

# Joining-up

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# and

A Vision for Early Childhood Education and Care

# Scaling-up:

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**EN BREF** Le Canada se classe souvent dernier lors des comparaisons internationales des programmes d'éducation et de garde des jeunes enfants (EGJE). Cependant, les décideurs, éducateurs et chercheurs reconnaissent de plus en plus la valeur de l'intégration de l'éducation et de la garde des enfants. Si les recommandations de Charles Pascal, conseiller spécial en apprentissage préscolaire de l'Ontario, étaient instaurées, la province passerait à l'avant-plan des progrès en EGJE au Canada en rationalisant les multiples programmes existants et en étendant l'accessibilité à toutes les familles. La recherche et l'expérience démontrent que des services bien conçus d'EGJE peuvent atteindre simultanément des objectifs d'apprentissage, de garde et de soutien de compétences parentales. Les propositions ontariennes pourraient permettre d'établir ce que l'Organisation de coopération et de développement économiques (OCDE) appelle un solide partenariat équitable entre l'éducation et la garde de jeunes enfants afin de soutenir une approche d'apprentissage continu dès la naissance, de faciliter les transitions pour les enfants et de reconnaître l'importance de l'EGJE dans le processus d'éducation.

TODAY A THREE-YEAR-OLD IN MARSEILLES, STOCKHOLM, BARCELONA, and Reykjavik – or in a rural village in many countries – is likely to attend a publicly-funded, publicly-delivered program that incorporates early childhood education and childcare in a more-or-less coherent manner. In most of the developed countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), relatively well-developed universal early childhood education and care (ECEC) systems have become the norm, beginning at two-and-a-half or three years. In some countries – Denmark, for example – ECEC is a right, even for toddlers. In comparison, in Canada, kindergarten and childcare are separated philosophically, pedagogically, administratively, and financially, so parents who want both early childhood education and care for their children usually must make several separate arrangements. Early childhood education is not widely available until part-day kindergarten becomes universal at age five (or in Ontario, age four). High quality childcare is the exception, not the rule, for children of any age, and access to most ECEC programs is on a user-pay basis, with fees that are too high for many parents.

As a result, it has become commonplace for Canada to take last place in international comparisons of ECEC arrangements or to be chastised and exhorted to do better. Since the federal Conservatives' 2006 termination of a barely-begun national program, data published by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit (CRRU) in 2007 and 2009 show that the picture of Canadian ECEC is by-and-large a bleak one – slowed-down childcare expansion, constrained provincial budgets, and an emergent trend toward increased privatization of childcare delivery.<sup>1</sup>

CRRU did note a bright spot, however, when summarizing ECEC developments across Canada in 2009, recognizing that some provincial governments took the first steps to close the gap between childcare and early childhood education. Recognition of the merits of blending early childhood education and childcare has unquestionably grown among policymakers, educators, and researchers: three provinces (in addition to the three already offering it) promised full-day kindergarten; another initiated a school-based, blended ECEC program; several provincial education departments began to assume responsibility for childcare, and new ECEC curriculum frameworks were launched. In 2007, Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty, following on an election commitment to bring in "full-day early learning", appointed a Special Advisor on Early Learning (ELA) to develop an implementation plan. With the publication of ELA Charles Pascal's report to the Premier in June 2009, Ontario moved into the forefront of ECEC developments across Canada.

Pascal's mandate was to set out a plan with the aim of "doing the right thing ... for our youngest students, their parents – and for the long-term prosperity of our province."<sup>2</sup> The report sets out a plan, beginning with a full-day early learning program for four- and five-year-olds, that would act as a catalyst for a new child and family service system for children aged 0 to 12. It proposes reorganizing funding, staffing, and existing programs to turn elementary schools into "neighbourhood hubs" – centres for children and families operating from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m., year round.

Many of the report's proposals are based on the best policy practices of "joining-up" and "scaling-up" and are associated with fundamental questions about early learning and care: Why should ECEC be part of public education? How do early learning and care converge and what does this mean for designing programs so they meet the needs of parents as well as those of children? What do

we know about how young children learn, and how does that knowledge affect program design? Finally, what can Canadian jurisdictions learn from comparison with best practices internationally?

### JOINING-UP AND SCALING-UP: LEAVING THE PATCHWORK BEHIND

The ideas of "joined-up" and "scaled-up" policy-making and program delivery are all the rage in debates about good governance and effective delivery of services and activities. Introduced during Tony Blair's UK government as part of solutions to what are sometimes called "wicked" problems,<sup>3</sup> joining-up is applicable to the complex issues that arise with some regularity in modern societies. Joining-up and scaling-up, consistent with analyses of best practices in ECEC policy and practice, draw on recommendations from the OECD's 20-nation comparative study that recommended merging childcare and early childhood education, vesting responsibility in one government department to forge a "strong and equal partnership", and extending ECEC programs to make them universally accessible.<sup>4</sup> Putting these practices into action would go a long way to resolving some of the key questions about ECEC programs.

Swedish ECEC is not only the best exemplar of "joining-up" ECEC pedagogically, programmatically, financially, and administratively and "scaling-up" to include all children, but has come to be regarded as the "crème-de-la-crème" of ECEC systems world-wide. Sweden's fully blended program ensures that both parents and children benefit from excellent quality early childhood education and childcare programs that are delivered by municipalities under the aegis of the National Department of Education. (Editor's note: For a first-hand description of the Swedish and Danish programs, see the article by Andrea Welz on page 22.)

Joining-up and scaling-up to effect radical change in key elements of Ontario's disjointed, inadequate ECEC situation are key to Pascal's report. The reasoning goes, and the evidence shows, that this would be expected to enable a transformation from the current market-based patchwork to a more rational ECEC system that would work better for both children and parents.

Pascal's proposals include joining-up kindergarten and childcare for Ontario's four- and five-year-olds, who are already in part-day public kindergarten. The proposed program would offer a full school day at no charge for children whose parents choose it and – for a fee – an extended day and summer program to meet the needs of working parents and ensure that children are with a consistent set of adults and peers whether they attend for a part, full, or extended day.



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But the joining-up proposals go far beyond four- and five-year-olds: proposals for stabilizing and improving ECEC for 0-3-year-olds and out-of-school programs for 6-12-year-olds are integral to the comprehensive reform package. The report calls for joining-up the existing patchwork of child and family programs for 0-3-year-olds to create networks of Best Start Child and Family Centres, managed by municipalities. Extended school-day programs for 6-8-year-olds and after-school programs for 9-12-year-olds under school board responsibility are part of the package as well. Programs across the age groups would be joined-up at the provincial level under the Ministry of Education's Early Years Division, which will have responsibility for these programs for children 0-8 years.

Originally an industrial term, "scaling up" is now used in the planning, development, and health fields. It means, literally, extending a program to more people, perhaps over a wider geographic area, moving from a pilot to a full program, or expanding from a targeted program. Pascal's report calls for scaling-up in several senses: moving from pilot projects such as Toronto First Duty, which examined integration of Kindergarten and childcare, to a universal, Ontario-wide approach; extending availability of full-day Kindergarten, now in French and some Catholic school boards, to all boards; expanding ECEC access from a first-year target of 15,000 children in several hundred schools to universal accessibility, and extending the benefits of joined-up ECEC programs across the whole 0-12 year age span.

### **EARLY LEARNING AND CARE: A NATURAL CONVERGENCE**

How do early learning and care converge? How can programs be designed to meet the varying needs of parents as well as those of young children? Perhaps the simplest answer to this question was offered in 1999 by Carol Bellamy, then Executive Director of UNICEF: "There is a growing consensus that childcare and early education are inseparable." Well-documented evidence shows that this makes sense both for children's development and for families. Well-designed early childhood education and care services can simultaneously meet objectives for learning, care, and support for parenting.

As in most other countries, the majority of mothers in Canada are part of the paid labour force for both financial and personal reasons. Ontario's labour force participation rate for mothers with youngest child aged 0-2 years is 68.3 percent; with youngest child 3-5 years, 78.6 percent; and with youngest 6-12 years, 83.6 percent.<sup>5</sup> As UNICEF's 2008 ECEC Report Card spells out, the participation of women with young children in the paid labour force has driven the need for high quality ECEC programs that can play multiple roles for children and families. From a learning/child development perspective, this means ensuring that ECEC programs are not merely custodial but truly developmental, and that they are available to all children, not just those with mothers in the labour force. At the same time, meeting families' employment and training needs means that ECEC schedules need to be arranged to provide both care and early childhood education. In this way, Pascal's proposal to join-up kindergarten and childcare in one coherent extended-day program reflects how learning and childcare converge.

However, while a coherent approach is fundamental for meeting children's and families' needs, good ECEC policy also recognizes that families are not all the same. In one community – or even on one city block – mothers will work outside the home at different hours or not at all, prefer different childcare modes, and have different approaches to child rearing. Here the report's proposals for flexible participation (attendance for a half day, full day, extended day, or not at all) and for active community and parent involvement provide a good balance that should mitigate apprehension about the "institutionalization" of young children in cookie-cutter programs.

### **A PUBLIC EDUCATION MANDATE**

Why should early childhood education and care be part of the public school system? The Pascal Report's recommendation that a "single ministry [become] responsible for driving change, providing overall governance and clear policy direction" reflects a key OECD finding: coordination, leadership, and accountability are most likely to be found when ECEC programs are consolidated under one department. With few exceptions, universal, publicly-funded, publicly-delivered programs – usually under an education mandate – have been most successful at moving away from the split between early education and care that has been unproductive for children, parents, and society at large.<sup>6</sup> By placing the responsibility for ECEC for children aged 0-12 not only with the Ministry of Education, but primarily with school boards as well, the Pascal report moves Ontario in the direction of the model followed by most other countries with well-designed ECEC programs.

The report also proposes shifting responsibility for ECEC for 0-3-year-olds to an education mandate under the Early Years Division of the Ministry of Education. At the local delivery level, programs for this age group would continue to be managed by municipalities, as all childcare programs now are in Ontario. Expansion would be through Child and Family Centres (CFCs), which would bring together childcare and other child and family services, operated by municipalities, school boards, post-secondary institutions, or community agencies, with schools the preferred location. This mixed jurisdictional model has some

elements in common with Sweden's successful ECEC governance model; Sweden's blended programs for 0-6-year-olds are under the aegis of the National Department of Education, managed and operated at the local level by municipalities. The Ontario proposals for transforming ECEC services for 0-3-year-olds take at least several big steps towards the coherent, publicly-funded, publicly-delivered arrangements that research shows are most likely to deliver the best results for children and families.

## LEARNING IN THE EARLY YEARS

What do we know about how young children learn, and how does that knowledge affect program design? There is now widespread appreciation of the importance of learning in the early years as it benefits both children and society. While child development experts have known this for years, broad awareness of young children's unique learning potential is a relatively recent addition to the public agenda in Canada. Child development research supports the idea that early childhood education programs can play an important developmental role. As Barnett summarizes, when ECEC programs are of high quality, they provide intellectual and social stimulation that promotes cognitive development and social competence, and these effects persist into elementary school, establishing a foundation for later success.<sup>7</sup> The gains from high quality ECEC programs apply to all children (although poor children may derive more benefit), whether the mother is in or out of the workforce.

While a human capital perspective – exemplified by Nobel Prize winner James Heckman's viewpoint that investing in child development through quality ECEC programs leads to high returns for society – has been a key driver for ECEC in Canada, there are other, equally important, goals for early childhood education.

A complementary idea comes from a children's rights perspective, which sees the child as a citizen, entitled to a full share of society's resources. In this view, childhood is an important phase of life, not merely a way station to adulthood,

and children are active, competent learners. ECEC services do not merely prepare children for schooling and the future; they contribute to the quality of their lives "here-and-now". Early childhood pedagogical expert John Bennett describes this as "education in the broadest sense...respecting the natural interests and learning strategies of the child, but within a socializing, learning to live together, rich learning environment." Bennett sees "educators supporting, rather than teaching, by focusing on the whole child... [with] play-based, active and experiential [programs]."<sup>8</sup>

What does this mean for program design? Pascal's report calls for a staffing team of certified teachers and registered early childhood educators for the four- and five-year-old program; this would balance the academic skills of teachers with the child development expertise of early childhood educators. The report's play-based pedagogical approach is reinforced by the Ontario-developed 2006 *ELECT* curriculum framework, which outlines a broad but consistent pedagogical approach for children aged 0-8. *Every Child, Every Opportunity (ECEO)* – which is a companion to the Pascal Report – joins up elements of both *ELECT* and the current Kindergarten curriculum to create a curriculum framework for the four- and five-year-olds. *ECEO* proposes moving away from a curriculum driven by specific learning outcomes to one that promotes children's optimal development and learning. This "emergent" approach fits with a children's rights concept. Using a holistic approach, the pedagogy builds on children's own interests, natural curiosity, and self-discovery.

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It is worth noting that while John Bennett and his fellow early childhood specialist Peter Moss have made a strong argument for moving ECEC programs into an education mandate, they also warn against what they call “schoolification” – moving the formal education system downwards by adopting narrowly conceived notions of education as the main goals.<sup>9</sup>

### A STRONG AND EQUAL PARTNERSHIP

As Dalton McGuinty's 2007 ECEC election promise has begun to take shape, the coming changes to Ontario's provision of early learning and care have the possibility of leading in Canada what the OECD called “a strong and equal partnership” between education and childcare to “support a lifelong learning approach from birth, encourage smooth transitions for children, and recognize ECEC as an important part of the education process”.<sup>10</sup>

The Pascal report provides the vision, the proposals, and the rationales. However, even the best plan is only as effective as its implementation, and it is the provincial government that must put the plan in place. The Pascal report outlines a visionary plan for a joined-up, scaled-up ECEC system that would be a “first” in North America. How this happens will make a significant mark on early childhood education and care across Canada now and for some years to come. |

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#### Notes

- 1 M. Friendly, J. Beach, C. Ferns and M. Turiano, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2006* (Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2007); J. Beach, M. Friendly, C. Ferns, and N. Prabhu, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada 2008* (Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2009).
- 2 Letter from Premier Dalton McGuinty re: full day early learning, 2009. Response to the 130 signers of letter urging full implementation of the Pascal report. Available online at [http://action.web.ca/home/crru/rsrcc\\_crru\\_full.shtml?x=127635](http://action.web.ca/home/crru/rsrcc_crru_full.shtml?x=127635)
- 3 The term “wicked” problem or issue is used to describe problems that are difficult to solve because there may be contradictory or shifting requirements or where there are complex interdependencies.
- 4 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Starting Strong. Summary Report for a Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care*. (Paris: Directorate for Education, 2001); Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Starting Strong 2. Final Report for a Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care* (Paris: Directorate for Education, 2006).
- 5 Beach et al.
- 6 Denmark and Norway are exceptions to the model of ECEC under an education mandate; both use a social welfare model.
- 7 W. Steven Barnett, *Preschool Education and its Lasting Effects: Research and Policy Implications* (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2008).
- 8 J. Bennett, *Building a Strong and Equal Partnership Between Early Childhood Services and Schools*. Montreal: Council for Early Child Development Conference, 2009). Available online at [http://action.web.ca/home/crru/rsrcc\\_crru\\_full.shtml?x=123911](http://action.web.ca/home/crru/rsrcc_crru_full.shtml?x=123911)
- 9 P. Moss and J. Bennett, *Toward a New Pedagogical Meeting Place? Bringing Early Childhood into the Education System*. Briefing paper for a Nuffield Educational Seminar (London: The Nuffield Foundation, 2006).
- 10 OECD, 2001