



Toronto First Duty
Early learning & care for every child

*Informing Toronto's
Vision for Children*

**Toronto First Duty Phase 2,
2006-2008:
Final Research Report**

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The opinions and interpretations in this paper are those of the Research Team and do not necessarily reflect those of the sponsors.

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Overview

Toronto First Duty (TFD) began in 2001 as a demonstration project testing an ambitious model of service integration across early childhood programs of child care, kindergarten and family support in school-based hubs. Phase 1 of TFD, with implementation of the model in five community sites, concluded in 2005. Phase 2, covering the period 2006 to 2008, focused on knowledge mobilization, policy change, and further development of the TFD model in one of the original five sites.

The TFD project had a direct lineage in the innovative efforts of local and provincial organizations and a more general social and intellectual connection to changes going on beyond Ontario. Internationally, interest in service integration and early childhood investment had been growing, as documented in the TFD Starting Gate Report (Corter, Bertrand, Griffin, Endler, Pelletier, & McKay, 2002) and in later sections of this report. During the early life of the TFD project, the rapid rise and fall of the Federal-Provincial-Territorial agreement showed both the breadth and political fragility of interest in the early years. In Ontario, the first *Early Years Study* (McCain and Mustard, 1999) called for integrative community hubs supporting children and parents and the report marshaled an array of research findings in support of the call. While general interest in early childhood and in integrating elements of a fragmented early childhood system had been around for decades (e.g., LaPierre, 1981) the Early Years Study report rekindled interest, pointed to a concrete strategy for transformative change and gave the ideas an evidence-based boost. The more recent *Early Years Study 2* report (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007) documents the contribution Toronto First Duty has made in providing evidence on how these ideas can work in practice.

The aspirations of the partners who came together to design and implement the TFD model were also transformational in two ways that go beyond many pilot or demonstration projects. The first aspiration was to design the project to lead to system change and improvement, not merely in the participating organizations and at the local Toronto level, but also at other levels, including provincial policy change. The second aspiration was to embed research and evaluation in the project and to mobilize the knowledge in several ways. One way was to feed back findings to the participating organizations and to the project sites to enable reflection and continuous improvement of the implemented program (see Pelletier & Corter, 2006; Corter, Patel, Pelletier, & Bertrand, 2008). A second way was to mobilize findings to support practice and policy change beyond the TFD project (Corter, Bertrand, Pelletier, Janmohamed, Brown, Arimura, & Patel, 2007b). This aspiration for knowledge building meant that the partners supported research and evaluation with funding for the university-based TFD research team and that they worked within their own organizations to contribute to and use the information and ideas for improvement- in the early years programs, their management, and their links to other programs. This report describes some of this knowledge building as it was carried out in a “community of practice” at the TFD Bruce Site, in the TFD organizational partners, and in Best Start: Toronto Vision for Children during the period 2006 to 2008.

The Toronto First Duty Design

The integrated early childhood service delivery model pioneered by Toronto First Duty (TFD) envisions regulated child care, kindergarten and family support services consolidated into a single, accessible program, located in primary schools and coordinated with early intervention and family health services.

In this delivery model, a professional team of kindergarten teachers, early childhood educators, family support staff and teaching assistants plan and deliver the program. Space and resources are combined. There is a single intake procedure and flexible enrolment options. Children and families are linked to specialized resources as required.

The goal of Toronto First Duty is to develop a universally accessible service that promotes the healthy development of children from conception through primary school, while at the same time facilitating parents' work or study and offering support to their parenting role.

The project is designed to inform public policy by demonstrating the feasibility of the main recommendation of the Early Years Study. It allows governments to test-drive the transformation of the existing patchwork of programs into a single, integrated and comprehensive early childhood program.

From Toronto First Duty and Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre, 2008

Phase 1

Phase 1 of the Toronto First Duty project began in 2001 with broad child development and parenting support goals and a vision of universally available, integrated early childhood services to achieve the goals. Partners for the project were the City of Toronto, Toronto District School Board, and the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. Phase 1 of the project was a four-year period with funding for development and coordination at five school sites to operate as integrated service hubs. Evaluation, funded by the partners and Human Resources Development Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program, described the implementation process and project outcomes at three levels: 1) programs, professionals and policy; 2) children and families; and 3) community impacts and awareness. After the end of Phase 1 in 2005, a final report (Corter et al., 2007) described the research methods and findings. That report and other TFD research and evaluation reports are available online at (<http://www.toronto.ca/firstduty/reports.htm>); more detailed analyses are also available in a number of academic papers referenced in this report.

The Phase 1 research described the implementation process in terms of variations and adaptations of the model across the five communities, as well as common struggles and successes across the sites. Struggles included issues related to professional turf, missing nuts and bolts of space and funding, staffing and leadership turnover, and working without system support across sectors "siloed" at higher levels of government. At the same time remarkable "process" success was achieved in staff teamwork across professional groups in several sites. Strong leadership and time to meet allowed integrated staff teams to come together over time to contribute to successful outcomes. An economic analysis showed that the integrated approach was cost-effective in terms of staffing the program for kindergarten-aged children. The analysis also suggested that changing the roles of school principal and child care program supervisor into integration leaders was also cost effective compared to having a project coordinator and as a result

contributed to sustainability. In terms of achievements, comparisons across the implementation period showed that progress was made in each of the five sites on service integration (as indexed by an Indicators of Change measure developed in the project; see the TFD2 December 2007 Progress Report) as well as on program quality improvement (assessed by the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale- Revised [ECERS-R]; Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 1998). We also found evidence of positive effects on children's social-emotional development on the Early Development Instrument (EDI; Janus & Offord, 2007) and on parents' engagement with school and learning, using comparisons with matched communities without TFD programs (Corter, Bertrand, Pelletier, Griffin, McKay, Patel, & Ioannone, 2007a). Nevertheless, there was little evidence of awareness of TFD programs in the communities surrounding them. In "person-on-the street" interviews and in surveys of parents who did not have young children, community members indicated that they hadn't heard of the TFD initiative even though they supported tax dollars going to early childhood programs and the aim of getting separate programs to work together. Highlights of these and other findings from Phase 1 and related findings from Phase 2 are available online in a December 2008 report from Toronto First Duty and Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre (http://www.toronto.ca/firstduty/tfd_research_summary.pdf).

Phase 2 and the Final Report

The general purpose of Toronto First Duty (TFD) Phase 2 was to promote system change through continuing research and knowledge mobilization. Questions addressed by the research team included, is the TFD program blueprint informing the transformation or evolution of early childhood service delivery in Toronto, in Ontario and elsewhere? What are the new lessons from the Bruce site (Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre), which is serving as a prototype for further development of integration and as a demonstration site for scores of visitors from around the world? The TFD2 Research Team worked to answer these and related questions during the period January 2006 to December 2008 with continuing support from the TFD partners: the Atkinson Charitable Foundation (ACF), the City of Toronto (City), and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), as well as from the Toronto Best Start Network and its additional partners. Detailed findings on the period 2006 to 2007 were presented in the December 2007 Progress Report (<http://www.toronto.ca/firstduty/reports.htm>).

This TFD2 Final Report provides an overview of the evolution of the TFD project and research activity across the Phase 2 period (2006 to 2008) through an "inside-out" perspective. It begins with the on-the-ground case study of the Bruce TFD site, which has continued as a demonstration site and as a test-bed for ways to move closer to ideal levels of integration in staff team work and in the early learning environment. This report also presents follow up vignettes of the other four Phase 1 case study sites, which did not receive additional support to continue the TFD model in Phase 2. Also at the on-the-ground level, results from two other Phase 2 studies are reported. In one, a case study described the first year of a successful integration project where kindergarten and child care were combined at the child care centre rather than at the school. In the other, a quasi-experimental study described the impact of service integration in reducing stress in family life.

At a higher organizational level, the perspectives of the TFD partners, including the ACF, the TDSB, and the City are described through the reports of key informants and through document analysis. The descriptions extend to the Toronto Best Start Network where the City and TDSB join a host of other partners in the integrative aims and plans of Best Start. The descriptions of their views and activities illustrate a number of themes including the role of TFD in informing Toronto Best Start (TBS), the value of knowledge building and mobilization by the partners, and looking ahead to prospects for further improvement in early childhood service delivery. At the next level up, perspectives from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) are reported along with one of their knowledge building efforts, a study of integrated full day programs from across Ontario combining child care and kindergarten. Finally, the Canadian national context for early childhood is briefly explored, followed by reports on international comparator projects on early childhood service reform. A conclusions section summarizes some of the key evidence-informed principles suggested by the TFD investigation and their implications for practice and policy.

Grassroots: Service Sites, Families, and Communities

The Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre: An Integrated Model of Early Learning

“Integration is just good sound community involvement in education and it just makes sense. When visitors come in and are surprised by what is happening at Bruce, I wonder, isn’t this normal? Shouldn’t the rest of the world be normal like this?”

“People keep on saying, not another pilot project, not another pilot project. Well, in this case, I think the pilot has really taught us some valuable lessons and I hope to see TFD roll out in the new full-day early learning or whatever direction the school boards and the city move within the province...”

In Toronto First Duty Phase 2, the Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre (BWELC; generally referred to as “Bruce” in this report) has served as a test-bed for further innovation in early years integration and as a demonstration site for the TFD model, with a steady stream of visitors from across the city, province, country and other parts of the world. At the site, visitors see two blended care and kindergarten rooms for 4 and 5-year-olds, a preschool room with care and education for younger children, and a Parent and Family Literacy Centre (PFLC) for all ages. These elements are pulled together by teamwork based on organizational structure, time to meet, shared vision and leadership. Although the spaces are separate there is some flow of children and staff across the building and there is school wide buy-in to the early years mission.

As is true of all community-level integration initiatives, the story of the Bruce site is unique. From its initial inception as a Toronto First Duty pilot site to its current role in dissemination and innovation, BWELC is a story of challenges and successes, told through a local lens. Yet, despite its individual journey, the Bruce site is also the story of

“every site” that is on the path to providing seamless early childhood learning and care to its community. The lessons learned are the integration practices and processes that have surfaced as key factors to overcoming hurdles and to achieving success. This report reviews the Bruce site’s individual journey and provides commentary that points to the processes that may contribute to success in early years integration in other sites. The story shows that with strong leadership and time to meet, integrated staff teams can improve the quality of their work together and strengthen a common pedagogy, curriculum and learning environment that they provide for children.

This case study summarizes the progress from the end of Phase 1 in 2005 to the end of Phase 2 in December 2008. Qualitative and quantitative results of the research focus on the changes that took place and details are available in a full case study in an Appendix. In this recent phase the Bruce site pushed forward to improve programs and to increase professional collaboration among the early years staff team and parents. The site’s story is told from the perspective of the research team, part of a multitude of onlookers. The Bruce site experienced its growth in the spotlight while hundreds of visitors from around the world came to see how integration happens. With the backdrop of continued local, national and international attention, the BWELC staff team kept their mission in focus as they moved forward together. Today, the preschool, parenting and kindergarten programs operate under one organizational umbrella, with one integrated curriculum approach that employs both Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) and the Kindergarten Program Revised (2006) documents.

Looking back, there has been significant organizational change at BWELC as two organizations (Bruce Jr. Public School and WoodGreen Community Services), three established early childhood programs (kindergarten, child care, parenting and family literacy) and a mix of other community services came together in a blended whole. Before TFD, there had been no child care program at Bruce school, but over time kindergarten classes were licensed for child care allowing for the introduction of half day, full school day and extended day delivery to four- and five-year-olds. Barriers such as limitations in space and its related funding, staffing changes, and lack of clarity about roles and the collective definition of what “integration” meant, were slowly but surely overcome. There is no fixed recipe for how that happened, but there are lessons that can be taken and applied to new contexts where staff and stakeholders begin to grapple with some of the same issues.

Space and funding barriers had to be broken down one by one as staff worked together to identify need. The children were a constant reminder of the primary goal when disagreements naturally arose about space and materials. The research was integral to helping move the mission forward; with continual feedback to the site from the research team and from the site’s own reflections, gaps could be addressed and the program could be improved. Funders were committed to the mission and provided support and refocusing as needed and where possible. Barriers were steadily dismantled with the help of the school principal, the school board superintendent, project coordinators, and City staff, all of whom were members of the Management Committee.

Measures of integration progress and program quality: Indicators of Change, ECERS-R and the Toronto Operating Criteria.

The case study analysis of progress in integration across Phase 1 showed that the Bruce site made overall progress and moved close to “full integration” in important aspects of staff team building and providing a common learning environment. For example, the early childhood staff team achieved “full integration” ratings on program implementation, attention to child behaviour, and staff development. Across all five dimensions of integration measured by the Indicators of Change instrument - local governance, seamless access, parent participation, early learning environment and early childhood staff team - the Bruce site experienced both peaks and valleys as the site moved from collaboration to integration. The same case study methodology, described in previous reports (Corter et al., 2007a), continued into Phase 2.

As TFD Phase 1 ended and Phase 2 began, the site experienced some bumps in the road. First, while the child care and kindergarten had been working together in an integrated fashion, the parenting and family literacy staff at the site were still not as well integrated with the rest of the staff team and were less aligned with the vision of integration. Another bump concerned parent involvement; the site’s goal was to improve the parent connection in all aspects of the integrated program yet that was not happening in the way the funders envisioned it would. Staffing changes, including a change in the principal, further disrupted the flow. At the beginning of Phase 2 the site expanded provision of full day programming to younger children and expanded hours of operation for four- and five-year-olds. The demands associated with the necessary care routines contributed to a decline in integration practices.

In the area of local governance, progress stalled on human resources: joint hiring practices were in place but because of time pressures, the integrated process was not always followed and the whole team was not involved. There were also gaps in the area of seamless access. Staff were still using a common intake and tracking form but only with half of the 4- and 5-year-olds. Three separate attendance systems were being used (Trillium, child care, and parenting centre) leading to possible redundancy of effort. Although information from the attendance forms was entered into the site’s intake and tracking system, not all attending parents were completing the intake forms.

By the end of 2006, there was also less integration in the early learning environment than previously, and ratings on various Indicators subscales declined. Kindergarten and preschool were using separate curricula, the parenting worker was not involved in the curriculum planning, and the parenting centre was operating as a separate entity. Within the early childhood staff team, there was more attention to responsibility for individual, respective programs rather than attention to working across programs. The site coordinator was referred to as the “child care manager” rather than as a member of the integrated early years staff team. Ratings of integration also declined in the area of staff development. There were fewer opportunities for professional development with the exception of an EDI data workshop and a kindergarten orientation event. In 2006, parent participation in programs appeared to be dropping in the 4- and 5-year-old group. Staff were reluctant to encourage parents to join activities at the end of the morning or afternoon programs because they believed that parents were distracting to the children.

Closely following the decline in levels of integration, a decrease in some aspects of program quality between 2005 and 2007 was also observed on the ECERS-R in assessments carried out by the research team between 2005 and 2007. Further, this decline was consistent with the Toronto Operating Criteria (www.toronto.ca/children/operatingcriteria.htm) observations carried out by City of Toronto child care consultants in 2007 as part of their regular supervision of regulated sites. Although the Bruce site's preschool rooms did receive an acceptable score on the operating criteria, the score was below the City's average rating for the 900 programs that were evaluated based on the Operating Criteria.

It is notable that at the beginning of Phase 2, the levels of integration and quality *decreased together* at the Bruce site. In contrast, across Phase 1 the levels of integration and quality *increased together* across all the TFD sites. The suggestion from the Phase 1 findings - that increased integration of staff team and learning environments leads to higher levels of quality (Corter et al., 2007a; 2008a) - is supported by the Phase 2 finding that declining quality accompanied declining integration levels. It also bolsters the Phase 1 conclusion about the need for a continual "focus on results", not just in demonstration projects, but also in good early childhood practice more generally. Programs should continually monitor process indicators as well as outcome indicators.

In Phase 2, the disappointing news about declining integration and declining quality was a wake-up call. The results were helpful in revealing areas to target for improvement and provided the impetus for a renewed focus for the entire early years team and management committee on program quality, curriculum integration and improved parent involvement. In the words of the school principal, "*evaluation drives programming,*" and it is clear that significant leaps in organization and program attention began to happen as a result of the research and evaluation formative feedback. In the spring of 2007, through a focused staff development process, the Bruce site committed itself to actively pursue three areas of integration: 1) To increase the integration of curriculum and pedagogical approaches and the early years staff team, 2) To integrate parenting activities with other program activities, and 3) To develop and use integrated communication messages that emphasize the seamless day for children and families.

Factors that supported renewed improvement in quality and integration

Staff teamwork. Bruce's management committee and early years team set to work to implement these goals with particular attention to integration and quality. In the spring of 2007, professional development workshops were organized for the staff team. The aim of these workshops was to push forward on the integrated curriculum development while increasing program quality of the early learning environment. In April 2007, the staff team and facilitators met to revisit the vision and assumptions of integration in general, and of the Bruce site in particular. A blueprint was developed and timelines and strategies to achieve the vision were articulated. At the forefront were children's early learning and development and a new program statement was established.

“You also have to trust that all school staff want what is best for students, so you have to give them the time and money so they are able to mobilize...in terms of PD workshops, it is essential to emphasize integration. Sessions are not just for teachers, but for early years staff as well. You provide supply and other support staff so that everyone knows they are working as a team and so a sense of respect and common goal is achieved – we are working forward together.”

“In the longer term, we need to think about not only the curriculum collaboration but also that training is huge. Have some kind of common credential and considering what’s behind the credentials – the kind of training that is happening at the college and university level and the kind of preparation that students are getting.”

At the end of May 2007, another professional development session was held with the Bruce staff team and facilitators. In this PD session staff reviewed the Bruce site program statement and ways to communicate it effectively. They discussed the purpose of observation and documentation as central components of the curriculum, as well as three strategies to support curriculum implementation: 1) use of individual child portfolios, 2) use of group profiles, and 3) use of learning centres. The staff discussed the ways in which they would look to the new Best Start Early Learning Framework document, *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (ELECT) combined with the Kindergarten Program Revised (2006), to support their curriculum goals and pedagogical practices. The staff then took action to ensure that every BWELC room and every activity were welcoming to parents and caregivers in order to unite the integrated goal of bringing the parenting and family literacy centre more in line with the rest of the Bruce site program.

From the spring of 2007 through the fall of 2008, the early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, educational assistants and parenting workers reformulated a shift toward being known as the early years team. Under the joint leadership of the school principal and the early years coordinator, the early years team underwent an intensive process of recalibrating the program, re-focusing their goals and re-envisioning their professional commitment to an integrated early learning environment for the children that included the active involvement of parents. A program plan was discussed with the TDSB early years coordinator, after which staff reported back with an eye to thinking about curriculum and next steps. In December 2007, a new program committee was launched with representation from the school administration, the early learning staff, child care administrative staff, the school board kindergarten expert and a member of George Brown College’s early childhood faculty with specialization in curriculum.

Staff were deeply engaged in implementation of ELECT through an emergent curriculum pedagogy. There was more focus on meaningful integration of the parenting program with the rest of the Bruce site by bringing groups of children to the parenting program and by integrating the program components among all the rooms. Families became a particular focus, specifically family involvement in all areas of the program. Finally, staff clarified their roles and spaces so that all staff members knew where they were to be and what they were to do. This was done by keeping staff in place rather than have them

move around. Overall, observers anecdotally reported an increased feeling of stability and calmness in the centre.

Leadership. Beginning in February 2008, there was a transformation in leadership; the new early years coordinator assumed responsibility for providing effective support, direction and supervision. The coordinator's role also required a close partnership with the school principal and a balance of administrative and curriculum responsibilities. From seamless access to a commitment to improving parent involvement, the early years coordinator and the principal worked collaboratively to ensure that the goals of an integrated learning environment were achieved.

“There are some principals who naturally love early years and there are others who have never taught kindergarten, Grade 1 or 2 and may fear it. We have to consider the principal hiring process or establishing faculty of education principalship training courses on early years.... the mood of the school starts in the principal's office. It doesn't just start in the kindergarten or at the preschool level; it starts with children coming in diapers. When staff know that the principal is welcoming and accepting ... transitions happen a lot more smoothly.”

Classroom learning environments. All the educators enhanced their classroom environments by making changes that supported the ELECT principles. For example, learning centres were clearly articulated and held rich materials for play-based learning; curriculum materials were organized and well maintained; natural elements were increased; materials representing diversity were increased; there was evidence of literacy and numeracy in all areas of the 4-5 year-old rooms. ELECT was introduced to the early years team in late spring 2007 and a program statement for the Bruce site was developed. Following the disappointing quality ratings of December 2007, the Management Committee made a decision to contract with a curriculum specialist and together with the TDSB early years consultant worked intensively with the staff team on program quality and to develop a plan of action on how to implement ELECT. From February to June 2008, work with the curriculum specialist included collaborative professional learning workshops on ELECT. The entire early years staff team participated including ECE staff, Kg teachers, Education Assistants, the parenting worker, the BWELC coordinator and the school principal.

Curriculum Planning. New planning forms were designed by the early years team. These forms integrated the ELECT developmental continuum, recognizing both group and individual learning and embedding the Kindergarten Program. In the fall of 2008, the staff refined the process and developed a plan to evaluate the forms in the spring of 2009. During the professional development sessions, there was a strong emphasis that observation and documentation would become the shared responsibility of all the adults in the room. Cameras purchased for each room were used as an additional tool for program observation and pedagogical documentation to drive curriculum change.

Overall, the early childhood team began working in a more integrated fashion. Staff are now using documentation in meaningful and integrated ways; the documentation is displayed prominently in the BWELC rooms. This ongoing assessment is believed to capture children's learning as it happens throughout the program. The program itself is more fully integrated, for example, the “kindergarten” teacher has submitted long range

plans that include ELECT, ensuring programming is richer and more sophisticated; planning is always undertaken in a team approach. As a staff team, they believe that they have come as far as they can in the areas of roles and responsibilities, many of which are based on collective agreements. Reaching the highest levels of integration in some areas are beyond the grasp of local efforts and will require systems change at higher levels. Common approaches to observing children and documenting progress may help to identify children with special needs that would otherwise slip between the cracks between silos.

“If there is a child who might be registered in the Parenting and Family Literacy Centre or a child who might be in the kindergarten program but not technically registered in the child care program, and if they don’t have access to the direct service, there would still be that referral point (in TFD). That’s what I meant by a springboard. I also think it certainly has increased awareness about the fact that services do exist. So I think many families who have kids in child care might know about special needs resources but do other people in the community, or families who aren’t connected to resources, do they know? Not necessarily. The whole thing about increasing awareness, putting inclusiveness as a central component, hooking people into the ‘every child belongs’ is central to Toronto First Duty.”

Family/Community Integration

The discussion of integration and planning focused on three areas: 1) integration of families with the centre; 2) integration of the school community with the centre; 3) integration of the parenting centre and the classrooms. The early years team, the school and program leaders and the management committee are developing strategies to ensure this factor remains central to all program and curriculum initiatives.

“We now offer much more flexibility to all of our parents in terms of part time options for enrolment. In the old days...we were very reticent around going into part-time arrangements with families.”

As an important area of improvement, the site made a commitment to involve families in all aspects of the program, including governance. There has been an increase in parental input regarding decision making and an increase of parent members in the governance structure. Examples of parent-focused organizations and activities are numerous and include: a new coffee/muffin monthly meeting, information sessions on the new ELECT planning sheet, information sessions for new kindergarten parents regarding the range of services in the school, connecting parents to school readiness and ESL programs.

Staff believe that there could be more consistency in connecting with the PFLC parents and that some parent sessions are not always avenues for “meaningful participation.” Staff believe that they should try to get more parent feedback on some of these initiatives. Another area for potential improvement is outreach. Although the demographic mix of families participating in the TFD programs matches the community profile, participants may not include some of the families who could benefit the most from supports. For example, the principal reported that not all families enroll their children in TFD programming, including junior and senior kindergarten. In a couple of these cases, children have presented at Grade 1 with particular learning needs without having any connection to TFD preschool services, including kindergarten. On the positive side, once such children do enroll in school, the integrated network of professionals created through

TFD can be used to provide supports. Nevertheless, the case study shows that the tasks of parental involvement and outreach are never finished. In fact, well-intentioned and effective early childhood programs can actually increase gaps and inequities in our society if less advantaged families have lower levels of uptake.

Evidence for payoff at the end of Phase 2: Integration and quality indicators

The efforts of the Bruce site staff to improve program quality and to work in more integrated ways were evident in multiple ways. In each of the five major dimensions in the Indicators of Change, assessed in the fall of 2008, the Bruce site demonstrated improvement over 2006. An increase in integrative local governance included a stronger human resource partnership despite different collective agreements. The involvement of the Parenting and Family Literacy Centre improved but remains inconsistent although joint PD is more apparent - all staff are encouraged to participate equitably within existing policies; for example, the entire site took part in the Ontario Focused Intervention Program (OFIP) supported through the Ministry of Education. Some areas of seamless access improved through a common registration process, a common attendance form, and better links to community services. However, with cutbacks in funding and increased costs there was a decline in affordability and parents' uptake of services. The Bruce site did what it could to support families in the transition to new funding structure, but several sub-dimensions of seamless access were affected.

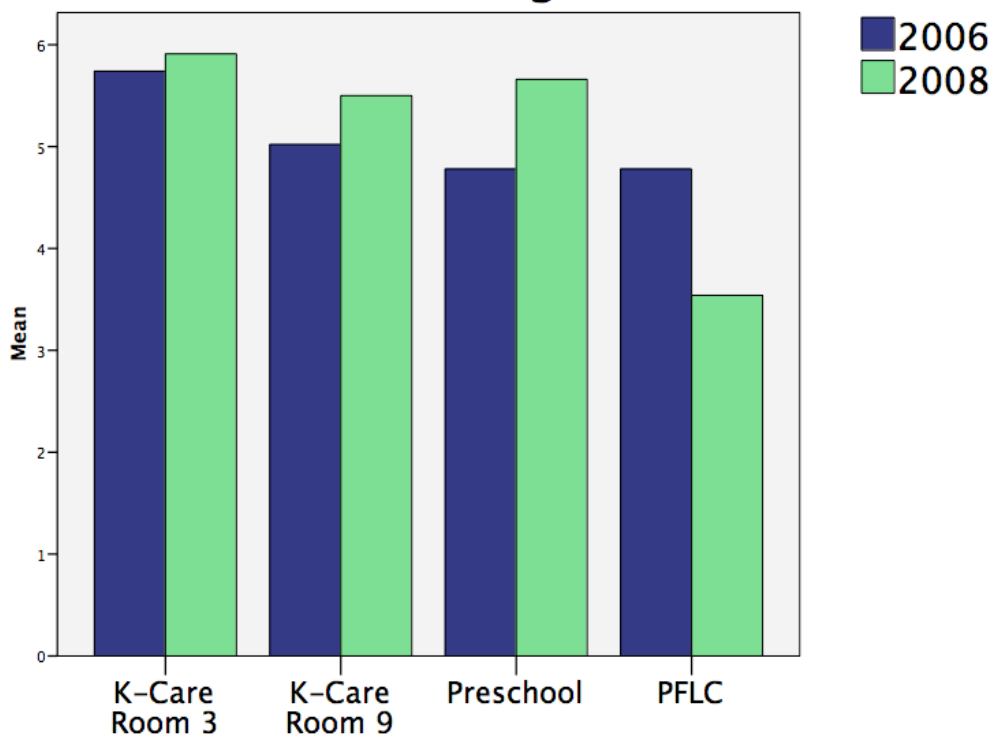
Levels of integration: Indicators of Change scores in fall, 2008

Indicators of Change Summary	Early Learning Environments						Early Childhood Staff Team				Governance					Seamless Access						Parent Participation			
	1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	3.1	3.2	3.3	3.4	3.5	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.6	5.1	5.2	5.3	5.4
Integration Level 5	■	■		■		■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■							■					
Collaboration Level 4	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Collaboration Level 3																									
Co-ordination Level 2																									
Co-existence Level 1																									
2008	1 Curriculum Framework 2 Pedagogical Approach 3 Daily Schedules & Routines 4 Use of Space 5 Children's Development & Progress 6 Program Quality						1 Program Planning & Implementation 2 Behaviour 3 Roles & Responsibilities 4 Staff Development				1 Decision-making 2 Allocation of Financial Resources 3 Service Planning & Monitoring 4 Program Policies 5 Human Resources					1 Capacity 2 Child Care Provision 3 Child Care Affordability 4 Intake, Enrollment & Attendance 5 Responsiveness to Community 6 TBD						1 Parent Input 2 Parent Participation in Programs 3 Parenting Capacity 4 Relationships With Families			

In terms of the integrated learning environment, staff felt and researchers observed, that quality has improved significantly in the key areas of the Bruce site programs that were targeted in professional development and staff teamwork. In particular, within the three classrooms for preschool and kindergarten age children, scores on the ECERS-R generally showed clear increases on the quality dimensions of program structure, language/reasoning, and quality of interaction. In the PFLC setting, only the program

structure score increased substantially. Across all four settings, positive changes were not generally seen in dimensions of activities, personal care routines, space/furnishings, and involvement of parents. These findings are encapsulated in the graph below showing increases in Total Average ECERS-R scores for the three classrooms and a decline in the overall PFLC score; detailed graphs of subscales are available in the Appendix. It should be noted that the ECERS-R measure is less appropriate for drop-in programs such as the Parent and Family Literacy Centre, and direct comparisons with other program types are misleading. However, comparing scores across time within the PFLC setting may be instructive. Lack of improvement in quality may partly reflect challenges in integration for PFLC staff since they did not participate as fully in the improved teamwork as did other early years staff at Bruce.

Quality changes in ECERS-R between 2006 and 2008: Total average scores across four BWELC settings over time



Corroborating evidence for program improvement at the site also came from the City of Toronto standard Operating Criteria evaluation in 2007 and again in 2008. This evaluation assesses quality in 6 dimensions and is used a management tool to monitor quality across all regulated child care centres. BWELC child care operations increased in quality on all 6 dimensions between 2007 and 2008.

Conclusion

It is clear that the efforts staff and management made to address areas of challenge evidenced in the previous research report paid off (December 2007 Progress Report). The strong sense of mission on the part of staff to address these particular areas led to the refocusing of the program areas through the assistance of the curriculum specialist. At the same time as these improvements and refocused efforts were made, staff committed themselves to working together more closely, to making explicit efforts toward integration. Thus as integration increased, program quality increased. School and program leadership are critical to ensuring increased quality and integration in a consistent and sustained way. Management took steps to provide additional support to the integrated staff team. It is also important to communicate that early leaders for change pave the way to allow others to learn from their successes and to avoid their mistakes. And the story of successful service reform is often “two steps forward and one step back” and “implementation dips” as reorganizations replace practiced approaches with potentially more effective, but unpracticed, approaches.

Fundamentally, the research evidence points to the integration model as a positive and effective learning environment for young children. It highlights the capacity of professionals from education and early childhood to work collaboratively and to build on the strengths of each. It recognizes the absolute importance of reciprocal mentoring and a professional respect for each other. Teaching became seamless across the two professions. The integrated model also allows for improved parent involvement and links to community agencies to support the extended family. In order to move from a service-based approach to a system of early learning and care, there are structural differences in governance, human resource policies and pre-service training that need to be addressed. However, the Toronto First Duty program at Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre has established a program that puts the vision of a seamless integrated early learning environment into practice with a professional team of educators committed to the children and families it serves.

Key Findings from the Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre

- Integration efforts can support quality improvement.
- Service transformation is not a smooth ride; positive growth has its ups and downs.
- Conceptual agreement on program aims and how integration will support them is a starting point.
- Continual focus on results, in both process and outcomes, is crucial to success.
- Indicators of program quality and progress in integration are key.
- Without system change, including top-down support/pressure, local efforts only go so far.
- ELECT provides a framework for working together and monitoring outcomes.
- Parent-community engagement has room to grow; hearing from parents and outreach demand continuing attention.
- Leadership and staff teamwork are crucial to local success.

An Alternative Model of Integration – Kindergarten in the Child Care Centre

In TFD 2, the TFD Research Team carried out a case study of an alternative model of early childhood service integration, contrasting with the school-based hub model in TFD1 (TFD2 December 2007 Progress Report). The study was based on the Toronto District School Board's and the University of Toronto's Early Learning Centre's (ELC) pilot project on integrated child care and kindergarten education during the first year of implementation in 2006-2007.

**Early childhood service integration at a child care centre:
A case study of the Early Learning Centre-Huron School partnership.**

In this model of integration a kindergarten teacher from Huron Street Public School teaches together with early childhood educators at the ELC; rather than being school-based, it is child care centre-based integration. To describe this approach we used case study methods of staff and parent surveys and direct observation of program quality. The Early Learning Centre-Huron School (ELC-HS) partnership project had some of the same challenges seen in TFD1 sites with staff trying to catch up to the roll-out of integration and not enough time to meet as a team. Nevertheless, staff reports revealed very successful team-building and staff satisfaction over the first year and generally high regard for the integrated program they produced. Observations of the program quality showed that most program dimensions were in the good to high range although "activities" and "language" were rated lower. Parents were generally very positive and articulate about the program and staff. A minority had issues with communication, space, and program content that related to the integrated nature of the program and its location outside a school and parents feeling disconnected from school life. Interestingly, the Toronto Best Start survey in 2007 indicated little collaboration between the school and child care centre even though some integrated staff teamwork was taking place within the ELC. Given the current Ontario context, the issue of the location for full-day early learning experiences (school vs. community site) is central. This case points to parents' needs and concerns as part of the planning, and to site considerations for the location of early learning programs.

This case study suggests that staff and program integration can work outside the school-based hub model of Toronto First duty. The same suggestion comes from a Ministry of Community and Social Services study (see p. 43) that examined 22 Ontario sites representing several different models for combining kindergarten and child care in full-day programs. Two sites with kindergarten and care co-located in employer sites, operated in highly integrated ways. It should be noted that the research in these case studies shows that integration- in various forms- is happening but does not follow through on whether it improves program quality, parents' capacity to engage in learning and connections to school, and children's outcomes. These benefits have been found for the integration in the TFD model, which goes beyond kindergarten and child care to include other services such as family supports.

TFD1 Site Follow-Ups: Where Are They Now?

In this section we present vignettes of the four Phase 1 case study sites that did not receive additional support to continue the TFD model in Phase 2. These reports are based on key informant interviews at the sites and on other data sources such as the Toronto Best Start Survey on early childhood service integration levels across the City of Toronto (see page 39). The survey suggested that there are a number of highly integrated sites across the City, including school-based hubs within the Toronto Catholic District School Board. In some cases, they reflect special supports from initiatives like TFD or Best Start. In other cases, they may have developed without special supports through inspired local leadership and community histories of services working together. The vignettes presented here help to answer the question of whether promising local initiatives are sustainable in the face of siloed systems not designed to support integration and collaboration across sectors. The reports from the sites suggest that without a mandate, recognition, and top-down pressures and supports from the “system”, program integration and its potential benefits are not sustainable in the long-term.

In TFD1 sites where the integrated programming continues, the contributing factors include dedicated leadership and ongoing meetings among service provider leaders. Good communication appears to extend beyond better programming to include parent and community involvement. For example in one site, the child care coordinator, working closely with the principal, steers parents into school council participation as the children enter kindergarten. In several sites, the capacity for greater parent involvement generated by TFD1 appears to be paying off in burgeoning parent attendance in school council meetings, including many minority families who in the past might not have attended. Nevertheless gaps in outreach to minority subgroups are reported, and these vary community by community.

On the side of additional challenges among the four sites, there is no systematic provision for staff time to meet, to integrate, or even to coordinate, professional work and learning environments. Along with leadership, this is a key to the success of the TFD model. Another challenge is that instead of top-down pressure and supports to work on an integrated early childhood system, there are competing priorities and initiatives from higher levels of the system. These are especially evident within the school system where principals and their schools adopt different emphases in the school success plan and early childhood may not be a focus. From the standpoint of other service providers, the degree to which a principal is open to a community approach to service provision is a crucial variable.

Action For Children Today And Tomorrow/Secord Dawes

In TFD1 the Secord School site operated more as a distributed network of collaborating services rather than as a school-based hub combining kindergarten, child care and family support. There were family support programs at the school but no child care. Ironically, as TFD 1 came to an end, space opened up in the school and child care (Annie’s Place) moved on site as part of the East York East Toronto [EYET] Early Learning Centre. With a strong neighborhood network and good communication between the principal and child

care supervisor, Secord has maintained the middle level of integration achieved at the end of TFD 1.

Currently there is a host of family support programs on-site (although at one end of the school building) including those offered by EYET Family Resources –an Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC)- including multiple weekly sessions for children and their families in literacy and math and summer school readiness programs for children and parents. Next year the school will be “fully subsidized” for the Learning Partnership’s Welcome to Kindergarten program. The Principal and a Kindergarten teacher, along with the supervisor of Annie’s Place and a manager of off-site child care attended the EDI rollout; they reported back to other staff. Ensuing discussions were said to have contributed to a comprehensive plan for developing oral language in the early years. The school is monitoring EDI and EQAO results and feels that there is a need for “intentional” kindergarten programming, so six of the kindergarten classes are “straight” JK and SK classrooms to facilitate the program match to developmental levels.

Annie’s Place now operates on-site child care, and there is bridging between the school and the child care. The centre head works proactively to link parents and children into the school. The principal reports that the school council has a number of parents who are “graduates” of child care and who had the encouragement of the child care head to get involved in the school. Child care educators and teachers exchange ideas and child care staff are involved. Nevertheless, the small number of spaces in Annie’s Place (16) limits seamless connections to the ten kindergarten classes in the school, so the 2007 TBS survey indicated, there is no joint programming at the site. Although nearly 40% of kindergarten children are in child care, most attend two off-site centres, and there are “extraordinarily long waiting lists”. Annie’s Place is trying to negotiate additional space for expansion in the school so that a seamless Kindergarten program can be offered. The Child Development Institute operates on site and offers a “first-start/good start” social skills program.

The principal related a story of an innovative, but short-lived, program developed through partnership with Seneca College’s ECE training program. Senior students ran a targeted literacy readiness program for 3-year-olds who were nominated from screening exercises such as the Nipissing and Red Flags. Unfortunately the program ended when neither the Board nor the College could assume the responsibility for liability/insurance.

Corvette Early Years

In Phase 1, Corvette Early Years (CEY) was a flagship for innovative work in the early implementation of Toronto First Duty. CEY developed a flexible model of child care; it introduced a highly visible summer program, and it designed curriculum approaches that combined expertise of kindergarten and early childhood educators. The Indicators of Change data in 2003 documented the early progress towards integration and staff at the site enthusiastically projected that they would be approaching full integration on several dimensions by 2005. Instead the Indicators data in 2005 showed that the site had actually lost ground compared to the 2003 levels. The 2007 Toronto Best Start survey results for the site suggested that the decline in integration of teamwork and common learning environment had approached the vanishing point – lower than the other former First Duty

sites and even lower than the city-wide average from hundreds of sites in the 2007 survey results.

What happened? History shows instructive ups and downs in visionary approaches to early childhood at the site. The lead agency at the site was Not Your Average Daycare, which began in 1979 as a seamless complement to Scarborough Village Alternative School. In 1997 Corvette School invited NYAD to bring the seamless model to the school but this innovation came to a close after a change in leadership. NYAD, the school, and other community groups including the Corvette Family Resources Centre rekindled the idea of a collaborative service community when they became a TFD site in 2001. After a strong start, changes in key staff, child care funding challenges, and shrinking school support led to the declining integration seen at the end of TFD Phase 1 in 2005. Key informant interviews conducted at the site in the Fall of 2008 corroborated the further decline in integration seen in the 2007 TBS Survey and also offered insights on potential factors that can reduce community-level integration of early childhood service delivery.

Preschool and before-and-after-school child care operate on site at the school and teachers communicate regularly as required on “student need”. However, the staff from child care and kindergarten do not work as a team in producing a common learning environment. Interviews with staff from Not Your Average Daycare, which was the lead agency in Phase 1 of TFD, suggested that staffing and leadership changes over several years in both child care and school led to declining interest in an integrated model. Interestingly, it was also suggested that the provision of TFD funding to support a coordinator’s position during Phase 1 created “dependency” and was disruptive in the long-run, as compared to having a “very willing principal already in place” and distributed leadership. *“What we found was if the person in charge of making decisions whether it be a school principal, whether it be a superintendent, whether it be a childcare supervisor, whether it be a front line child care worker, whether it be a kindergarten teacher if they had belief in the project and a willingness on their own to get involved, we saw progress, we saw quick progress, we saw excellent results.”* Despite the current disconnect and too many examples of *“not wanting to play in the same sandbox”*, NYAD remains true to its history and belief that *“The first place that families rally around in their community whether they have been in that community for years or whether they are new immigrants, is the school.”* Linking lessons from TFD into Best Start meant not getting involved in establishing a new Best Start centre because NYAD believed that the locations selected to set up the new programs did not serve community needs and, according to the informants, the program in this community is not filled to capacity because it is simply not accessible to families. Politics and funding mechanisms limit the capacity to meet family needs. *“You can’t pull full fee parents out of low income communities. You have to ensure there are adequate subsidies available that are not tied to the parents’ employment status. When student parents are forced to withdraw their children from summer programs because they are not in school, it simply puts the child at risk for more challenges”*. The requirement to work in order to access child care subsidy is an issue that can serve as an important policy shift; in order to provide consistent and often much needed programming, children should not be penalized for their parents’ employment status.

From the school side it is reported that the School Success plan put in place over the last two years is bearing fruit. The school's approach includes TDSB initiatives that encompass the early years, although they do not emphasize external partnerships with other early childhood services. Corvette is an Early Years Literacy Project school with literacy support in K-3, a Reading Recovery programming, and the Welcome to Kindergarten program. A Vice Principal and lead kindergarten teacher attended the TDSB 2008 EDI rollout. Although no integrative community initiatives were sparked by the EDI rollout, the information was brought back and shared with the kindergarten team. Plans were developed and implemented with teachers and E.A.s. Part of the school's current approach is a community orientation and it participates in the TDSB *Model Schools for Inner Cities project*. Parent involvement and community outreach, and successful fundraising, are intertwined with the school's improvement of climate and character. Diversity has increased on the School Council. A prime indicator of the school's success is that the rate of suspensions has fallen by more than half over the last several years; school events are now widely attended by diverse parents, which represents another dramatic change over the last several years. It appears likely that current school programs have indeed contributed to the turnaround in civility and community engagement. However, the legacy of TFD1 and the three years of experience with integrated services for parents and preschool children who are now moving through the higher grades of school may also be a key to this success story. Findings from Phase 1 showed that children's social emotional function improved at the site during TFD 1, along with their parents' capacity for school engagement.

Queen Victoria Partners for Early Learning

The Queen Vic site was part of Toronto First Duty in Phase 1. Levels of integration among service were relatively modest throughout implementation. The legacy of the program continues to be supported by a partnership among the Child Development Institute and Queen Victoria Public School, the Parenting and Family Literacy Centre at the School, Parkdale Beach Child Care, St. Christopher House, Parkdale Primary Prevention Project (St. Joseph's Hospital) and Toronto Public Health with occasional meetings of staff from these organizations. Collaboration includes ongoing child screening and summer school readiness programs, although funding is tenuous and dependent on contributions from partners. Programs are vulnerable to quality and integration issues because they are constantly dealing with separate funding envelopes and subsidy rules. *"The mish mash of administration is crazy"*.

Over TFD Phase 1 and 2 the journey to integration included dealing with a resistance and outright aversion to collaboration in the view of one key informant. Much depends on the leadership of the principal, but there is no natural desire or mandate inherent in the position to build links with the external community and the vision. *"Principals have to raise their sight away from "my school" and the kids who attend the school "belong to the school", to our kids in the community.... The EDI is not about a school performance measure; it's a measurement of what is happening before they even get there"*. The TDSB is seen as having good policy but no mandate. *"Without a policy mandate, integration is entirely dependent on the leadership of the principal and the early*

childhood supervisor who may lack confidence". They too are also engaged in territoriality issues about their centre. We need to "*raise the sights on training for directors*".

The school principal reported a growing commitment to early childhood partnerships over the course of TFD 1 and 2 but suggested that local supports had been more important than TDSB-wide initiatives. A vice-principal attended the TDSB EDI roll-out session, but it had no real effect since they are "*already doing it.*" In fact, the principal is skeptical about the meaning of the EDI since scores went down in 2008 because new kindergarten staff arrived who "*couldn't see the progress.*" Although board initiatives are not a big part of the story of the school's commitment to the early years, the Parent and Family Literacy centre is very valuable and feeds the diversity on school council. Nevertheless, it is reported that the PFLC does not appeal to all cultural groups equally; for example, there is less appeal for white families in poverty and Caribbean families. Interestingly, the principal also suggested that outreach is an issue even in Kindergarten enrolment, with some ethno-cultural groups being somewhat less likely to elect to enroll their children.

Nevertheless, at Queen Vic, TFD lives on with a community agency early childhood committee including the school principal, a summer readiness program with partner funding and integrated staffing, internal communication between kindergarten and child care, joint professional development, and in Health Screening days. The site is proud of its role in "pioneering" Health Screening in TFD1 and produced a manual to help other sites (http://www.rfsc.ca/HCS_Manual_2005-12.pdf). In fact, health screening days appear to bring in a wide range of families and may be an effective outreach strategy, as well as a useful service integration practice (Pelletier & Corter, 2005a; Patel et al., 2008). Anecdotal evidence suggests that this approach is being used increasingly around the city (Rushowy, 2008).

York Early Years-Wilcox

York Early Years-Wilcox was the Early Leader among the five original TFD sites. With a history of collaboration among service providers in the community, the site came together in 2001 with Macaulay Child Development Centre as the lead agency. Over the implementation years, the site moved strongly on most dimensions of integration. Naturally, there were bumps in the road; at one point in implementation, the pace of integrating child care and kindergarten was unacceptably slow to one of the project funders. A funding cut loomed but the site responded by pushing on staff team integration and on the integrated learning environment. Nevertheless the site generally worked proactively and governance was a strong suit with effective leadership, an engaged management committee and the development of protocols to guide the partnership. Over time the staff team moved to working together and developed a more integrated learning environment; quality of the learning environment improved, followed by EDI scores in 2005. In fact, the site demonstrated the success of the TFD "knowledge building" approach to innovation and improvement in early childhood services, with the support of feedback from indicators like the EDI and ECERS-R quality data, and a staff team focused on results (Cortier, et al., 2008).

The 2007 Toronto Best Start survey results for the site suggested that integration in TFD2 is continuing at high levels relative to most communities in Toronto, and relative to the other three TFD1 sites. Strong leadership, a continuing joint management committee, and program co-location appear to be keys to the success in maintaining collaboration. The positive effects of TFD in building capacity for parent involvement continue as TFD “grad” parents move up the grade levels.

Following Phase 1, the site lost the funding for the coordinator’s position and the management committee lost some of the organizational partners. Instead of a lead agency approach to management committee, the principal and child care supervisor became the co-leaders and coordinators of activity at the site and the site was renamed Wilcox - Early Learning Centre (WELC). In contrast to the other three original TFD1 sites, WELC continues to operate with a joint management committee consisting of a subset of the original partners, together with strong inputs from the OEYC and Toronto Public Health. There is collaborative work in drawing on organizational resources to offer programs that are located at the site. For example, the Macaulay Child Development Centre and Learning Enrichment Foundation pitch in to offer a summer readiness program. Some of this is more modularized than programming developed by on-site teams, as is the case when the OEYC offers special programming.

Interviews with the principal and child care supervisor show the continued influence of TFD ideas and values, but suggest that the leadership and staff are frayed by the efforts to carry it forward without support and recognition from higher levels of the “system”. Within the school board, the principal reports that the early years work done at the site is not part of a larger picture and is not a part of regular discussions among principals in the “family of schools” meetings. Interestingly, a nascent early years professional learning community had grown up among the schools connected in a local network as part of the MOE OFIP initiative where resources for professional development included support for time to meet to discuss strategies for boosting achievement. At the frontline level, the child care and kindergarten classes operate side by side and staff share occasional joint planning time and activity times with the children. The curricula are not integrated but overlap when the staff find common learning activities that can be combined, such as a writer’s workshop for the children.

In contrast to years past, the school council is brimming with parents, most of whom are “grads” of early years programming in the PFLC or child care. There can be downsides of parental involvement if development of parents’ capacity for leadership working in the School Council is not supported by the system, or if cliques develop within programs like the PFLC. Outreach is also an issue, with some groups, such as Caribbean parents, not coming into family support type programs in representative numbers. Interestingly, one of the partners, Macaulay Child Development Centre is working on building the capacity for better service-community connections to hear from men in this community through a unique “barber-shop” pilot project (Macaulay Child Development Centre, 2008).

Parents and Family Life

In TFD1, we found that the availability of integrated TFD services in school sites was associated with stronger parent involvement, in terms of connections to services and the school, as well as in terms of parents' confidence in fostering learning at home (Patel & Corter, 2006; Corter et al., 2007a). This is an important finding since research shows that high quality environments both in the home and in early childhood programs contribute to child outcomes, with the home having even greater impact (e.g., Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2007). In TFD2 we further explored how the home environment might benefit from high quality integrated services (see Box below).

Daily routines, parenting hassles, and social support: The role that early childhood services play in parents' and children's daily life

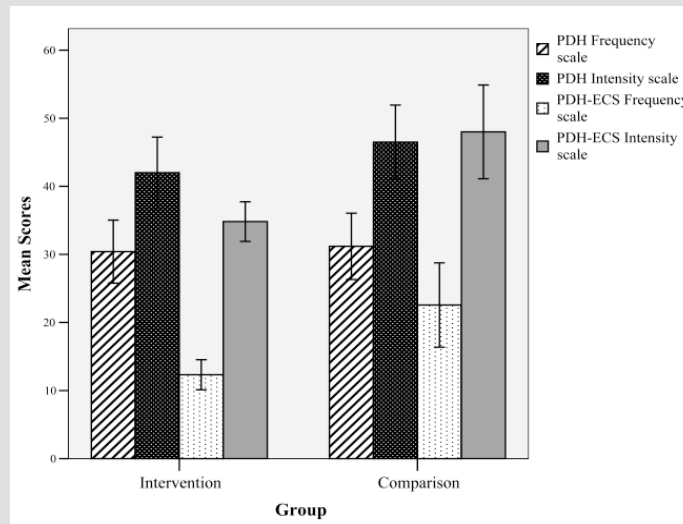
Do seamless services improve everyday family life and children's experiences, beyond the direct experience in early childhood programs? There is little academic research on this topic, but survey evidence from TFD1 suggested a high level of "client satisfaction" with the new service array. In TFD2 we systematically studied the impact of integrated services consisting of kindergarten, child care and family support programs on the daily lives of parents and their kindergarten-aged children (Arimura & Corter, 2009). The quasi-experimental design compared the daily experiences of parents and children accessing integrated TFD services versus families using traditional, disconnected forms of kindergarten and child care services. Intervention group participants came from two TFD1 sites offering integrated programming in co-located child care and kindergarten. Comparison group participants were parents and children who attended separate kindergarten and child care programs. Comparison group participants were recruited from sites that matched TFD sites on the TDSB Learning Opportunities Index (TDSB, 2007). Thirty-eight parents completed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews regarding daily routines, daily parenting hassles, social support networks, and views about early childhood services. Sixteen children participated in a semi-structured interview that assessed their views about their daily routines. Analyses indicated that service integration is associated with lower levels of daily parenting hassles, greater satisfaction with some forms of support, and greater levels of continuity in children's days. In TFD sites, parents named both kindergarten teachers and early childhood educators as part of their social support network. In Comparison sites, only early childhood educators were named. Children in TFD sites spoke about their experiences in a seamless way. In contrast, several children from the non-integrated sites noted differences between their experiences at school and at the child care centre (e.g., "We have to learn a lot in kindergarten but we mostly play at daycare").

continued...

Continued ...

Daily routines, parenting hassles, and social support: The role that early childhood services play in parents' and children's daily life

Compared to TFD parents, parents in the Comparison group reported more frequent and intense Parenting Daily Hassles – Early Childhood Services (PDH-ECS): a new measure developed to assess everyday stress associated with service use. There were no differences in the general Parenting Daily Hassles scale (PDH; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990) assessing everyday stress associated with typical tasks of parenting and children's behaviour.



TFD Partners and Toronto's Best Start: Vision for Children

The grassroots perspectives described above show the effects of the TFD model on the ground. However, the general purpose of TFD was to improve practice and to promote policy change on a wide scale, using evidence about the feasibility of the model and its results for children, families and program improvement. In TFD2 we asked whether the TFD program blueprint is informing the transformation or evolution of early childhood service delivery and policy in Toronto, in Ontario and elsewhere. To begin to answer this question we interviewed key informants and analyzed documents from the TFD partners, (ACF, TDSB and City), as well as from the Toronto Best Start Network and its additional partners.

Atkinson Charitable Foundation

The Atkinson Charitable Foundation's (ACF) mission is to promote social and economic justice. It works for system change to build better societal supports for children, family, youth and communities, particularly for those living in poverty and other adverse circumstances. The mission builds on the principles Joseph Atkinson, the first publisher of the *Toronto Star*, followed a century ago in a program of social action that led to sea changes such as the establishment of the Children's Aid Society (Kieran, 1986). Today the ACF funds innovative projects to build social change in two overlapping areas: Early Childhood Education and Development and Economic Justice (<http://www.atkinsonfoundation.ca/>).

Developing Toronto First Duty for policy and social change

The TFD project is a major part of the ACF's investment in early childhood over the last decade. In 1999, the ACF approached the Toronto Children's Advocate with a proposal to jointly sponsor a project that would demonstrate the development of an early years system. The Toronto City Council allocated funds to contribute to a partnership for a multi-year Early Childhood Education, Development and Care project and the ACF launched a 'Million Dollar Early Years Challenge' to support innovative approaches. The City and ACF were joined by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) in a feasibility study on integrated early childhood programs.

Phase 1 of Toronto First Duty began in 2001 with the ACF, City and TDSB as the major partners and funding from the ACF and City. This partnership continued in Phase 2 of TFD beginning in 2006. In this phase ACF has been the major funder supporting the continued development of the Bruce TFD site as a test bed for further improvements in integration efforts and as a demonstration site. Since the inception of TFD, research and development and project evaluation have been a key part of the project. In Phase 2, ACF has supported the Toronto First Duty Research Team to evaluate the further development of the Bruce site, as well as the dissemination of lessons from TFD Phase 1 in Toronto Best Start and beyond. In Phase 3 of TFD beginning in 2009, ACF has provided funding for the continuation of research at the Bruce site, support to the Toronto Best Start Network, and communication of findings. In this next phase, one focus will be curriculum and program development reflecting the provincial Early Learning

Framework and its ELECT document. A second focus for the research will be to deepen the examination of how variations in service integration affect children and families.

Knowledge mobilization and evidence-based lessons

Consistent with its aim of fostering social change at the system level, the ACF has also supported a communication strategy to move public policy towards the development of an effective early child development and learning system. This strategy has been a key part of mobilizing knowledge from TFD research locally, provincially, and beyond. The strategy has also been part of the direct influence TFD has had on provincial policy as documented in the TFD December 2007 progress report and elsewhere in this report. The ACF's early childhood advisers helped to prepare summaries of findings from TFD research (e.g., TFD Phase 1 Summary Report, 2006; Informing full day learning: Lessons from the TFD research, 2008); they have presented on TFD at local, national and international conferences; they have helped to coordinate the innumerable visits to the Bruce site (see TFD December 2007 Progress Report); and they have consulted directly with governments and policy makers in a number of jurisdictions.

"In the past year, the government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Education visited the program at Bruce Jr. Public School and embedded its core principles into the Saskatchewan Learning and Child Care Vision. Drawing on the expertise of TFD policy and communications staff and the research findings, the government of British Columbia's Children's First agenda now includes a feasibility study on the extension of early learning and care into a full day, publicly funded program for all children 3-6 years. Most recently the government of New Brunswick is implementing integrated programs modeled after Toronto First Duty."ACF official

The design and evolution of the TFD project and its evaluation plan have been consistent with many of the funding criteria on the ACF website: evidence-based evaluation and learning inside the project along with dissemination; individual (parent) and community engagement; working in partnerships and using existing resources.

Staff at the ACF also see that the TFD project has been a key to moving the early childhood agenda forward in the province of Ontario.

"We would not be here today with an Early Learning Advisor, considering full-day early learning care, without TFD.... Best Start is really all about coordinating services and systems change, and until they (the government) could see what it looked like on the ground as TFD, they would not have been able to move forward"

View of the provincial context

There is hope in the ACF that the TFD model will contribute to the form full day learning takes, as well as to the continuing Best Start implementation of integration. In looking at full day learning, the big issues are seen as the implementation and program focus.

Implementation has to balance doing it fast and doing it right, and the program has to negotiate between academic and play-based emergent curriculum emphases. The TFD experience can be interpreted as providing some relevant insights. Doing it sooner and doing it right, calls to mind the "Ready, fire, aim" premise of education reform as described in Michael Fullan's analyses of school improvement (1993). The premise was seen a apt description of what happened in TFD sites: There was strong initial push to establish the

TFD model of integration, which front line staff at some sites felt came too fast (see Corter et al., 2007a). However, the model was adapted and improved over the course of implementation through a combination of bottom-up engagement, reflection and effort, in parallel with top-down pressure and support. On the program design issue and tension between play and academic approaches, the work of the Bruce integrated staff team is promising. It appears to bring together the play-based approaches of early childhood educators with the more academic learning aims of the Ministry of Education (MOE) Kindergarten Program in an effective way, following the principles of the ELECT document, created by the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning. These efforts are described in the Bruce Case Study in this report and the Appendix. With opportunities for staff to work together, ELECT principles appear to offer a framework that can bridge different learning and development activities and into a more integrated, developmentally enriched approach.

Consistent with the TFD model, ACF staff believe that Best Start networks have been able to demonstrate the positive impact of better coordination. However, even with important early years leaders from major service sectors at the table, the networks are limited by the established silos and unable to move further without legislated mandates. Although some school principals and the school board, through their early years team and the supervisor, have done heroic work on integration in TFD and Toronto Best Start, there is no mandate or push from the Ministry of Education. In addition to lack of Ministry mandates there are others systems barriers such as insufficient preservice training in professional collaboration for staff and insufficient preparation for leaders in partnership development.

One key informant summarized the frustrations and promise of Best Start.

“Best Start does two things. I think Best Start has made a real contribution in getting people across sectors talking to one another on a regular basis and really understanding what each other does... Around the province the Best Start tables are tables of innovation. If there wasn't a lot of change in the way that services were managed or rolled out in a community it's often not the fault of the table itself. For example, there is money for child care but it's not the Best Start table that was allowed to decide where the child care would go. Then there was money for family and parenting centers but again by-passed the Best Start tables. It was very frustrating for these local organizations that were asked to put community service plans They had been by-passed. But on the other hand, from those tables there has been a very good public awareness. For example from the Hamilton Best Start table they did a lot of work around poverty in Hamilton and a lot of the business leaders were drawn into that discussion are now being considered for the Round Table that will work with the Premier and the ministry to say move forward on the Poverty Reduction Strategy.”

The need to go further in model building

ACF also reported limitations of the TFD project in pointing the way for system change. Importantly, “HR remained a continuing challenge and TFD did not provide systems solutions”, although TFD did demonstrate that different professional groups could come together effectively through the power of time to work together towards common goals.

The parent involvement piece of TFD was also a disappointment in several respects. First there was little evidence of parents being empowered to advocate for system change to sustain the model even though they benefited by using it in TFD sites; there was a general “disconnect between the research and really mobilizing parents around what could be.” Secondly, the parent and family support program was not as fully integrated in TFD sites as it could have been. Beyond TFD, parent involvement is not seen as running deep in most services.

“Everybody has the wording; everybody has the concept. They say ‘We engage the parents’ and you say ‘Well how do you engage the parents?’ ‘Well you know, we have pajama nights. And we have this one grandmother and she volunteers in the library all the time’”.

The Toronto District School Board

The Toronto District School Board has a decades-long history of linking schools and child care, as well as providing family supports through its Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs). Its current vision is directed toward the community and is consistent with the integrative approaches of Toronto First Duty and Toronto Best Start’s Vision for children. According to the TDSB website, “The local public school, as the hub of a young family's life in the community, provides the ideal location for programs and services to support young children and their families. Our schools can provide the necessary infrastructure, from facilities to human resources and beyond, to ensure excellence and innovation in early years programming. With our Early Years policy as a foundation, we look forward to collaborating with partners to provide for children's early care, development and learning, in order to ensure children's success.”

The TDSB has 451 elementary schools with kindergarten programs, over 300 licensed child care programs and 69 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs). The large scale of the operation lends weight to the early years mission, but it also makes implementing it more challenging. The vision for the early years had been revitalized through the participation in Toronto First Duty: There are new early years policies, an active Early Years Advisory Committee, with external and internal membership, and a strong early years team of more than a dozen members. Senior leadership within the board is perceived by the Early Years team as being very supportive. At the same time, there are many competing priorities in the large, complex board, so there are divided attention and resources, and no system-wide “press” for early childhood priorities. Furthermore, large-scale implementation of the partnership vision would require direction and leadership not only from the school board level but also from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The perception is that this has not been part of the MOE’s recent focus, either in its role as a Best Start partner, or in its supports and policies for schools, although it is recognized that the MOE is now fully funding PFLCs in many Boards across the province. Similarly, MCYS has provided limited support as a Best Start lead. In the absence of Ministry support and funding, local Best Start Networks are dependent on the commitment of local Early Years leaders.

New ways of thinking

With respect to TDSB's participation in TFD, key informant interviews, focus groups and other information collected over Phase 2 show that this partnership has been a catalyst for the board's renewal and innovation in the early years, as noted above. In addition to many organizational and policy changes to support the early years, TFD has also contributed to a new way of thinking, in a "systems" perspective, which helps to guide the TDSB's efforts in early years programming and partnerships (kindergarten, child care and parenting centres), a central part of their early years vision. The TFD organizational partnerships and the research have contributed to the renewal.

"The biggest impact has been in the intentionality on how we work, pulling from FD and knowing the key elements that have an impact, then focusing on those areas. We know that we need to work with the principal; we know that we need to provide PD."

"What has really informed our work are the lessons learned and certainly from the research that has been forwarded back to us around the principles. ... it's the way we operate now, rather than as a special project or a set of schools, it's the way we think about operating as a system ... that's our mindset now."

System-wide work supporting the Early Years

The TDSB developed a document called *Working Together for Children's Success* to promote an integrated approach to the delivery of education, care and family support services for children and families. This manual was developed to guide partnership both within the TDSB and as part of the Toronto Best Start Network. Within the Network, this document helped to stimulate other working together-type documents from the Toronto Catholic District School Board, the Family Support Working Group and the City of Toronto Children's Services as managers of child care.

Other current system wide work within the TDSB includes:

1. Developing an early years Partnership Checklist for inclusion in the Principal/VP Orientation Binder to support the role administrators.
2. An early years emergent curriculum group (50 to 60 voluntary attendees at regular meetings) to foster programming consistent with the Early Learning Framework ELECT document.
3. 2008 EDI rollout combining reporting and information on the potential of community partnerships to take the findings and the actions beyond the school. Several sessions were held and substantial numbers of child care staff attended along with kindergarten teachers and school administrators.

Progress and challenges

These are markers of real progress, but there is still a long distance to go. Engaging principals will require more than information, so the EY group is working on establishing a kindergarten presence and network within the 24 families of schools, where early years staff can meet to share ideas and practices. All principals have also received information regarding what to look for in a developmentally appropriate classroom. Widespread advances in bridging ELECT and the Kindergarten Program will require more than hardy

bands of volunteers and local experiments in using it as a resource document; Ministry supports and mandates would be required.

As in Toronto Best Start generally, TDSB early years leaders and staff appear to be scaling down expectations for system innovation and “transformational” reform; instead they appear to be taking a more “incremental” approach. Staff have begun to emphasize local work on a school-by-school basis rather than changing the system all at once. However, given the hundreds of schools and limited number of early years staff team members, “*It’s a slow-moving train*”. Overall, EC is not a focus at the middle-management system level. Principals at former TFD1 sites report that early childhood is almost never discussed in “family of schools” meetings. One principal reported that the school was involved in a school network with an early years focus as the result of OFIP, the MOE provincial initiative from the Literacy Numeracy Secretariat. Many principals do “get it” and partner with community organizations and services and child care. A manual to help principals do this kind of integrative work has been produced. The EDI rollouts, with suggestions for integrative community programming and school leadership sometimes attending with early childhood educators or PFLC staff, are also promising, but only a start at the level of moving the system. Nevertheless, there are late breaking developments indicating that the TDSB system is responding to the challenges.

“At a system level, our trustees are becoming increasingly interested in integrated service delivery at all levels, not just in the early years. We continue to add PFLCs and child care programs across the system. Where there are no PFLC programs, we link schools to OEYCs or satellite programs etc. “ ‘Critical Learning Standards’” developed by the Early Years Department have been rolled out at a system level through a presentation to all Superintendents of Education. Now SOEs are in the process of arranging for EY team members to provide local presentations to principals and kindergarten teachers at a family of schools level. The Standards promote developmentally appropriate programs and assessment strategies.”

The TDSB early years team is not alone in facing challenges of having a board-wide impact. Other local district school boards are facing similar challenges. A 2008 report to the Learning Consortium (Corter & Pelletier, 2008) revealed that similar stories came from the Toronto Catholic DSB, the Peel DSB and the York DSB. Across the boards, there are questions about the organizational structures, technical supports, funding and strategies that can best effect change at the school/classroom level. Effectively engaging principals and teacher/principal PD are seen as keys. How to engage principals in EY literacy and parent involvement are seen as major challenges, given all the competing demands on principals’ attention. Nevertheless, there are examples of successfully integrated early years school sites in both the TCDSB and TDSB as well as in Peel, and some of these are not the product of special initiatives such as TFD and Best Start. As described below, under Toronto Best Start Knowledge Building, the understanding of successful integration efforts needs to go beyond TFD sites.

The interviews and focus groups in the TDSB suggest some other areas of continuing challenge. TFD demonstrated the potential of stronger parent involvement but the capacity building potential of the early years for parent involvement in higher grade levels at schools has not filtered out to official committees, policy work or school councils.

“Early years programs are seen as an after-thought and as a system we are really not doing our best to make parents feel they have ownership of the school and they feel that it’s their place and they have a legitimate voice and they have a reason for showing up.”

Sometimes it appears that the Early Years staff and operation in the board are treated as a silo within a silo. For example, the 50-person Parent Involvement Committee of the TDSB recently organized a large conference on parent involvement but did not involve the early years team. This despite the TFD1 finding that integrated early years programming in schools is a very promising practice for building capacity for parent involvement in schools (Patel, Corter, & Pelletier, 2008). In fact the TFD Phase 2 site follow-ups of the original 5 TFD sites produced several reports of school councils coming off life support due to increasing interest and diversity among parents who had been introduced to the school through integrated early years programming (see TFD1 Site follow-ups). On the promising side, one respondent reported that school councils are now beginning to focus on the early years.

“Many of our School Councils put in proposals for MOE Parent Reaching Out grants related to engaging parents in the early years, often before their children start school, through programs like the Welcome to Kindergarten program, now in about 150 TDSB schools.”

At other times the Early Years team is not siloed, but appears to stand out in pushing back against developmentally inappropriate push-down curriculum and pushing out a progressive vision of what early years learning should be: building engaging active learning, more coherence and less modularization, whole child development including self-regulated students, parent capacity to work with schools, and community supports for child development and learning.

The full day early learning proposal has led to a number of anxieties and misconceptions, but it has also led to understanding more deeply “*how we work together on this thing.*”

“We have a number of models along the continuum we can look at, learn from and study. The idea of full day learning is allowing us to help people be more informed about integration. When I am thinking about full-day, that’s where I am thinking about it, the marriage of the staff team really”.

Full day learning provides an impetus to test out tools like ELECT. Kindergarten teachers were hoping to get a developmental continuum from the revised K program and now they have a framework that alerts them to those ideas. The challenge relates to the expectations that K teachers will evaluate end of year outcomes for children, which is not the same assessment approach as using a developmental continuum.

“They (Kindergarten teachers) feel a tremendous amount of pressure to get children ready for grade one and the continuum does not mesh too well with that. Teachers struggle with that. You have that whole push for the academic teaching of young children, which is counter to what obviously is the method that we would want to be using. There is also pressure from principals who want to see their EQAO scores increase and then you get the outside public printing material that is saying, you got to be prepared and you got to be more rigid, there has to be more formal rote teaching and more directional teaching and I think it is an uphill battle on many fronts. With more leadership training, people would see this is not good pedagogy.”

Knowledge-building and dissemination

The design of TFD focused on how organizations would learn together, as well as how they collaborated in program and policy development. Substantial funding was directed to research and development that would provide formative and summative evaluation and user-friendly findings for dissemination. In that same spirit TDSB operates as a knowledge-building organization, both inside the board and in its Early Years partnerships, as well as in wider dissemination activities.

In looking at innovation in integrative early childhood service, the TDSB is not limiting itself to the TFD model. It is monitoring a number of integration “experiments” and models, including 11 Best Start sites, the Toronto First Duty Phase 1 sites, 7 Inner City Model Schools plus associated Cluster Schools, and 4 Kindergarten in Child Care programs. The latter group includes the Huron-Early Learning Centre program at the University of Toronto described earlier in this report.

At a school level, the early years team is working on grassroots partnerships that take the form of knowledge building that brings parents and children into the picture.

“We had the adults come together around a book, or an idea of oral language development. And the family resource centre was involved. It was really a little think tank - three kindergarten parents, educational assistants, the child care supervisor, the two kindergarten teachers, the grade one teacher, the reading recovery teacher, the off-site family resource...And out of that work came some presentations that the parents did at kindergarten registration and will continue to do this year to get more parents involved. They used the concept of play dates ... They created 2 three minute DVDs with one in Mandarin and one in English where the parents were emptying out a grocery bag and developing oral language.”

The TDSB research department is also an important part of the knowledge-building for the early years. The research department has supplied invaluable data to the TFD research team. In turn the research team assisted the TDSB in a case study of schools that were “off diagonal” on EDI, that is, showing results that exceeded what demographic factors would predict. The research department is also monitoring success of integration experiments including the Inner City Model Schools and Cluster Schools and related early years innovations. These include full-day kindergarten at one site. Its system-wide Scan (TDSB, 2008b)

(<http://www.tdsb.on.ca/site/ViewItem.asp?siteid=309&menuid=4382&pageid=3720>) provides important contextual data including patterns of school absence beginning in kindergarten, a potential indicator of risk that could be used to supplement the EDI (Corter, 2008b).

A recent Parent Census relates demographic and experiential factors to school success (http://www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/about_us/media_room/docs/2008ParentCensusK-6SystemOverviewAndDetailedFindings.pdf). One area of particular interest is the parents’ reports on their children’s experiences in the preschool period. For example, it was found that minority families generally used these services less than English families (see Table below). These findings corroborate and extend what we have reported in our TFD sample. However, the TDSB data provide additional information in breaking down

the patterns into the experience of minority subgroups. Of particular interest is the finding that Aboriginal and Black families reported much higher preschool use of child care centres than did all other groups including White parents. These reports point to the importance of quality child care in supporting the development of children from these groups. It also reinforces the point that different groups have different needs and preferences in accessing early childhood services (Patel et al., 2008). The importance of child care for Black families is also notable in light of reports from two TFD1 sites that other services do not draw heavily from this community (see TFD1 Site Follow-ups, p. 15). This data convergence suggests that nuanced outreach strategies are needed to ensure that early childhood services provide equitable support to all families and young children. Later educational goals of reducing achievement gaps and school dropout rates may begin with successful outreach to comprehensive early supports that engage families and build child readiness (Corter, 2006; Corter & Pelletier, 2005).

Table 35: Childcare and Pre-school Program Attendance by Race, JK-Grade 6

	Attended Child Care		Attended Pre-school Program
	Centre	Home daycare	
Student Racial Background			
Aboriginal	53%	2%	44%
Black	44%	12%	18%
East Asian	30%	5%	27%
Latin American	30%	6%	20%
Middle Eastern	26%	3%	17%
Mixed	39%	11%	33%
South Asian	9%	3%	29%
Southeast Asian	13%	4%	20%
White	33%	13%	47%
OVERALL	27%	8%	32%

TDSB has also been active in disseminating TFD ideas in the Toronto, Ontario, and National Context. TDSB staff help to host visits to BWELC. The Superintendent for the Early Years teamed with the Ministry of Education in a webcast to explain the package of professional partnerships, PD, Principals and the Best Start context (Curriculum Services Canada (CSC), (2007). TDSB EY team members frequently present at provincial and national conferences. For example, a TDSB early years staff team member joined in the presentation of the TFD findings at a national conference in Sackville, Nova Scotia in May, 2009 (http://www.councilecd.ca/cecd/home.nsf/pages/PSIA_TFD_May1409.pdf); others are presenting at the Canadian Superintendents' Association Conference in Calgary in June of 2009.

The City

The City of Toronto's Children's Services (City) is designated as the "child care system manager" under provincial legislation and has responsibility for planning and managing a broad range of child care, including fee subsidy, wage subsidy, family resource centres, special needs resourcing and summer day camps, and it directly operates 57 child care programs. In fact it is manager of one of the largest child care systems in Canada. Beyond its service management responsibilities, the leadership of the City of Toronto in the Toronto First Duty Project and in the Toronto Best Start (TBS) Network has been crucial in connecting child care to other early childhood services. The City was a major funder of Phase 1 of Toronto First Duty and contributed substantially to the evaluation

effort with the development of the Intake and Tracking system for participants and to the development of the Indicators of Change tool for benchmarking changing levels of service integration (See Corter et al., 2007a). In Phase 2, the City has continued to lead the dissemination of lessons from TFD1 and to promote service integration and improvement in the Toronto Best Start Network, as described below. It should be noted that the City's leadership in supporting children, families and service improvement extends beyond TFD and TBS. Over the last decade, advocacy and improvement efforts extend from the Report Cards on children to the Best Generation Yet and Toronto Vision for Children, an integrated umbrella of supports over-arching TBS and supporting children's development from birth to 12 (Toronto Best Start Network, 2006).

In key informant interviews during Phase 2, Children's Services officials agreed that TFD has been part of the catalyst for these broad plans. Furthermore, participating in TFD, and bringing in those experiences into the continuing work in TBS, has changed the organization's approach in a number of ways.

"TFD was instrumental in pushing the envelope at the City level to be inclusive of more partners to work meaningfully to support children and families".

Adopting the principle of integration into the child care system, the City developed a Working Together section that has been incorporated in draft form into the City's Operating Criteria for assessing the quality of child care centres (http://www.toronto.ca/children/pdf/Working_together_questions.pdf).

Parent involvement, another key dimension of the TFD model, is also part of the Operating Criteria. Another form of supporting parent involvement is the City's development of websites supporting parents in learning about and locating regulated child care spaces. The information includes location, subsidy, and the relatively recent addition of Operating Criteria reports on quality for centres (<http://www.toronto.ca/children/childcare.htm>)

Despite the progress, challenges in realizing new ways of working together remain. Although service integration is a goal on paper as part of the Operating Criteria assessment, the item assessing it is limited in detail and it is still labeled as "draft". Although it is reported that the item will become part of the city consultants' visits, there is no clarity on how the city will support further integration through this process, beyond drawing attention to this "partnership" dimension. Similarly, the single item on parent involvement in the Operating Criteria is limited mainly to communication and it is not clear how quality improvement in this dimension is supported. Criteria for assessment include the "needs improvement" marker of sharing daily information during arrivals and departures, but also include other strategies such as interviews and written information for parents. This is notable in light of a recent study of child care centres in Toronto and Colorado that sampled informal parent-staff communication for over a thousand parents as they dropped their children off. The study found that staff provided "child-related information to fewer than 9% of parents" and only 6% of parents stayed inside the classroom for more than 5 minutes, while others stayed an average of 67 seconds (Fletcher, 2008).

City knowledge building

The Children's Services Division of the City has championed the Toronto Best Start (TBS) Network and used the management committee structure of Toronto First Duty as a blueprint for the establishment of the Implementation Steering Committee (ISC). The City's leadership in the TBS Network continues the "knowledge building approach" of TFD1 in which partners come together regularly to share information and ideas and to discuss next steps. Numerous reports for dissemination and references to TFD are available on the City of Toronto website (see www.toronto.ca/firstduty). A search on the site lists 131 documents or pages referring to "Toronto First Duty", including reports to Council and the Community Development and Recreation committee.

Knowledge mobilization has been a key Children's Services strategy well beyond TFD and TBS. Over the last decade the City has produced a steady flow of information resources on the status of Toronto's children and children's services. The City and its partners produced a series of Toronto Report Cards on Children between 1997 and 2003 (<http://www.toronto.ca/children/repcard.htm>). The first volume was entitled, "The First Duty" ("*of every society is to care for its youngest members*", quoted from Ruskin, 1857). Subsequent information updating the picture on children and services has appeared in other forms including "Fact Sheets", which show, for example, a growing number of children on the waiting lists for child care subsidies – over 14,000 in October 2008 <http://www.toronto.ca/reportcardonchildren/pdf/factsheet1.pdf>; http://www.toronto.ca/children/pdf/factsheet_oct2008.pdf.

An organizational balancing act: the child care gap and service integration

Even though the City has helped to lead exploration of how system silos might be transformed in new models of service delivery in TFD and in Toronto Best Start, there is continued concern about underfunding of child care and the glaring fact that there are regulated, publicly funded spaces for only a small minority of potential users. When the City's current Child Care Service Plan came into effect in 2005, only 28% of children requiring child care had access to a licensed child care space (Children's Services Division, 2005). There has been a concerted effort to keep alive the goal of strengthening the child care operation, attending to and advocating for quality and coverage. For example, the City commissioned a report by Cleveland (2008), which showed that publicly funded care delivers higher quality, complementing the other city reports noting gaps in subsidies with thousands of families on waiting lists.

In looking ahead to Full Day Early Learning (FDEL), the City has utilized TFD findings and gone further in its own analyses by modeling the impact of different implementation models on viability of child care operations Children's Services, City of Toronto, 2008). The position that child care must be maintained and strengthened as part of an early learning and care system in Ontario has also been mirrored at the provincial level in an Ontario Municipal Social Services Association position paper (2008). Notably, within the provincial government, a Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) official also voiced concern about the differences in scale between care and education services. Thus, there is some general concern about the fragility of child care coming into a closer living arrangement with an elephant.

“You can’t integrate a system-education- with a non-system-child care”.

Nevertheless, supports for working towards collaborative possibilities remain. Some informants thought that TFD could provide important lessons to full day early learning. It is important to build on what is already known but also to recognize that transformational change is necessary.

“Challenges to FDEL could be addressed through legislation, mandated staffing models, training and establishing the same employer – raise the bar on qualifications but grandparent the process – and establish equity in remuneration – challenges will remain in space, Aboriginal, Francophone and rural – but change is imperative. No matter what policies are mandated, if people don’t want to dance, it won’t happen. You need a positive attitude, be willing to work together, be creative and think outside the box for innovative ideas to work”.

The Toronto Best Start Network

Toronto First Duty informs Toronto’s Best Start

.....tagline from Toronto Best Start communications, 2006

Following the provincial mandate, the City of Toronto, as the Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM), leads the Toronto Best Start (TBS) Network. Since the provincial goals of Best Start overlap with the TFD model, the City is charged with facilitating work towards more integrated and cohesive services for young children. The TBS Network and its Implementation Steering Committee (ISC) include representation across levels from leaders of large-scale multi-service agencies, the four Toronto school boards, family support organizations, public health, provincial ministry officials as well as the City’s Children Services. The panel and its ISC meet regularly and the ISC has become a place where previously disconnected planning and actions may be coordinated.

The TBS Network is now a partnership of 36 members representing two provincial ministries, four school boards, the City of Toronto, Toronto Public Health, representatives from the Francophone and Aboriginal communities, and special needs and community organizations. The Toronto Best Start Network Terms of Reference (Toronto Best Start Network, 2005) and the Best Start Plan: Toronto Vision for Children (Toronto Best Start Network, 2006) envisioned a redesign of programs and services for young children with an emphasis on increased collaboration among kindergarten, child care and family support programs in the first phase, and the development of clusters of services, providing a broader range of options for families in the second phase (Toronto Best Start Network, 2007a).

The TBS Network has made tangible progress on key goals in the 2006 Plan, including the initial goals of bringing together child care, kindergarten, and family support programs into more collaborative relationships (Toronto Best Start Network, 2006). “Working Together” resource documents have now been produced by the Family Support

Working Group of the TBS Implementation Steering Committee (2009), the Toronto District School Board (2008), The Toronto Catholic District School Board (2008) and the City's Children's Services (2008) for child care services. The common release of information/confidentiality form that facilitates seamless access across traditional service boundaries is another example of a tool that supports integration. Aside from the collective work across partners in TBS, individual partners have their own organizational stories of innovation and progress towards integrative goals. For example, the TCDSB has a number of success stories around the early years, including highly integrated school hubs sites, paralleling the work of the TDSB.

In moving into the second phase of TBS, the goals have widened to extend collaboration beyond the services of care, education and family support to bring in a wider network of community partners, and also to incorporate new collaborative activities, such as early identification and screening (e.g. Toronto Preschool Speech and Language Services' Infant Hearing Program- http://www.tpsls.on.ca/about_ihp.htm). Tangible progress is being made. Some of this progress is reported in the *Best Start Integration Status Update* (TBS Network, 2008), as well as the minutes of the TBS Network available online (http://www.toronto.ca/children/bs_network_b.htm). The 2008 Update highlights promising strategies and some of the system integration activities of specific partners. For example, within Toronto Public Health, Toronto Preschool Speech & Language Services is working on developing outreach models to parents in a variety of pilot projects in hard-to-reach communities in partnership with Ontario Early Years Centres. Along with progress, the report notes challenges. In particular, even though there are local efforts to involve parents, "Systems-level engagement of parents has not as yet been addressed", according to the report (TBS Network, 2008, p. 10). Another challenge noted is finding time for staff to meet to take collaborative action and the "unfunded costs of staff-release time" (p. 11). As noted in case studies of Toronto First Duty sites, "Time to meet" is a key for front-line staff to work together as professional learning communities that improve program quality and outcomes for children and parents (TBS Network, 2008).

The expanding role of public health in the TBS Network is a promising development in the vitality of TBS as revealed in meeting notes and minutes and key informant interviews. Since Public Health has multiple roles in early childhood service provision, bringing them in is crucial to a coordinated approach. Knowledge of their services and the possibilities for integrated efforts is important to the care, school and family support triad of services; it also creates new potentials for networking with other groups, such as family physicians and pediatricians who are busily incorporating early years planning in the professions (e.g., see www.cps.ca). Toronto Public Health programs include Healthy Babies, Healthy Children, the Peer Nutrition Program, Toronto Preschool Speech and Language Services, blind/low vision and infant hearing programs. Toronto Public Health has also produced the Toronto Red Flags document, which may connect different professional groups in common work on early screening.

The coordination efforts of TBS include programs that are integrative within themselves. CityKids, based on a broad network of agencies across Toronto, is designed to offer a single point of access for families of children with special needs from birth to 12; service navigators broker referrals so that families don't have to tell their story over and over

again. The approach aims to reduce service fragmentation, access barriers, and limits of specific funding mandates (<http://www.mothercraft.ca/dispatcher.asp?page=206>)

Toronto Red Flags, the new reference guide developed by Public Health (Toronto Public Health (TPH), 2008), was introduced to different professional groups with support from the TBS Implementation Steering Committee. It is expected that many early childhood professionals who are in contact with young children will use the TRFG as a quick reference guide to assist them “when deciding whether to refer a child for additional advice, assessment and/or treatment” (TPH, 2008). Child care and family support professionals are seen as particularly important and were targeted for training in city-wide professional development sessions in the fall of 2008. Key informants in the Best Start network suggested that this integration effort was motivating for child care staff, drawing them into the integration project. As in all integration progress, there are road bumps. For example, at a professional development rollout session for Red Flags, a discussion of developmental disorders provoked several questions from the audience; early childhood professionals felt there was a contradiction between the provision of disorder-specific red flags and the notion that the TRF Guide is not to be used to diagnose. Despite these “bumps,” The Toronto Red Flags Guide represents a positive step toward more integrated service delivery for families of children with special needs. Contact information for CityKids appears quite frequently throughout the document. On the positive side of “cross-cultural” professional work, TBS leaders believe that the Red Flags tool may provide a common platform to bring a wider range of professionals, such as physicians and other health care professionals, into an integrated approach to early childhood. The December 2008 issue of *Pediatric Child Health* (www.cps.ca) shows that physicians are working with new ideas on integrative community approaches to health, broadly conceived, and should be ready partners for the Toronto Vision for Children.

From transformational to incremental change to ?

Given the complexity of the current environment and lack of funding, TBS has moved its “theory of change” on improving service systems from the “transformational approach” inherent in the TFD model to an “incremental approach” (see TFD December 07 Progress report). With current limits on funding and siloed approaches at higher levels of government, the prospects of going further on the first phase goals of integrating child care, education and family support appear dim. There is more that can be done in the broader community collaborations in the second phase of TBS, but how long the momentum can be maintained and what happens beyond the current provincial funding window for Best Start is unclear. Thus there are declining prospects for scaling up the transformational Toronto First Duty model. In the model, communities that strengthen families and give children the best possible start begin with a universal platform of integrated care, education, and family supports, extended and bolstered by other services and community partners.

“Changing attitudes and behavior is easier than systems... We have a lot of poverty, a lot of issues in the school system. We are running out of money. We have 15,000 on the waiting list for child care. Everything that we are dealing with is a funding crisis. There may be increased coordination and better outcomes for kids and families because of our strategy and our Best Start plan but it still doesn't fill the void of not enough programs and not enough services. Early ID – great – we keep identifying kids but there are not enough services for the kids to go to and the parents are stressed to the max because they don't know what to do. So the system is still in a mess.”

Despite the challenges and complexity, the opportunity to meet and plan together is welcome.

“The Network has broadened everyone's horizons from a resource perspective. It gives you more contact and people to go to.”

Short of the provincial government giving dedicated community Best Start Networks important roles in funded initiatives going forward, it is not clear how long good will and perspective broadening can sustain the effort. If the Networks were given an important role, for example, in full-day learning and in the poverty agenda, they no doubt would relish the opportunity to contribute with a more concrete base to stand on.

Collaborative knowledge building

TBS has continued to incorporate a “knowledge building” approach, a key feature in the original conceptualization of the TFD approach. In TFD, formative feedback to sites had been an essential part to the research and evaluation framework and “focusing on results” on the front line and at higher levels of the organizations contributed to the success of the project (Corter et al., 2008). A fruitful example of this strategy was the development of the Indicators of Change, a measurement tool designed to benchmark progress towards service integration along the key integration dimensions in the TFD model (TFD December 2007 Progress Report). In the spring of 2007, the Implementation Steering Committee of the Best Start Network drew on the Indicators to develop the Best Start Survey that focused on the core integration dimensions of staff teamwork and integrated program environment.

The goal of the TBS survey was a general stock-taking of the level of collaboration among the three core early years streams of child care, kindergarten and family supports. The survey results were widely circulated in a report showing that the three core sectors are motivated to continue moving forward in building relationships with each other (Toronto Best Start Network, 2007b). At the same time there is also considerable scope for growth since the majority of reports indicate relatively little collaboration across services. In total, 77% of respondents scored at the co-existence level, 16% at the coordination level, and only 7% scored at the highest level-collaboration/integration. As expected there were differences in levels of collaboration between on-site programs (co-located in the same building) and off-site programs (located in separate buildings), with higher levels of collaboration identified in on-site programs. Nevertheless, the sites reporting high levels included some communities where programs were not co-located. It is also notable that some communities appear to have achieved higher levels of integration outside of special initiatives such as Toronto First Duty or Best Start. The

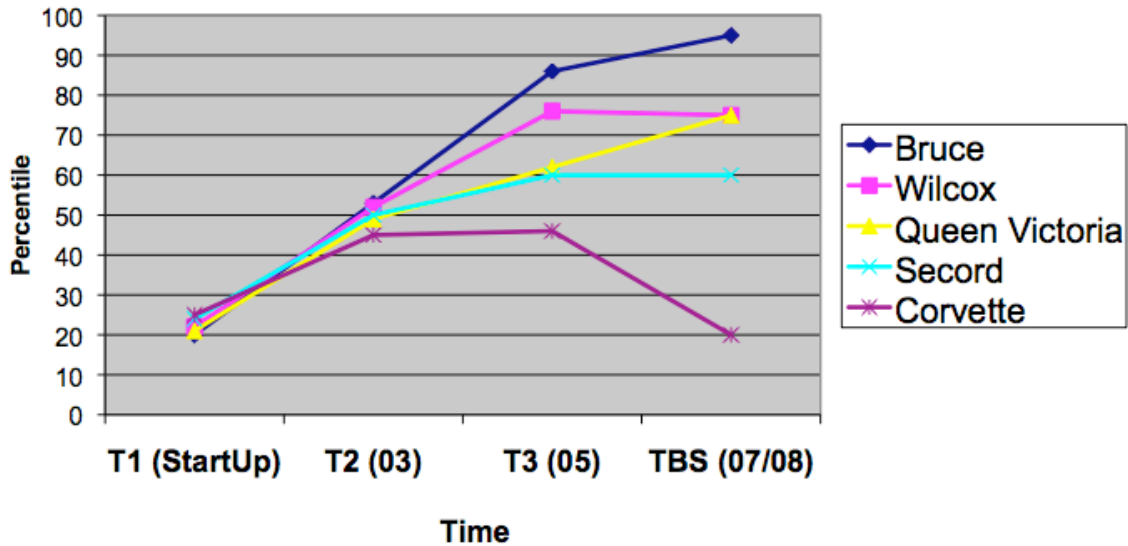
public dissemination of the tool and findings has been useful beyond Toronto; the survey is currently being used in the development and evaluation of Best Start sites in the Peel Region and has been adapted for use in the evaluation of Hamilton's Best Start.

In Toronto Best Start, the TFD team has worked with the ISC to carry out further examination of the Best Start Survey data and their implications for system change. Some of these analyses are technical examinations of the reliability of survey data and its correlation with other publicly available data, such as City quality ratings of child care (Operating Criteria) and TDSB ratings of demographic risk (Learning Opportunities Index).

Analyses of possible correlates of collaboration levels in survey reports showed no associations between collaboration levels and quality of child care or demographic factors in the school. The latter negative finding is interesting in that it suggests that more heavily serviced areas of higher need do not have a more highly integrated "platform" of core service that could support the addition of multiple services, as is envisioned in Phase 2 of TBS.

Findings on reliability show some modest degree of agreement between reports from the kindergarten (KG) and child care (CC) sectors within communities. For instance, for *onsite* KG and CC relationships, survey responses placed 29 partnerships (42%), out of 69 matched partnerships, within the same range along the continuum of change. Interestingly, most of these partnerships reported high integration scores (i.e., scores were within the coordination and collaboration/integration ranges). For *offsite* KG and CC relationships, survey responses placed 17 partnerships (39%), out of 45 matched partnerships, within the same integration range. In contrast, the majority of these off-site partnerships reported lower levels of integration (i.e., scores were within the co-existence/co-operation ranges).

Findings on reliability also come from comparisons of the full scale Indicators of Change at the five TFD sites at Time 1 (start up), Time 2 (2003), and Time 3 (2005) with the 2007/08 TBS survey administration, as well as a retrospective version of the survey administered in 2008. These analyses help answer questions such as how integration in staff teams and programs has fared in the four original TFD sites that have worked without special supports since the end of Phase 1, in contrast to the Bruce site which has drawn continuing funding to deepen and disseminate the integration efforts. In the figure below a line graph plots percentiles for overall total scores on Indicators of Change data across 3 time points and for the TBS survey data collected in 2007/2008.



Note: In order to compare TFD and BSS data, percentile scores were calculated from the total score of the BSS and the sub-total score of the Indicators of Change tool for the 2 core elements (i.e., Early Childhood Staff Teams and Early Childhood Learning Environment) that were also assessed by the BSS.

The findings show that the survey results for TFD sites in 2007/08 correspond to conclusions from key informant interviews (see TFD1 Site Follow-Ups, p. 15).

In addition to working on ways to measure service integration, the TFD research team has also worked with the ISC to explore follow-up case study analyses that could feed useful knowledge back to the TBS ISC. In particular, plans are now underway to carry out case studies of communities to examine how service clusters go beyond the core services of care, kindergarten and family support to include other community services, other types of community groups, and families as direct partners in the collaborative mix.

Beyond the City: Provincial, National and International Context

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services

The Toronto First Duty project has contributed to the major provincial policy developments in early childhood over the last five years: Ontario’s Best Start and the promise of Full Day Early Learning. It’s no accident that the Premier’s announcement of FDEL came at the Bruce School. This uptake of ideas has been fuelled by changes in the provincial government over the last six years.

As the Toronto First Duty project moved out of the starting gate, the provincial context changed dramatically with the election of a new government and the subsequent establishment of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS) in 2003. As the only ministry with a specific focus on children from birth to six, MCYS oversees core early childhood programs, such as child care centres, the Ontario Early Year Centres, Preschool Speech and Language, and Healthy Babies, Healthy Children. It leads the Best Start Plan and it shares the lead with the Ministry of Education (MOE) on planning for

FDEL. TFD ideas continue to play out in the Best Start initiative and may contribute to FDEL.

The Best Start Plan marked a serious Ontario commitment to Early Childhood, on the order of a multi-billion dollar commitment over a five-year period starting in 2005-2006. The plan for full implementation included:

- A massive expansion of child care, predominantly in Ontario's publicly funded schools
- More child care subsidies so that more families can access child care spaces
- Best Start neighbourhood early learning and care hubs that provide one-stop services for families
- Universal newborn and ongoing screening and services to identify needs and provide supports
- A comprehensive 18-month well-baby checkup.

In 2005, MCYS released an Implementation Planning Guide for the Best Start initiative. This foundational resource promotes several ideas consistent with the TFD model as optimal for “laying the foundation” of Best Start networks across the province. Of note, the document stipulates that a key goal of Best Start networks should be to “develop a plan to implement early learning and care hubs” (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2005, p. 38) and that “schools are seen as the most appropriate sites for child care and early learning and care hubs” (p.65).

A major setback for achieving the initial Best Start goals occurred when the federal government cancelled funding that would have supported child care expansion. Nevertheless, the MCYS continues to support initial goals through Best Start community panels across the Province.

“We are working with our community partners - school boards, public health units, municipalities and child care and children's services providers - to make sure that more children and parents can access a seamless network of early learning and development services and supports right in their own communities.”
MCYS web site

Although the reality falls short of the initial vision, and there is concern about what happens when the currently committed funding runs out in 2011, the MCYS is continuing to work on elements of the plan such as the comprehensive 18 month well-baby visit. A crucial part of the Best Start strategy was the creation of three expert panels to guide the implementation of Best Start: The Expert Panel on the Enhanced 18 Month Well-Baby Visit, The Expert Panel on Quality and Human Resources, and The Expert Panel on an Early Learning Program (Ministry of Children and Youth Services). The reports from these three panels are beginning to achieve traction in the field.

Knowledge building. According to an MCYS official, the Ministry is small relative to education and health “but we punch above our weight”. It is also described as an “ideas shop” with a capacity to commission investigations and look at evidence. For example, it is examining the process of implementing the Early Learning Framework’s ELECT

curriculum document at a number of sites across Ontario, including the TFD2 Bruce site. In 2008 it produced an investigation of different models of integrating child care and kindergarten that already exist across many communities in Ontario (see next page). The use of integrative ideas is also seen in the MCYS Strategic Framework, which has an “education” indicator, “Every child will finish school”, as a cornerstone (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2008). Several TFD core principles are consistent with the aforementioned framework. For example, a goal is to ensure that “every child and youth receives personalized services”, consistent with the principle of parents having choice among the array of services in TFD. A priority reform is to “strengthen service interconnectivity” (p.9). In regard to the goal that “every child will finish school”, another priority is to “actively promote school attachment” (p.12). As noted elsewhere, the principle of engaging parents in TFD preschool services increased their capacity be involved with the school. The contribution of TFD is acknowledged, along with the need to examine other models and ideas. One important idea is that integration is not the goal in itself.

“The TFD experience was very instructive. Research results provided good advice on moving forward. Integrating programs is really important for a whole number of reasons, starting with the kid, in terms of just plain working with families and working with communities. It’s important from a public sector efficiency point of view. But integrating crummy programs is going to give you a crummy integrated program. So program quality trumps everything...”

Looking ahead. Reports on cooperation between the MCYS and MOE on Best Start and Full Day Early Learning are upbeat and it reported that the two ministers work hand-in-hand. Nevertheless, the MCYS stewardship of child care leads to important questions about the design of FDEL.

“Impacts of FDEL are more straightforward for MCYS. We do not have an easy way out... FDEL will impact staffing, space, and what do we do with existing programs. ... Fifty percent of child care is located in schools in the province – what will those centres do when FDEL requires schools to use every bit of space in their building?”

If MCYS is a small Ministry punching above its weight, the MOE is seen by some key informants, at the local Toronto level, as a heavyweight that isn’t answering the bell on early childhood service reform and integration. Nevertheless, many things are happening on the early years file within the MOE. For example, the revised Kindergarten Program appeared in 2006 and standardized kindergarten reporting is part of the new approach to the Ontario Report Card (Ministry of Education, 2008). The MOE is funding PFLCs in many boards across the province. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat offers supports that reach down into the early years with funds to close achievement gaps by supporting curriculum and professional development in some schools. The MOE does talk about the importance of transition from preschool in a current document (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/planningentry.html>) and a recent report cites work on explicit linking between the MOE and an MCYS preschool program for children with autism (<http://cal2.edu.gov.on.ca/feb2009/AutismIntervention.pdf>)

Nevertheless, document analysis suggests that the separate early years pieces are not necessarily part of a cohesive early years strategy in education, closely coupled to related work in the preschool period. For example, special education documents and reports often do not mention the Early Years (beyond including kindergarten as a grade level), provincially mandated early and ongoing assessment in schools, or the integrative work on prevention, screening and early identification that is taking place in the context of Best Start (e.g., Ministry of Education, 2009). Aside from the work on autism, it appears that the handoff from preschool to school has potential problems for parents and children.

MCYS Knowledge Building: “Full-day kindergarten and child care integration- A look at promising practices in Ontario.” (2008)

In the context of Best Start principles of integration and the Early Learning Advisor’s task, this report was designed to recognize promising practices and to inform debate on reshaping and integrating Ontario’s existing early years service systems. An environmental scan described efforts to integrate early learning and care in communities across Ontario. Visits and analysis focused on 22 sites where child care and kindergarten came together in full-day programs. In selecting sites, an Integration Continuum tool, adapted from the TFD Indicators of Change, identified sites working at levels “deemed to be collaborative or integrated”. Interestingly, Catholic and French boards were over-represented in the sample (13 and 8 sites, respectively).

The 22 sites fell into one of three models of full-day programming. In Model A, at 4 sites, half/alternate day Kindergarten was paired with “Complementary Education Services” (CESs) co-located at the schools. CESs were arranged through child care providers and were staffed by ECEs but in 3 sites were not licensed under the Day Nurseries Act. In Model B, at 13 sites, half/alternate day Kindergarten was paired with Child Care; in two sites these were co-located at the child care centres off the school property. In Model C, at 5 sites, Full Day kindergarten was paired with “wrap-around” child care. Wrap-around child care was also available in Models A & B sites as well. The scan does not point to a preferred model among these but it does raise issues worth keeping in mind as full-day learning takes shape. For example, when child care is limited to “wrap-around”, its role seemed subordinate and undervalued. As another example, the two Model B sites with kindergarten and care co-located in employer sites, operated in highly integrated ways.

Although all sites were judged as being fairly far along on the Integration Continuum, more detailed examination showed some gaps. For example, among some Model B, alternate day sites, programming alternated with child care on one day and kindergarten on the next, to allow large blocks of time permitting play on the “care” days, contrasting with the more managed school programming on “school days”. Furthermore, in another site, the professional staff changed from using common space to using separate space for child care and kindergarten programming in order to avoid cognitive confusion among children resulting from the mix of child care play-based programming and the more structured kindergarten program. It appears that there is more work to do in unifying the implementation of the relevant “complementary” program documents – the 2006 Kindergarten Program and the 2007 Early Learning Framework ELECT. Nevertheless, there were signs among some of the sites of movement in this direction. The same story of some gaps and struggles is reported across other dimensions of integration: governance, accountability, regulation, program planning, shared vision, professional relationships, and financing. At the same time numerous successes are also described. And in some well-integrated sites, there was also a community orientation that reached out to “community-based family supports as the ‘third leg of the stool’ in a family-centred model”. Best Start was seen in a number of communities as an important support to full-day programs.

National Perspective

Late in 2008 Canada made news with its last place showing in early childhood service provision in the UNICEF report, *The child care transition: A league table of early childhood education in economically advanced countries* (United Nations Children's Fund, 2008). In terms of achieving 10 critical early childhood education and care benchmarks, Canada met only one and was tied for last place among OECD countries with Ireland. This failing report card spotlighted the need to improve child care in Canada and to critically examine public policy against that of highly ranked countries. The failing mark was not surprising given that Canada had recently defined the bottom of the scale in financial commitment to early childhood among OECD countries. In 2004 estimated expenditures on early childhood services as a percentage of GDP were lower for Canada than for any other country surveyed in the OECD's Starting Strong reviews (Bennett, 2008). The OECD's 2006 report also criticized Canada's service provision for the lack of connection between kindergarten education programs and child care programs for working parents.

The last place showings on international comparisons suggest that if current Canadian federal government policies were rated on child care "quality", the ratings would be low indeed. Bennett (2008) describes this "orientation quality" ("...the type and level of attention that a government brings to early childhood policy, through national legislation, regulation and policy initiatives..." p.33) as a crucial dimension, which complements the structural and process dimensions of quality as it is applied to child care programs.

Beyond the Quebec realization of the vision of a universal platform of educare supporting young children and families, early childhood services in Canada have remained a "patchwork" of under-funded provision. The hopes for improvement attached to the national Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care in 2003 were dashed with the subsequent change in federal government. Nevertheless, there are signs of renewed optimism for improving support and outcomes for young children and families across Canada. Several provinces, including Ontario, are working on ambitious plans for expanding, improving and integrating services. Nationally, the embarrassment of Canada's showings on international comparisons is part of the backdrop for a recently released Canada Senate report (Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2009), which can only be described as a rallying cry for action.

International Perspectives from Comparator Initiatives

As the Toronto First Duty Phase 1 got underway, the research team began to track promising integrated service initiatives to support young children and families in other jurisdictions as reported in the TFD Starting Gate Report (Corter et al., 2002), with particular attention to those in California (First Five), North Carolina (Smart Start), and the U.K. (Sure Start). Although it could be argued that learning from Scandinavian models of early childhood is more to the point of what should and could be, we felt that helpful understanding of how to make progress in the Canadian context could come from jurisdictions facing similar challenges of patchwork programs and policies and histories of underfunding.

We have continued to follow the comparator initiatives in the US and UK. These initiatives have generated helpful reports on issues that also run through the local integration efforts in TFD and TBS. In North Carolina, the research team from the Frank Porter Graham Center reported early successes of program quality improvement efforts but also documented shortcomings in engaging families in the initiatives (Pearl & Bryant, 2000). In California, a group of researchers, reported the challenges of evaluating the success of an initiative that reaches millions of families members a year with information media along with more focused programming that differs from community to community (Perry, Woodbridge, and Rosman, 2007). In the UK, a detailed case study of an exemplary Sure Start site (Brown & Liddle, 2005) suggested to the researchers that “chaos” theory was an apt lens to look at integration efforts across different organizations. Nevertheless, in this case, the scattered elements were successfully brought together by the diverse actors into a new socially shared definition of a common “service domain”, transcending siloed professional work, and propelled by top-down pressure from the Liberal government and funding that was contingent on partnerships. These initiatives have implications for issues involved in the political sustainability of ambitious efforts to restructure services and governmental frameworks, and the bottom-line issue of whether they are worth the effort in terms of improving the quality of services and outcomes for children and families.

North Carolina’s Smart Start

In North Carolina, state appropriations have held steady over the last decade at roughly \$200 million annually, supplemented by foundation and corporate donations (North Carolina Partnership for Children, 2008). One of the major outcomes of this stably funded initiative has been to increase quality level in subsidized child care across the state; in fact, the legislation requires that at least 30% of Smart Start services funding must be used to subsidize child care. In 2008, 80% of funding went to child care subsidies and related child care services; other funding went to family support (e.g., Incredible Years programming to help in behaviour management and to deal with the unacceptable finding that some children in state preschools are expelled), health programs (obesity reduction), and other program initiatives (Ready Schools). The actual scope of integration across service sectors appears limited. While child care serves as a platform for delivery of some health programs, most connections among sectors appear to be coming at the organizational level rather than on the ground.

California’s First Five

In California, a decade of tobacco taxes have funded the First Five initiative to the tune of about \$600 million annually, spent to achieve the mission of supporting children’s development to age 5 (First 5 California, 2007; Perry, Woodbridge, & Rosman, 2007). The bulk of funding (80%) goes to County Commissions to spend in light of their strategic plans to support early development and families; in other words there is flexibility and a cornucopia of programming variety at the local level. The remaining funding goes the First 5 state-wide organization for a variety of purposes including Media and Awareness (6%), child care (3%), and research and development (3%). Some programs carry across counties, such as a dental health Smart Smile program and an integrated approach to support children of migrant workers. In 2004-05 it was reported that preliminary findings on more than 1000 programs suggested outreach to underserved

groups was working and children's outcomes were improving; participating children were receiving better health services and attending preschool more regularly. The 2007-08 Annual Report also has promising but preliminary reports on improving service access and better children's outcomes. Nevertheless, the variety of programming and the inconsistent use of evaluation protocols have meant understanding of outcomes has been hazy. Nevertheless, a sharp bottom line for evaluation of this initiative appears to have been drawn with the announcement in the fall of 2008 that funding is declining and current programs will not be continued (First 5 California, 2008); instead a "Legacy Project" has been implemented to sift through the evidence and politics on what is worth continuing. In a related development, California voters rejected a Proposition vote that would have funded universal prekindergarten through taxes on the rich.

The United Kingdom's Sure Start

In the UK extensive research has been documenting Sure Start's impact on children's development. Earlier reports had been somewhat mixed, with limited positive effects, sometimes found only in demographic subgroups or communities (e.g., Melhuish, Belsky, Anning, Ball, Barnes, Romaniuk, & Leyland, 2007). Implementation issues were cited as possible factors in the lack of early impact. However, the same research team has published a recent and more positive report in *Lancet* (Melhuish, Belsky, Leyland, & Barnes, 2008) comparing children and families in "deprived" areas that either had Sure Start Local Programmes, or did not. On 14 child or family outcomes, 5 revealed differences favoring Sure Start communities: children were more independent and positive in their social behavior; parents were less negative, provided a better home learning environment, and used more services to support child and family development. According to the authors, "The contrast between these and previous findings...might indicate increased exposure to programmes that have become more effective." Thus Sure Start appears to be a sustained effort that is centrally funded with accountability and pressures to change and that is having positive effects. Notably it is also part of a larger service reform effort stressing service integration and parental choice under the broader umbrella of Every Child Matters. In the UK considering parents' needs and offering informed choice among a broad range of services across childhood is seen as a crucial tool in improving the quality of services.

Comparisons Across Comparators

There are similarities and differences in the jurisdictions we've followed. In all three cases, efforts are more or less targeted to "disadvantage" and community level organizations implement and deliver programs. But in the case of NC and the UK, there are central pressure and program design principles directing communities towards coherent approaches and outcomes. Despite the success of the UK effort in affecting outcomes, large scale centralized efforts at service reform are rarely smooth. Critiques of neo-liberalism in the UK policy and controversy over "schoolification" and "educationalization" of early childhood programs have appeared in the press and in academic journals, along with concern about the limited success of the national child care policy. Although increasing child care provision in the targeted Sure Start communities (Neighborhood Nurseries Initiative) has been a funded aim, performance on national goals for new provision has fallen short of projections. As a result the government has

promised renewed effort (U.K. Government, 2009). In NC funding goes to child care provision and quality improvement with demonstrated gains. In contrast to the strategies in the UK and North Carolina, California First Five has developed a less coherent collection of services from its de-centralized approach. Although some of these programs involve integrative approaches (e.g., early childhood supports for migrant workers) it appears that there is no overall programming thrust or evidence of effectiveness to sustain the effort in challenging economic times.

The Broader US picture

According to Sharon Kagan (2009), the mixed evidence of success from decades-old studies of Head-Start, and late breaking studies on pre-K and full day kindergarten raise the specter of fade-out of positive effects in later grades as a reason for not providing the kinds of quality early childhood programs that other countries take for granted. At the same time, she believes that ways of ensuring longer-term benefits depend on a policy shift to integration, which brings together schools, communities, and higher quality EC programs to achieve better results.

Although the US is a far from coherent early childhood landscape – with state-to-state variations in policies, investments and evaluation information – there are national controversies around perceived trends towards “educationalization” and “systemization” of early care and education (Kagan & Kauerz, 2007). These trends are seen across program types (child care, preschool, nursery, and comprehensive head-start type programs); they include more rigorous assessment of programs and children, teacher qualifications, curriculum and learning standards. These structural factors do not ensure positive interactions between adults and children and that children will learn, but together they do “support the possibility that children learn”. However, the structural factors are currently disconnected and need to be “aligned” in a way that connects goals to learning, to assessments, and to teachers at the level of children’s everyday interactions in the classroom.

Interestingly, the push for “standardization” is used as the basis for an attack on the Prekindergarten “movement” in the US (Fuller, Bridges, & Pai, 2007), as the Pre-K advocates seek to make universal educational programming available for young children (Barnett, 2008). In any case, the Prekindergarten programs are not the model of integrated early childhood programs envisioned and implemented in the Toronto First Duty model. Myriad state-level comprehensive approaches, such as North Carolina’s Smart Start and associated initiatives, come somewhat closer to the TFD model. In the US, Edward Zigler’s model of Schools for the 21st Century (21C) probably comes the closest to the TFD model, with service integration and onsite child care as foundations for family support and child development success (Finn-Stevenson & Zigler, 1999). Implementation has been widespread but scattered, and does not appear to have achieved critical mass in any political jurisdiction. Several state initiatives have been sparked by SPARK (Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids <http://www.wkkf.org/default.aspx?tabid=75&CID=168&NID=61&LanguageID=0>), a five year initiative of the Kellogg Foundation reported in a jointly with the Education Commission of the States. A report on this initiative draws on the community-school transition model of Robert Pianta (“reaching out and reaching back” and includes a

section by Sharon Kagan (2009) on next steps in policy to ensure “linking ready children to ready schools”. She writes, “Guided by a new think, money should be spent on things that fundamentally realign curriculum, pedagogy, programs and policies.” to support transitions. Money for education in the new federal budget and stimulus package should be spent in ways that durably alter the “infrastructure” for linkages and “all new funding for young children should be subjected to a “linkage impact statement,” similar to the environmental impact statements that have become commonplace (p.9).”

In many key initiatives in US, including the pre-kindergarten movement, there is a focus on the instrumental aim of school success leading to economic payoffs, along with standards and measures along the way. Using the Starting Strong OEDC reports on early childhood Bennett (2009) has contrasted this sort of pre-academic model with the “Nordic” model of early childhood programs, which includes concern for children’s happiness, preparation for a full life and participation in a civil society, along with less focus on instruction and economic outcomes. Nevertheless, blends are possible. For example, although most Nordic programs emphasize broad developmental goals with unobtrusive assessments, other Nordic programs have more focused individual learning plans and assessments.

Summary and Conclusions

The Toronto First Duty project tested a new model of early childhood service delivery that was meant to build a universal platform to improve children’s development and societal outcomes. The core of the model is the integration of child care, kindergarten, and family support programs into a seamless, high quality program. The project mobilized evidence from research to improve both local practice and government policy. Evidence from Phase 2 research in this report and in a previous progress report (Corter, et al., 2007b) shows that TFD has had clear policy impact, including contributions to the development of the Ontario government’s Best Start strategy and to the decision to develop Full Day Learning for 4- and 5-year-olds.

Much of the evidence on the promise of the Toronto First Duty model has come from research on the front lines. It shows that the model can be implemented successfully in local sites, despite systemic challenges and missing supports, and that the resulting integration enhances professional work, improves program quality and child development, and supports parenting. At the same time, the evidence illustrates that wide scale integration and improvement of early childhood services will require organizational and policy change beyond individual sites and beyond the local level. Government ministries, along with municipalities, school boards and other service providers, will have to align the way they work if we are to move beyond the current patchwork of early childhood services to a more powerful system that supports the development of all children. In Toronto some of this alignment began as part of the TFD project and has now expanded with more partners in Best Start: Toronto Vision for Children. In Ontario, the provincial Best Start initiative has expanded the breadth of attention to service integration and improvement, but integration across ministries on early childhood has a long way to grow. In the meantime, local leaders soldier on in small bottom-up steps to

build collaboration and improve service but many believe that new provincial mandates and funding are urgently needed to sustain the progress- system changes that may come from the implementation of Full Day Learning, from synergies between early childhood programs and the Poverty Agenda, and from renewed roles and support for Best Start Networks across the province.

In TFD1 (2001-2005), five community sites were evaluated in terms of the TFD model's implementation and outcomes across three levels of analysis: professionals, programs, and policies; children and families; and communities. As summarized in other reports (e.g., Toronto First Duty and Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre, 2008), the evidence from Phase 1 showed that the integrated model could be successfully implemented in different communities with demonstrated progress on pulling together child care, kindergarten and family supports, along with other types of community services. The Indicators of Change tool was developed to assist sites in monitoring integration progress along 5 dimensions: integrated early learning environments, staff teams, governance, program access, and parent/community engagement. Predictable challenges to local integration efforts were found. At the same time factors facilitating higher levels of integration included strong leadership, opportunities for staff time to meet, bottom-up teamwork together with top down supports and pressure to build the model, and school space for co-location of care with kindergarten and other services. Despite common challenges and varying levels of facilitating factors, all TFD1 sites made progress in implementing integration with concomitant increases in program quality. With the greater integration, parental engagement with services also increased and children's social and emotional development was enhanced.

In TFD2 (2006-2008), new evidence strengthens key lessons of TFD. This evidence comes from the ongoing case study of continuing developments at the Bruce Site and from follow-up observations at the other four Phase 1 sites. Additional studies at the front line level in TFD2 expand the understanding of service integration. These include a case study of an alternative to the school-based hub model of TFD and a quasi-experimental examination of whether service integration contributes to quality of family life.

In the Bruce site case study, front-line observations in TFD2 reinforced the connection between integrated teamwork and quality improvement. Early in Phase 2 both integration and quality declined but the site pushed both back to very high levels by the end of 2008. In addition to shared resolve and problem solving, a number of factors appeared to contribute to this renewed success: common beliefs and an articulated site vision, monitoring of integration and quality using measurement tools, teamwork that aims at children's development but which also includes respect among blended professionals, common professional development and using the common curriculum principles provided by ELECT. The Bruce community of practice benefited from feedback from program quality assessments and the Indicators of Change technical tool as they solved problems and improved programs. Their accomplishments underscore the need for ongoing reflection and knowledge building in service improvement and reform.

The follow-up observations on TFD Phase 1 sites that did not receive any special supports for continuing integration in Phase 2 were also instructive. Findings illustrated that local-level service integration efforts are hard to sustain without mandates and supports flowing from integrated policies and mandates at higher levels. They also suggested that community steering groups are needed to plan collaborative work. On the theme of leadership, the observations reaffirmed the struggles of individual leaders who do seek to make integration work in the face of many competing demands. Despite the challenges, middle levels of service integration are being maintained at several TFD1 sites. Furthermore, reports from the sites strengthen our earlier conclusion that TFD preschool services build capacity for parents' engagement with the school and other services. In several cases, current school councils boast large numbers of diverse parent "grads" of the integrated child care, kindergarten and family support programs.

Evidence from the front-lines of integration in Phase 2 also comes from a case study of an alternative to the school-based hub model of TFD; in this case, the child care centre is the site for integration with kindergarten. Key informant interviews, parent surveys, and program observations were employed to describe how integration worked over the first year of implementation. This study speaks to the issue of where integration can take place and how different locations bring benefits and challenges with the new ways of operating. The study showed that good quality programs combining kindergarten and care can be mounted in a high quality child care centre where parents are keen for this model. Similar conclusions were reached in a series of case studies conducted by the MCYS (2008), which included kindergarten and child care located at employer sites.

A final part of the front-line investigations in TFD2 went beyond programs to look at the question of whether service integration contributes to quality of family life beyond children and parents' direct experiences in programs. This study used a quasi-experimental design to compare samples from two TFD1 sites with continuing high levels of service integration with samples at matched community sites where child care and kindergarten are not co-located. The report breaks new ground in examining the how family stress and daily hassles relate to different ways early childhood services are offered. The findings showed that integration of services with combined kindergarten and care reduced stresses for parents and led to a more unified experience for children. Thus the evidence from TFD 1 and 2 shows that service integration can improve parent engagement and the quality of family life.

Although the TFD research documented successes of the model at the front lines, it also points to areas that need continuing attention. Outreach to all families is a crucial example; otherwise children who could benefit the most from programs may not take part. More meaningful parental "engagement" is also an area for improvement. Parents may not have input on program issues. Engaging the interest and support of other community members in local early childhood initiatives is also missing according to our observations. These are important issues for any early childhood service model.

Moving beyond the front line and the mix of young children, professionals, parents, and programs in local sites, research in TFD2 analyzed the TFD project's contribution to organizational and policy change, with a focus on the local and provincial level.

Reports from the TFD partners – the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, the TDSB, and the City – suggested that the organizations changed as a result of participating in Toronto First Duty. The TDSB has made particularly impressive organizational changes over the course of TFD. It pulled together fragmented early years operations and has created a cohesive Early Years team working incrementally on a number of fronts to improve and integrate early years programs. Despite the remarkable progress it is still a challenge for a relatively small Early Years team to reach across hundreds of schools.

In Phase 2 the City and Board also worked on knowledge building to inform improvement of programs and policy. For example, they both provided public data portraying problems in accessibility to programs. City Children’s Services reports showed the continuing shortfall of subsidized child care spaces for Toronto’s children. A TDSB document showed the uneven access of preschool programs by different minority groups. The City and the Board joined in a number of knowledge building exercises with the other Toronto Best Start partners. A major project in Phase 2 was turning the TFD Indicators of Change into survey form and then using it to assess service integration levels across hundreds of Toronto communities.

The Toronto Best Start Network and its Implementation Steering Committee also developed concrete technical supports to foster integrative work. A major accomplishment has been the development of “Working Together”-type support documents for child care, education (including both the Toronto Catholic DSB and the TDSB), and family support programs. Despite the efforts of the TBS Network, and the carry-forward lessons of TFD, in the long run it is likely that “good will is not enough” to maintain even modest incremental movement towards an improved system of early childhood services.

At the Ontario governmental level, the groundwork for reforming an incomplete, inadequate, non-system of early childhood services began with the provincial Best Start strategy, which was originally conceived to pull together fragmented services and to bolster missing elements such as sufficient quality child care. The analysis in this report shows that the MCYS has worked over the last two years to maintain the vision of integration of existing services, and that incremental progress has been made with supports such as the reports of the expert panels on the eighteen-month visit, human resources, and the learning framework for all early childhood program, as outlined in ELECT. While the MOE has been a partner in Best Start, it is clear that across the education system, the early childhood service improvement agenda is a relatively small piece of the pie of all the diverse activities and demands on the system. Transformational work across ministries will require embracing and acting on the potential for an early years system to contribute to better social outcomes in education and health. The research in TFD2 and elsewhere shows the potential of an early years system to build a better education system by improving parent engagement, more equitable access to preschool supports, and by contributing to children’s development as they enter school. Embracing the foundational role of early childhood will be more likely if it is seen in longer-range perspective. For example, the issue of school dropouts is partly an issue of lack of engagement and academic difficulties; strengthening family engagement and children’s readiness at the transition to school is the starting point for addressing these

problems. As another example, inequitable access to quality preschool services by some minority groups may connect to later gaps in academic performance. These in turn may contribute to greater risk for dropping out and even to the racialization of poverty. And of course, there is the business case for investing in early childhood.

At the provincial level, the incremental steps taken so far towards a system to support young children and families require a transformational boost that could come with full-scale implementation of the FDEL plan. Otherwise the successful experiments at the local community level, the advances in local organizations with improved supports and collaboration, and the provincial work to date will likely fade away over time.

At the federal level Canada's failures on the international stage in recent report cards on early childhood are shameful but hold promise of renewed attention to the early years as a social investment. International findings show that investments in other jurisdictions are paying off. Engaging the Canadian public and policy makers in evidence-informed discussion and debate should lead to action on early childhood at the federal level, a necessary complement to the growing provincial initiatives. Connecting national purpose to the first duty of every society to care for and educate all of its youngest members could be the base for building caring communities for all.

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