has had persistently high child poverty for many years; in 2004, almost 18% of children in Canada lived in poverty (Campaign 2000, 2008).

Political Realities

It is often said that Canada’s ECEC programs have developed as a ‘hodgepodge of separate programs and policies’ (Friendly et al., 2007). There is no

national policy or approach, nor a national department of education. Each of the 10 provinces and three territories has developed its own ECEC programs. Issues such as availability, affordability, level of quality such as teacher training requirements, and schedules account for a good deal of variability in ECEC programs not only between provinces/territories, but within each as well.

Two Canadian political realities have helped shape this situation. The first is Canada's organization as a federation, in which provinces have the main responsibility for provision and administration of health, education and social programs. In this structure, designing a national approach to a social program like ECEC is far from straightforward, although—as Canada's Medicare program illustrates—it is not impossible to forge a reasonably consistent national approach to a program within provincial jurisdiction. It is noteworthy that although provincial/territorial governments have the jurisdictional responsibility for both childcare and kindergarten, none has developed a coherent or adequate ECEC system.

Second, Canada is a liberal democracy with a relatively weak welfare state. An analysis of ECEC programs by Meyers and Gornick used Esping-Anderson's typology of welfare regimes to describe the liberal welfare states—Canada, the US, the UK, and Australia—as relying primarily on “market-based solutions and means testing, mak[ing] only limited public investments in ECEC” (Meyers & Gornick, 2000, p. 23). In sharp contrast to stronger state roles in the Nordic countries or in most continental European countries, the liberal welfare regimes rely on the marketplace for childcare—high use of informal care, reliance on parent fees with subsidies for those who qualify, and private, often for-profit service provision. Limited accessibility to ECEC, fragmentation, and poor or mediocre quality in all the liberal democratic countries—those that rely on market solutions—are well documented (OECD, 2006, White, in preparation). Canadian childcare's

privatized nature is illustrated by the fact that almost all responsibility for developing and managing it—even to raising capital funds—falls to the private sector, particularly parent groups, voluntary organizations, or entrepreneurs. Meyers and Gornick's (2000) description of liberal regimes' relatively stronger commitment to public education as an equalizer, rather than focus on childcare is consistent with the Canadian situation; that is, while responsibility for childcare is mostly private, kindergarten under public education is a public responsibility.

Growing Apart: The Histories of ECEC in Canada

Much of the early history of early childhood education and care in Canada occurred in Ontario. There are, in fact, two separate histories—kindergarten and childcare—a division that persists in policy, administration and programming to this day.

In the first half of the 1800s, several infant schools modeled on those pioneered by Scottish social reformer Robert Owen appeared in Canada. Private kindergartens began to appear in Canadian cities and towns followed by “free kindergartens” run by charitable groups that were used as a tool for social reform and as a way of assimilating immigrant children (Prochner, 2000). Canada's first public kindergarten was opened by the Toronto (Ontario) Board of Education in 1883; kindergartens were recognized officially in 1885 and were then funded by the provincial government. By 1900, there were kindergartens in many towns across Ontario (Mathien, 2001).

Organized childcare began developing at the same time. In the 1800s, there were several services in Toronto and Montreal and, by 1920, in other cities, set up to provide childcare for low income women who had to work outside the home. These crèches, some accommodating infants, were operated by churches and women's charitable groups. However, there was little government involvement until World War II

when the federal government intervened in childcare for the first time, agreeing in 1943 to share with provinces the cost of childcare centres for mothers working in essential war industries. As many women in rural Canada worked at farming (not deemed to be essential war work), only Ontario and Quebec opened wartime childcare centres. After the war, federal funds ceased and many centres closed. Ontario, however, not only continued to support the remaining centres, sharing costs with municipal governments, but passed Canada's first childcare legislation in 1946.

In 1966, one of the new federal post-war social programs included provisions to pay for childcare for low income families. The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP)², which was intended to ameliorate poverty, treated childcare like other welfare services, stipulating that federal funds were available to pay only for services for needy families. By the 1980s, public kindergarten had become a mainstream and there were childcare centres in almost all parts of Canada. Ontario was the sole province to introduce public kindergarten for four year olds beginning in the 1950s, as a way of ensuring that the children of Toronto's many new immigrant families would learn English. As these junior kindergartens flourished, parents in affluent neighbourhoods demanded them as well, and within 20 years junior kindergarten was widespread across Ontario.

Today almost all Canadian five year olds and almost all Ontario four year olds are enrolled in public, mostly part-day kindergartens, usually 2.5 hours a day.³ Simultaneously, demand for childcare has accelerated as mothers of young children entered the labour force in growing numbers, forming a majority by 1985. However, part-day kindergarten and childcare for working parents have continued as two separate programs conceptually, administratively, and programmatically. Today, many Canadian children and parents lack opportunities for both care and early childhood education.

Characteristics of Kindergarten and Childcare Programs

At the beginning of the transformation to full-day early learning programs in Ontario, kindergarten and regulated childcare—both including four and five year olds—are quite different in several key areas. Among the differences are the responsible parties, operational control, program intentions, staffing and qualifications, financing and parental contributions.

Who Is Responsible?

The two programs are under different government departments: kindergarten in Ontario is under the Ministry of Education, while the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, a social welfare department, is responsible for childcare (including regulation). At the local level, elected school boards are responsible for kindergarten⁴, while municipal governments administer provincial childcare funds. Operationally, public⁵ kindergarten is an entitlement throughout Ontario while childcare programs are delivered in a private mixed economy model, primarily (about 67%) operated by non-profit organizations (parent groups, community-based or social agencies), municipal governments (about 10%), and entrepreneurs (23%) (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007).

What Are the Goals?

The Ontario kindergarten curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2006, April) states the program's purpose as follows:

The Kindergarten program is designed to help children build on their prior knowledge and experiences, form concepts, acquire foundational skills, and form positive attitudes to learning as they begin to develop their goals for lifelong learning. It is also designed as the foundation for a continuum of learning from Kindergarten to Grade 8.

There is no specific statement about the purpose of Ontario's provincial childcare program. A general

statement from the responsible ministry states goals for children across a number of programs, including childcare (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2008): (a) to promote healthy growth and child development, (b) to protect children from abuse and neglect (or those at risk of abuse and neglect), (c) to provide temporary or permanent guardianship for children separated from their families, (d) to place children for adoption, (e) to provide prevention and early intervention supports, (f) to provide counseling, and (g) to treatment for children with emotional or behavioural problems and mental disorders.

The goal of the Best Start program, which subsumes childcare, is stated as: "... to make sure that children in Ontario are ready to learn by the time they start Grade One" (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2008, April).

An entitlement would be consistent with the goal of making sure that children are ready to learn but there is no entitlement to childcare as there is to kindergarten and, indeed, childcare has enough spaces for only 16.9% of Ontario 0-5 year olds (Friendly et al., 2007). Financial access is driven by user fees too costly for many parents and an individualized fee subsidy system that requires eligible parents to be employed or training for employment, the latter suggesting that perhaps parent employment is also a goal of the childcare program.

Who Are the Teachers?

A four year undergraduate degree plus a year of teacher training is required for Ontario kindergarten teachers but education in early childhood is not required (Friendly et al., 2007). Kindergarten teachers are usually alone in classrooms of their own with 20-25 children. In childcare, the regulations require one adult with each group of children to have a two year diploma in early childhood education, with no training required for the other adult. Ratios and group sizes are set by regulation; for four and five year olds, regulations specify a group of 20 with a

ratio of 1:10.

There are other differences in training as well. An early childhood education training program at an Ontario community college is focused almost entirely on young children with a developmental orientation. A certificated teacher will have a broader, more general education at an undergraduate level with specialized courses in teaching methods. This may mean that the approach and culture of the childcare centre may be quite different from the culture of the public school kindergarten.

Wage and benefit scales are also quite different, with most early childhood educators' wages at low levels as they depend on the mix of funding from parent fees and public funds. Finally, Ontario kindergarten teachers are a strongly unionized group as part of elementary teachers' unions and bargaining processes whereas only about 12% of Ontario's childcare staff are unionized.

How Are They Financed?

Financing of the two programs is quite different, with kindergarten being entirely publicly-funded with no parent fees and childcare funds coming from a mix of parent fees and public funds which are predominantly delivered as fee subsidies attached to individual low income families. Other differences and similarities summarized in Table 1.

Paving the Way for a Full-Day Early Learning Program

While Ontario has had a long history of parallel systems of childcare and kindergarten, there have been two recent developments that have helped pave the way for the full-day early learning program. The first of these was a Toronto-based pilot project, Toronto First Duty; the second, the provincial government's Best Start program.

Toronto First Duty began as a partnership between the City of Toronto and Toronto District School Board

Table 1.
Comparing Ontario Kindergarten and Childcare Programs

	Kindergarten	Regulated childcare
Purpose	Education	Care while parents work/study; regulation system for basic quality, therefore “education”
Responsible ministry	Education	Children and Youth Services
Financing and fees	Publicly funded according to provincial funding formula. No fees.	User-pay, fee subsidies for low income. Some operational funding. Public funds include federal, provincial municipal dollars, flow through municipal governments.
Is it an entitlement?	Yes	No
Who sets up and operates?	Local elected school boards	Community groups, entrepreneurs, municipalities
Schedule	Generally 2.5 hours per day; some full-school day alternate days, some full-school-day, every day. No summers or school holidays.	Full-time to meet parents’ work schedules (limited provision of extended hours)
Compulsory?	No (School attendance compulsory at approximately 6 years)	No
Teacher training	Four year degree. Teacher training and certification. Background in early childhood education not required.	Two year diploma in early childhood education for one adult with each group of children; no training required for other adult.
Workforce organization	Strongly unionized as part of province-wide elementary teachers’ union	Some unionized workers in multiple unions
Wages	Salary scale, benefits set in school-board-wide collective bargaining; same as elementary teachers	Most centres establish own wage rates/ benefits unless part of collective bargaining unit. Wide range of salaries. General agreement that low wages major problem in childcare field
Age group	Four and five year olds (3.8 years–compulsory school age)	0-12 year olds
Class size/ratio	Class size of 20 (aspirational)	Ratio and group size set by regulation (1:10, group of 20)
Provincial curriculum? ¹	Yes	No

Note. From “Early childhood education and care in Canada 2006” by Friendly et al. (2007)

supported by the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, designed to combine existing ECEC programs into “a single comprehensive program for children less than 6 years of age.” Between 2002 and 2005, this concept was tested at five Toronto sites working with neighborhood public schools and community organizations. The purpose was to demonstrate how

public school kindergarten and community-based childcare and family support programs could be moved from historically divided services to a model delivering seamless access, parent participation and “an integrated early learning environment planned and delivered by a staff team”; to “bridge the disconnect between childcare, education and family

support programs and demonstrate the advantages of comprehensive, universal service provision to policy makers, families and communities” (p. 2). The project’s Phase 2 research report states that the goal of Toronto First Duty was to demonstrate a prototype that illustrates transformational change on the ground and push for transformational change in public policies related to early childhood programs. “Early learning and care for every child” is the central goal. The blending of existing resources and programs is the process to achieve the goal (Corter et al., 2007).

It is important to note that the Toronto First Duty project was conceived in a time when provincial government support of both regulated childcare and public education was in chaos. Unrelieved administrative re-organization and cutbacks in funding meant that communities and municipalities were struggling to maintain even the existing programs. A 2003 change in provincial government together with the first designated federal funding for regulated childcare⁶ since World War II augured a new provincial initiative, the Best Start Program, which was influenced by Toronto First Duty.

During the election, the new provincial government had promised universal childcare as an extension of public education. The ECEC part of Best Start was an expansion of childcare for children in junior and senior kindergarten; a wrap around program to complete a full-day of ECEC for four and five year olds with working parents. Corter et al. (2008) observe that Best Start is an incremental approach relying on collaboration among stakeholders and on coordination and networks, not transformational change:

Co-operation among its participants are predicated on good will. The initial expansion of funding for expanded childcare to be located in schools wherever possible was a new resource and provided some initiative to draw in the local partners and if it had continued might have been enough to effect more systemic change at the local level. That funding was

cut-back (due to changes in federal government⁷), leaving good will to stand on its own as an incentive to push towards further collaboration or integration. (p. 7)

In 2006, new childcare spaces generated by the Best Start program’s local networks began to come on stream (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2008a) but by the fall of 2007, the announcement of the new full-day early learning program had been made, linked both to Toronto First Duty and the Best Start program but more ambitious than either in its scope, proposed schedule for change, and transformation of provincial policy.

The Project: The Goals, the “Givens” and the Challenges

The full-day early learning project is in its initial development phase in the spring of 2008. The early learning advisor has been appointed by the Ontario Premier to advise on implementation of the program to begin in September, 2009. His task will be “recommending how to create a universal, full-day early learning program for 4 and 5 year-olds from the existing two main program streams for this age group—child care and kindergarten—with all of the differences between them” (Mathien, 2008, April). The policy considerations he will inform include: (a) alignment of transitional roles and responsibilities between Ministries of Children and Youth Services and Education, (b) program models that will alter roles and responsibilities of municipalities, school boards, public and private child care service providers and at least two government ministries, (c) funding models that will address fiscal issues such as capital and operating expenses, pay equity issues and transportation costs, (d) sector engagement issues such as credential recognition, labour relations and pay equity issues between teachers and early childhood educators, and (e) parent engagement issues

associated with public expectations of savings in child care expenses and the transition of early learning to full-day learning that embodies the strong links between care and learning

Several official statements about the project suggest the general goals to be school readiness and parental support. Research tells us that “early learning helps children get off to the best possible start in school – so it's important that we get it right” and “we need everyone at their best for Ontario to prosper – and our government will continue building opportunity for parents and investing in the success of children” (Premier’s Office, 2007, April)

What Are ‘the Givens’?

The project has several ‘givens.’ First, it is not a feasibility study or a pilot project; the provincial government has committed to putting a full-day early learning program in place. Second, it has been described as a universal program for all four and five year olds, not as a program targeted to vulnerable children as four year old kindergarten is in other parts of Canada or accessible only to a minority as childcare now is. Third, the program will be publicly funded, not user fee-based as is childcare.

The Challenges

There has been avid discussion and keen interest in the program details among the various players with an interest in this project, especially the childcare community and the teachers’ unions. From these, some key challenges for designing the program have emerged.

Challenge 1: Merging a public system with a market-driven mixed economy model. Kindergarten in Ontario is part of a public system with kindergartens operated by elected local school boards as an entitlement. Childcare, however, is market-driven, delivered in a mixed economy model. Most childcare centres are operated by private sector⁸ providers, primarily incorporated nonprofit organizations with a sizeable share (23%) operated as

profit-making businesses. There are two main issues that are part of the challenge of reconciling mixed economy childcare and public kindergarten. The first is the operation and funding of for-profit childcare which has been a major, divisive issue in Ontario (and Canada as a whole) for decades, especially as literature has accumulated suggesting that quality in the for-profit sector is generally poorer even under equivalent regulatory and funding regimes (Childcare Resource and Research, 2008b). Examples of publicly-funded expansion of pre-K or early education in other countries through the private for-profit sector show unsatisfactory results (Kirp, 2008; Penn, 2007). This year, the issue of for-profit childcare was reinvigorated politically as Australian-based childcare conglomerate ABC/123 Global moved into Canada and engaged in an active campaign to purchase Canadian centres (Cribb, 2007), creating what many in the childcare community regard as a danger for the full-day early learning program.

The second part of this challenge is concerned more generally with reconciling a public system and a privately-delivered sector, including the community-based non-profit sector. Here the international literature provides strategy, policy, and program lessons from which Ontario can learn (Cohen, Moss, Petrie, & Wallace, 2004; Integration Network, 2006; Moss & Bennett, 2006; Neuman, 2000; OECD, 2001; OECD, 2006). How the full-day early learning project approaches these two sectors with dissimilar funding and staffing regimes will be important for its success.

Challenge 2: Financing. The announcement of the full-day early learning project stated that the provincial government has “committed to spending \$200 million in year three of its mandate and \$300 million in year four to make progress on full-time learning for Ontario children” (Premier’s Office, 2007). However, most observers believe that these sums are insufficient to put the program in place. A public Open Letter to the Ontario Government from a broad

spectrum of ECEC—supporting organizations observed that “Full-day kindergarten is clearly a bold and intelligent policy initiative” but went on to say that “Doing it right will require that it is firmly entrenched in a broad, long-term and visionary plan for early childhood education and childcare”, emphasizing the importance of “adequate funding” (Open Letter, 2007).

The importance of adequate public financing for ECEC programs for access and quality is well documented (OECD 2001; OECD, 2006). The standard benchmark for adequate financing originates with the target first proposed by the European Union’s Childcare Network of *at least* 1% of GDP for ECEC for children aged 0-5 years (1996). Analysis shows Canada as the lowest spender among 14 OECD countries with .25% of GDP for ECEC programs (OECD, 2006), while Ontario’s ECEC spending was .28%⁹ of provincial GDP in 2006, about 25% of the recommended international benchmark. Given the current absence of federal commitment to ECEC, financing the program adequately enough to fulfill its promise will be a challenge for Ontario.

Challenge 3: Maintaining stability in childcare programs. Another important challenge facing Ontario as the new program comes on stream will be how to maintain stability in user-pay childcare programs as four and five year olds (the least expensive age group) exit existing services, leaving behind infants and toddlers who are more expensive to care for. Childcare service providers, social agencies and municipal governments are especially concerned about how this challenge will be resolved, especially as childcare funding in Ontario has been stagnant since 1995 (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007). The Open letter (2007) to the Ontario Government called for:

Providing immediate funding to address quality and stability issues in existing full day kindergarten and childcare programs serving infants, toddlers and

school-age children.

As noted earlier, this challenge may create hard choices for Ontario to make about spending priorities in light of the absence of intention by the current federal government to champion ECEC.

Challenge 4: Human resources. As described earlier in this paper, educational requirements, wages, and working conditions for teachers in Ontario kindergartens and childcare programs show significant differences from one another. At the same time, human resource gaps in the early childhood field have been identified in some detail. The Human Resources report for Ontario’s Best Start Panel reported on instability of the childcare sector’s workforce due to low wages and poor employment opportunities and that many practitioners lack the required education to provide high quality ECEC programs (Best Start Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources, 2007). A second Best Start Panel designed ELECT, an ECEC curriculum framework. This group’s report notes the importance of “high quality pre- and in-service training linked to the ...pedagogical framework” and cites Bennett’s 2004 observation that “obstacles to pedagogical quality arise not from a particular (pedagogical) tradition but from structural and orientation failures, in particular, the absence of structural supports [such as teacher: child ratios] that allow the implementation of quality curriculum as well as inadequate pedagogical theory and practice” (Best Start Panel, 2006, p. 81).

When seen through the lens of what is known about high quality ECEC programs, it is apparent that there are gaps in approaches to human resources in both sectors—kindergarten and childcare. A key challenge when designing the new program will be finding ways to design a model of high quality programs that ensures that ECEC teachers have sufficient years of education, a background in early childhood education including attention to pedagogical theory and practice, structural and

working conditions that do not present barriers to good practice, in-service training, and an agreed-upon curriculum framework, an accepted element of a high quality ECEC system (Friendly, Doherty, & Beach, 2006).

Challenge 5: Phasing in the program. A final challenge concerns the roll-out of the program, which will require phasing it in to ensure public and private sector support while having adequate resources to ensure smooth transitions. Issues like physical space for programs and adequate human resources to staff them well are likely to have an impact on how the program is phased in. At the same time, the phase-in needs to occur with enough promptness and fairness to maintain public support, as Quebec's introduction of full-day five year old kindergarten and universal child care for 0-4 year olds did. In Quebec, the universal nature of the program captured the public support that was necessary to sustain the cost of the program politically (Tougas, 2002).

Learning from the Best Available Knowledge

The idea of full-day early learning for four and five year olds is not a new one in a world in which, as the OECD(2006) notes, the trend is "towards integrating early childhood policy and administration under one ministry, often education" and "most European countries provide all children with at least two years of free, publicly-funded provision before they begin primary school" with several providing universal coverage for three year olds too (cited in Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2006). In Canada, three provinces offer full-school day kindergarten although none provides universal kindergarten for four year olds as Ontario does.

As Moss and Bennett (2006) comment, in the 1980s, an international movement began to integrate care and education within education systems. Today Sweden, New Zealand, Spain, Slovenia, Scotland,

Brazil, Iceland and Norway have integrated education-based ECEC systems. Several others—France, Italy and Belgium—have fairly coherent systems for three to five year olds as part of their education systems. Based on transitional experiences in a number of these countries, the analysts stress that there is a strong case for moving ECEC into education ministries. They identify several ways to facilitate successful integration of ECEC under education:

Extend the values and principles of public education systems to all ECEC services (for example, that it is a public good); organize a single structural framework including funding, workforce and regulation to replace dual care/education structures; develop an integrative concept¹⁰ encompassing not only learning but also care and well-being of young children, enabling policy and practice to move beyond 'early education' and 'childcare' as separate entities. (p. 1)

Beyond a "Strong and Equal Partnership with Education"

This paper began with a policy lesson from the OECD's Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care about the importance of "A strong and equal partnership with the education system." However, the eight policy lessons learned from the OECD Review's comparative analysis found to promote equitable access to quality ECEC are meant to be taken as a whole, not in isolation. The eight policy lessons, that is, a systematic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation, a strong and equal partnership with the education system, a universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support, substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure, a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance, appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision, systematic attention to monitoring and data collection, and a stable framework and long-term

agenda for research and evaluation, together with other research and knowledge, are all integrally connected to meeting the challenges in a major policy initiative such as the transition to full-day early learning in Ontario. Doing this well will mean that, ultimately, children and families across Canada will be the winners.

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Notes

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- ¹ The governments of New Brunswick, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island have all recently expressed interest in bridging early childhood education and care.
- ² The Canada Assistance Plan was abolished in 1996 and not replaced.
- ³ Full-school day in three provinces
- ⁴ Under the *Education Act*, Ontario permits private schools to operate but doesn't fund them.
- ⁵ Ontario publicly funds Roman Catholic schools under "separate" school boards; this historical arrangement in Ontario and several other Canadian provinces goes back to the 1800s.
- ⁶ The Multilateral Agreement on Early Learning and Childcare was executed by the federal government and provinces including the childcare—cutting Ontario government before it was defeated in the 2003 election.
- ⁷ In 2006, a new federal government terminated the first phase of the national ECEC program. The elimination of substantial federal funds meant that provincial plans to expand and improve ECEC programs were severely curtailed across Canada.
- ⁸ An estimated 10% of regulated childcare spaces in Ontario are operated by municipal governments (specific data are

not available). Ontario is the only Canadian province with a significant share of municipally-operated childcare.

⁹ None of the other provinces spend substantially on kindergarten for four year olds; this program represents about 33% of Ontario's ECEC spending.

¹⁰ The authors note that the concept of 'pedagogy' or 'education in its broadest sense' are such integrative concepts.