



TORONTO
FIRST
DUTY

Early Learning and Care
For Every Child

Toronto First Duty

**Informing full day learning:
Lessons from the TFD research
at the Bruce/WoodGreen Early
Learning Centre**

*Submission to the Early Learning Advisor
on Full Day Learning.*

December 2008

Toronto First Duty Partners and Structure

Toronto First Duty (TFD) was established in 2001 as a partnership of the City of Toronto, the Toronto District School Board and community agencies supported by the Atkinson Charitable Foundation.

The project is supported by resource development and a robust research agenda led by the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development in the Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology, OISE/UT.

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

The Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre

Five sites were originally selected as Toronto First Duty sites, each sponsored by a community agency. Four of the sites have since been rolled under Toronto's *Best Start* plan. The Bruce/WoodGreen Early Learning Centre (BWELC) continues as a Toronto First Duty prototype. It informs the policy and practice of Toronto's *Best Start* plan and *Toronto's Vision for Children* and is piloting the integration of the early learning framework, *Early Learning for Every Child Today*, with the *Kindergarten Program Revised*.

Five Elements Identify a TFD program:

- 1. Integrated governance:** the partners pool their resources to plan and deliver the program. At the BWELC, Bruce School and WoodGreen Community Services are the lead site partners. The school principal and centre manager (employed by WoodGreen) jointly supervise the program. In addition to the school and WoodGreen, the management committee includes the City of Toronto's Children's Services and public health divisions; the Toronto District School Board and its Early Years division and the Atkinson Charitable Foundation.

2. **Seamless access:** There is one enrolment process which allows parents to access the range of activities the program offers. Participation is flexible – parents may attend at anytime with their children.
3. **Staff teams:** The program is delivered by a teaching team of early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, parenting workers and assistants using a common approach, resources and space. The team approach brings a broader range of expertise to the classroom and allows more individualized attention for the children.
4. **Integrated early learning environment:** The school's classrooms are licensed under the *Day Nurseries Act* and meet the City's *Operating Criteria*. This allows for multi-use of space, supports child development goals and enhances health and safety standards. The curriculum also meets the expectations of the Ministry of Education's *Kindergarten Program 2006 (Revised)*. Combining these approaches provides a better learning environment for children throughout their day, and removes the many transitions that children this age often experience as they move from child care to kindergarten and back again.
5. **Parent participation:** Parent participation is recognized as paramount for children's success. Parents are welcome to take part in all the Centre's activities at all times. This includes eating lunch or snacks with their children, joining in their classroom and outdoor activities and participating in programs designed for parents/caregivers on their own and with the children.

Major Findings of TFD Research

A number of policy lessons emerge from the BWELC experience that may inform full day learning:

- Successful systems change involves the meaningful engagement of stakeholders at all levels, informed by expert knowledge.
- Integrating early childhood services requires clear goals and expectations. These should be contained within a new provincial framework for early learning, child care, and parenting supports that outlines the vision, policy, and practice.
- A new policy framework should be accompanied by a single funding envelop and infrastructure to support program and professional development.
- Integration promotes more intensive use of existing community facilities, but does not negate the need for service expansion.
- New investments should complement existing services rather than adding new program layers.
- Service integration can be accomplished within current staffing requirements but requires a realignment of job responsibilities.
- Building parent/public support for systems change requires the development of programming which is accessible and responsive to community need.
- Regular assessment and evaluation provide accountability. Shared with practitioners, they support program quality and contribute to improved child outcomes.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The research findings for Toronto First Duty chart the changes, benefits, and challenges of seamless service access at three levels: program, practices and policy; families and children; and, communities. The findings are based on data provided by assessments of program quality and child outcomes; parent, staff, and community surveys; and, an economic analysis. In addition, input was gathered from focus groups, interviews, and the researchers' observations at the sites.

What we envision will be a first "tier" program for early child development, as important as the elementary and secondary school system.... The system should consist of community-based centres operating at the local level within a provincial framework...

(Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain & Fraser Mustard. *Early Years Study*, 1999. p. 20.)

1.2 Why integrate early childhood services?

Early childhood services in Canada outside Québec are divided into three distinct streams — kindergarten, child care, and family resources. Even though their prime goal is promoting the healthy development of children during their formative years, each operates under a separate legislative mandate.

Parallel streams impede, rather than enhance, access for families. Internationally the trend is towards service integration. Nine members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and three Canadian jurisdictions (PEI, Saskatchewan and Nunavut) have now combined their early education and child care systems for children under one government department.

Healing the rift between child care and early education was advised in the OECD review of Canadian early childhood services. The international review team emphasized the need to “build bridges between child care and kindergarten education, with the aim of integrating [early childhood education and care] both at ground level and at policy and management levels.”¹

2. Practice and Policies

2.1 Leadership is critical

The findings from the Indicators of Change (www.toronto.ca/firstduty) process show that Toronto First Duty encouraged increased coordination and collaboration at each site. The amount of change, and in particular areas of change, varied across the sites and was influenced by local leadership capacity.

Whatever their progress, sites shared similar assessments of the barriers to integration. For instance, differences between the funding, training, labour affiliations, compensation, and work environments of kindergarten teachers and other early childhood staff are viewed as barriers to creating a fully integrated staff team.

Leadership, particularly from the school’s principal, was seen as a ‘make-or-break’ variable.

Leadership at all levels was seen as critical to the success of the project. Administrators at the City, TDSB and lead agencies developed governance structures and policy and assigned staff to support integrated early learning environments. Site leadership, from the school, child care and parenting supports managers signaled to staff the importance of the project.

¹ (OECD, 2004 p.7) Penn, H., Barreau, S., Butterworth, L., Lloyd, E., Moyles, J. Potter, S. and Sayeed, R., (2004). *What is the impact of integrated out-of-home settings on children aged 0-6?* London: EPPI. www.eppi.ioe.ac.uk Accessed April 2004.

Leadership particularly from the school's principal, was seen as a 'make-or-break' variable. Leadership leveraged many supports, including innovative approaches to expanding child care capacity, maximizing the use of school space, and finding resources for staff release time. The latter was repeatedly identified as essential if staff are to plan for and implement joint activities or programs. A major challenge was assisting the principals in developing a focus that was wider than academic education and hiring principals who were willing and able to change or evolve their professional practice.

2.2 Integrated programs are cost-effective

The researchers considered the front-line costs of delivering the integrated program for kindergarten-aged children at BWELC with the cost of programs for children attending 2.5 hours of kindergarten at a WoodGreen-operated child care centre. Component costs were kept similar for comparison purposes.

The direct cost of integrated programming for kindergarten-aged children is slightly less than traditional program delivery. This may balance out when indirect costs are included. The school principal shared TFD management responsibilities with the centre coordinator. Management is a real cost, although the principal reports receiving mutual support from the partnership with the coordinator. BWELC benefited from professional development opportunities offered by the TFD Research and Development team and the Toronto District School Board Early Years team, without any additional costs.

**Integrated programming
serves more children
for the same costs as
traditional service delivery.**

The cost per space of the integrated and traditional program is not substantially different. However the option of the flexible enrollment in the integrated model serves 40 families with 24 spaces, as compared to 24 families in the traditional program. The integrated four and five year old program maintains a 1:10 staff/child ratio throughout the entire day, half the 1:20 staff/child ratio the Ministry of Education established for traditional kindergarten programs.

The current organization of programs results in more intensive and more flexible use of space. Human resources are maximized - more time is spent in engaging children in a rich learning environment and less time is spent on daily transitions between programs.

2.3 Supporting program quality

The sites were assessed twice by the researchers. In 2003 the kindergarten, child care and parenting programs showed fairly good quality, but there was room for improvement. By 2005, quality improvements were found in all assessed areas, with the biggest advances were made in use of space, program activities, and parent/staff communication. These were TFD goals that staff sought to realize.

Measured against the City of Toronto's *Operating Criteria*, ratings at the BWELC declined in 2007 but rose again in 2008 following staffing changes and outside support for program development. This would indicate that leadership and attention to program quality must be ongoing.

**Attention to quality
must be on going**

Pedagogical leadership and a focus on incorporating both the Kindergarten Program and Early Learning for Every Child Today produced a unified curriculum design. Development continues this year with an emergent curriculum emphasizing children's literacy, numeracy and inquiry skills as well as their abilities to get along with each other extended across the age groups.

2.4 Professionals value team teaching

Staff views of the teaching team approach evolved over time. In its earliest stages, integration was a new concept for both professionals and administrators. The absence of clear direction and supports created challenges. The considerable differences in compensation and working conditions among the team members contributed to an internal hierarchy. Improved leadership and support (including the development of policies such as common behaviour management protocols, joint professional development opportunities, program planning time, and collective problem solving) helped to build the teams.

**Time for program planning and
shared professional development is
critical to building the staff teaching team.**

Despite the struggles, the final staff survey shows every kindergarten teacher, early childhood educator, and family resource respondent "would like to see the TFD project continued at my school." Team members also cited professional benefits from integration including: increased support from administrators and system managers; more access to program resources; better communication with families; enhanced professional development opportunities; and peer learning and support. The advantages of the integrated program for children played a big part in overcoming earlier reservations.

The on-the-ground success of a TFD model depends on the front-line staff. When front-line staff had time and professional supports to move together towards the common purpose of improving children's environments and outcomes, programming improved and professional barriers to integration were reduced.

3. Impact of Integration on Children and Parents

3.1 Helping parents engage in their children's early learning

Parent involvement is a core element of Toronto First Duty. There is a significant body of evidence indicating that parent participation in their child's education—reading to the child, talking to the child about school, and meeting with staff to assess student progress—is related to school success. To assess parent involvement, researchers surveyed a sample of parents of kindergarten-aged children. To provide a comparison, parents were also surveyed in comparable schools where only kindergarten, or kindergarten and either a parent child centre or family support program were offered.

**Attention to parent
engagement yields results.**

For TFD parents, teachers, early childhood educators and program coordinators were equally mentioned as important to the parents' social network. Compared to parents at non TFD sites, TFD parents were more likely to feel empowered to talk to their child's kindergarten teacher and to help their child learn at home. Parents at the TFD sites had integrated in their mind the role of the school (i.e., kindergarten program) and the child care program into a single entity. In other words, their expectations were the same for the kindergarten program and the child care program. This knowledge and capacity building worked for parents who are new to Canada as well as for those born here.

3.2 Listen to parents when designing children's programs

At intake, parents were asked about their goals for their children and for themselves. Most parents had multiple goals in joining TFD. For example, accessing child care was of interest to 34% of parents enrolling in TFD at one site and 52% of parents at the BWELC site. Second, goals for children generally outranked parents' goals for themselves. Benefits for their children and school readiness outranked parents' interest in being part of a group or learning about parenting.

**Advantages for their children
motivate parents to participate
in early learning programs.**

It is clear that participating parents value the TFD multi-pronged aims of supporting child development and supporting parents, both in their roles as parent and in their needs for child care.

3.3 Listen to children when designing programs

In addition to participating in standardized assessments, children were interviewed about their experiences in the Toronto First Duty project. They were asked to tell about their day. Specific probes included asking what they liked and didn't like and what they were good at and not so good at. An important point is that "play" is the winner to the question "what do you like best?" Academic-related activities, crafts, etc., had far less appeal -- a reminder that children and their experiences need to be part of planning for quality early childhood programs. 'Play' was also identified as what children liked least, particularly when other children wouldn't play nicely, indicating the importance of adult guidance to support social and emotional development.

Play is a winner with children

Further research found that 4 and 5 year old children at the BWELC did not identify as being in different programs throughout their day as compared to collaborative programming at other sites where kindergarten-aged children did recognize program changes in their day.

3.4 Reaching families who do not normally use early childhood programs

Toronto First Duty strives to increase access to services as it reaches out to families who do not traditionally use early childhood programs. At the same time, it wants to avoid the stigma that can be associated with programs targeted at at-risk families. Tracking enrolment in TFD programs helped to determine whether they engaged families who are representative of the communities they serve.

Using maternal education as an indicator, researchers found the demographics of the TFD participants varied within and across sites. For example, the following graph shows the Queen Victoria site participants have somewhat lower levels of education compared to the other four sites. More than 20% of participants at QV have not completed high school, yet almost the same percentage have completed university. This suggests that the TFD model has universal appeal.

Universal access to programs does not 'squeeze out' more disadvantaged families.

Similar patterns for diversity in language are seen across sites. Overall, 58% of the participating families have English as an additional language, ranging from 85% at QV to 38% at York Early Years-Wilcox (YEW-W).

The YEW-W site was interesting because it is situated in the middle of a demographic divide; on the east is an affluent area while the west has concentrations of families living below the poverty line, more lone parent families, and more language minority and immigrant families. Enrolment figures show families from both areas used TFD services.

3.5 Integration improves access but expansion is required

Early surveys (2003) show that the majority of parents (56.9%) reported that they had not been able to use many of the programs/services for children and families offered at the TFD sites at that time.

From early implementation of TFD in 2003 to full implementation in 2005, improvements were noted. The percentage of parents who reported that they have not been able to use many of the programs/services for children was considerably lower (35.6%) in 2005 compared to 2003. These differences may reflect the documented efforts of sites to increase access with program flexibility and to increase channels of communication with parents. At the same time they reflect parents' desire for early learning and care options for their children and the limitations of meeting parent demand for service without expansion.

3.6 Improving outcomes for children

The first duty of TFD is to support the development of children. During the spring of 2003, researchers collected direct child measures on a sample of 76 children across the TFD sites. Measures were repeated in the spring of 2005 with a sample of 125 children from three of the sites. The measures included the Vocabulary-Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-III), the Test of Early Reading Ability (TERA-III), Number Sense, and Social Understanding. Although the children tested were reflective of their community, the sample size is small.

Nevertheless, the data is indicative. Significant improvements were found across the three sites sampled in 2003 and 2005. Significant differences were found for language development (vocabulary), total TERA (measuring dimensions like print awareness and comprehension), and number knowledge.

4. TFD impacts on the community

4.1 Parent/community outreach

Sites engaged in varied outreach efforts. Partner agencies, such as libraries and Toronto Public Health, distributed information through staff members. Flyers, posters and events held in the languages of the community were posted. Sites held open houses or undertook door-to-door visits. These efforts had some success in raising parental awareness. For example, the percentage of parents finding out about TFD programs from posters ranged from 5% to 22% across sites. Referrals from staff in community agencies accounted for smaller percentages. Direct contact with TFD program workers accounted for more awareness, ranging from 8% to 26% across sites.

School is an important channel for building parent awareness of early years programming

The school was generally the biggest channel for building parental awareness, with 22% to 44% of parents reporting school as where they heard about TFD. Hearing about TFD from friends was nearly as common, with the percentages ranging from 15% to 40% across sites. The latter indicates a healthy flow of communication within the community, outside of professional channels. Note however, that these channels differ in their relative importance across sites. For example, at QVPEL, “friends” were less important than the school. Demographic information shows that, of the five sites, this one has the greatest cultural linguistic diversity and the highest transience. These factors would likely reduce the social networks of communication among “friends.”

The findings lend support to the TFD concept of the school as an effective platform for early childhood and family services.

4.2 Community awareness of early childhood services

Community awareness of Toronto First Duty was assessed through surveys in the spring of 2005. Three groups were targeted: parents with kindergarten-aged children in the TFD sites; parents

with children in grades five and six in TFD schools; and ‘on-the-street’ interviews with members of the public in each school’s catchment area.

In addition to awareness of TFD, the surveys captured support for integrated programs; for early childhood education as compared to other levels of education, and ideas about who is responsible for preparing children for school. Although some differences emerged among the three groups of respondents, as well as between males and females, there were more similarities than differences. Furthermore, across sites there were very few differences.

An overwhelming majority in all three categories agreed (25%) or strongly agreed (72%) that they “support the idea of incorporating services such as child care, parenting & family support services, public health, nutrition, early intervention, and summer readiness programs within the school system.” Similarly, an overwhelming majority agreed (33%) or strongly agreed (57%) that daycares and schools should coordinate their efforts by sharing information. Thus, support for integration of services was not limited to parents who had children enrolled in TFD programs; enthusiasm was shared across demographically-diverse community members.

**Polling shows consistent support
for public investments in early childhood.**

There was also general support for “early childhood education.” For example, 82% of the respondents agreed that there should be publicly funded, full-day junior kindergarten. The support was not just philosophical; the majority of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed (64% combined) that they would be willing to pay more taxes to improve the quality of early childhood education. This is comparable to the numbers who agreed to pay more tax to support the elementary (68%) and secondary (64%) levels of education, but higher than the number supporting the college and university levels (46%). Despite the support for early childhood services, the respondents all agreed on the importance of parents. In terms of who is responsible for preparing children for school, there was overwhelming agreement that parents were responsible (94%), with lower numbers naming schools (65%) and the community (47%) as responsible.

Overall, these findings show strong community support for integrating services and for strengthening early childhood services, as indicated by the general public sample, even if it means paying more taxes.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Factors contributing to integration

Effective early childhood staff teams that develop and deliver the early learning, care, and parenting program are the core of service integration. Factors that helped build the professional teams included:

- regular time to meet and plan the program

- joint professional development
- work on concrete problem solving with common goals in mind
- leadership from administrators, principal and other on-site managers
- system support and affirmation (e.g., kindergarten teachers seeing that the project is important to the principal, the school board, and the teachers' federations)
- sufficient school space to allow for expanded programming

5.2 The benefits to integrating early childhood services

Outcomes for children: For children, the evaluation was not designed to directly test outcomes. However, both kindergarten teacher ratings of school readiness on the Early Development Instrument (EDI), and direct assessments by the researchers suggest that the children benefited socially and developed pre-academic skills. Parents whose children attend TFD programs reported being more involved in their children's early learning. Parent involvement is an important factor in school success.

Program quality: The quality of non-parental care services is the central and most consistent factor that determines the effects of those services on children. Quality in TFD programs compared to their non-integrated counterparts was higher. Moreover, quality continued to improve throughout the term of the project. The sharing of the quality assessments with staff was a motivator for further improvements.

Benefits for parents: Parent surveys expressed high levels of satisfaction with TFD programs. Parents felt more confident in helping their children learn. Program hours and participants increased at all of the sites. Access to programs allowed parents to achieve goals, such as helping children learn and meeting other parents. TFD did not track whether parents changed their own activities because of its programs (e.g., whether a parent entered the workforce because TFD made non-parental care available). Other research², however, suggests that affordable, quality care options result in increased maternal labour force participation.

Staff benefits: Staff developed strong positive opinions of the professional benefits they received from integration.

New early childhood resources: TFD offers a number of resources to support the development of full day learning. An on-line manual³ provides the policy templates, professional development, and assessment tools developed by the sites and research team. The BWELC remains a prototype piloting the integration of the ELECT curriculum framework and the Kindergarten Program 2006 (Revised).

² Baker, M., Gruber, J., & Milligan, K. (2005). "Universal childcare, maternal labor supply, and family well-being." National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper 11832. Cambridge, Massachusetts. Lefebvre, P., & Merrigan, P. (2005). "Low-fee (\$5/day) Regulated Childcare Policy and the Labor Supply of Mothers With Young Children: A Natural Experiment from Canada." Centre interuniversitaire sur le risque, le politique économique et l'emploi, Working Paper 05-08.

³ www.toronto.ca/firstduty

5.3 Lessons from the TFD experience

- TFD set out to redefine the delivery of programs and services for young children. The term “First Duty” was selected to identify a new service delivery model that offered a seamless service for young children and their families.
- Separate funding, governance, and legislative structures for education, child care, and other family and children’s services make it difficult to integrate people and programs at the local level. Different employers, staffing requirements, regulations, and funding structures become obstacles. Sustainable change requires an overhaul of legislative requirements, professional education, funding mechanisms and governance structures from the ministry through to the program management.
- The success of full day learning depends on front-line staff. System redesign will remove many barriers, but it is essential that the staff are motivated to become part of an integrated early childhood workforce. This means blending professional education and development, as well as developing equitable compensation and working environments. New approaches to training can help prepare practitioners to work across professional boundaries. They can also support knowledge building approaches that are focused on results for children. When staff ask “how can we improve our programs?” and “how do we know it’s working for children?” as they did in this change initiative, good things happen.
- Although child care is central to the range of options necessary to support young children and their families, it remains the program component that is most difficult to incorporate and expand in an integrated model. It is the only program that relies on parent fees (paid directly by parents or through child care fee subsidies) and is the most highly regulated component.. Blending child care and full day learning will be challenging; it is nevertheless critical. The promised outcomes of full day learning will not be realized unless non-parental care is offered not only for 4 and 5 year olds but for older and younger children as well. This approach requires the vertical integration of children’s programming from birth through primary school as well as the horizontal integration of education, child care and parenting supports.
- Leadership is critical. A leadership development strategy is essential starting with the Ministries and working through to systems administration, the program and the classroom. If the school is to be the physical center of Full Day Learning programs, both the support and the direct involvement of the principal are necessary.

Appendix:

BWELC PROGRAM STATEMENT

June 2007

BWELC is continuing its integrated strategy by piloting the Ontario Early Learning for Every Child curriculum and pedagogy framework for early childhood settings demonstrating how existing resources can be transformed into a more integrated delivery program for children and families.

The Bruce WoodGreen Early Learning Centre integrates family and early childhood programs to ensure children have opportunities to reach their full potential at the same time as family members are supported to participate in their children's early learning, earn a living, study or care for other family members.

BWELC:

- Provides a holistic, quality learning environment supporting young children's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development
- Respects and encourages families' participation in their children's early learning and development
- Offers flexible, non-parental care options
- Shares demonstrated practices with parents, policy makers, funders, early childhood professionals and experts, service delivery providers, and the community.

The BWELC curriculum and pedagogical approach is based on five principles:

Family Participation Families are the first and most powerful influence on children's early learning and development. Respect for family structure, culture, values and knowledge build relationships that benefit young children. Family participation in the daily program is welcome and encouraged. Opportunities for involvement are varied, to meet the individual and changing needs of families.

Purposeful Play Play capitalizes on children's curiosity and joy. BWELC plans for play experiences, embeds opportunities for learning in the physical environment and play activities and communicates to families on the benefits of purposeful play. Ideas and skills become meaningful; experiences for learning are planned; and concepts are understood and expanded. Play can engage children's attention and offer a challenge that is within the child's capacity to master skills.

Planning for Learning Children learn when they are engaged in activities that are meaningful to them. BWELC's planned curriculum contains goals for children's social competence, emotional maturity, communication, thinking abilities and physical well-being⁴. It respects children's individual interests and choices while the development of capacities and skills are supported through purposeful play and judicious amounts of explicit, teacher-guided instruction (through individual discussions, small group and individual tasks) as needed to acquire core skills. Ongoing observation and documentation of children's learning assess the development of capacities and

Understanding Children's Development Children's social, emotional, language, cognitive and physical development and understanding proceeds in a predictable sequence. Children's individual development proceeds at different rates within the contexts of family, community and culture. BWELC plans for meaningful engagement and equitable outcomes for each child. The early years staff team combines the knowledge, expertise and resources of teachers, early childhood educators, parenting workers, educational assistants, special needs assistants and early intervention specialists to meet the needs of children and their families.

Safety and Security Children's well-being begins with a safe environment that protects them and their families from harm and promotes physical and emotional security. BWELC strives to maintain a social and physical environment that protects young children and their families and promotes their well-being.

⁴ The program plan at BWELC for four and five year old children meets the requirements of the Ontario Kindergarten Program, Day Nurseries Act, the City of Toronto Operating Criteria and TDSB Parenting Centre Guidelines. It is supported by the Ontario Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) curriculum framework for early childhood settings.