

Pedagogical Leadership: Lead From Where You Stand

Symposium Report

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Special thanks to the following students
for helping to organize the event

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The context:

With Our Best Future in Mind offers a blueprint on how to move from a vision for a comprehensive child and family system for all of Ontario to implementation melding child care, education, family support, early identification and settlement programs into one. The symposium on *Pedagogical Leadership: Lead from Where you Stand* was organized to address questions of staffing for the new early learning programs and to begin community level discussion on planning for child and family centres.

To set the context for the day, Annie Kidder, Executive Director of People for Education shared important principles to frame the discussion. Kidder reminded us that children and families are part of an “ecosystem” of influences. She said the new Early Learning Plan recognizes the importance of that ecosystem by bringing together teachers, early childhood educators and a whole range of other supports and programs for families and children. She also said that parents will be key partners to ensure the viability of the new strategy and that most parents only desire to be good parents. She said that the education “teams” working in the new program will need to be pro-active with this new group of parents. It will be important to communicate with them about the science behind the new curriculum for the Early Learning program and about its basis in early brain development. Kidder offered a critical piece of advice – she said, “changing structure may not be sexy but it is the revolutionary part of the (ELA) recommendations.”

Forging Collaborative Practice in Early Learning Programs

The morning panelists addressed *what resources, supports and professional learning are necessary to establish effective teams of teachers and early childhood educators in the new early learning programs?*

With expert moderation offered by Penny Milton, CEO of the Canadian Education Association, the panelists offered their perspectives. Sam Hammond, President of ETFO recognized the important contribution that early childhood development makes to learning but he also reminded us that kindergarten programs have provided Ontario’s children with excellent learning so far. In this new climate, the teacher’s federation looks forward to a new working partnership with early childhood educators. At the core of a solid team is professionalism and ETFO is committed to making that happen. The Association of Early Childhood Educators anticipates that leadership development will be key to success. With leadership at the core, educator teams will need time for planning, joint professional development and a strategy for recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood educators. The AECEO sees itself as an important vehicle for communication for parents, local school boards and the public on the role of early childhood educators.

The Toronto First Duty Early Years Staff team established that with good will, support from leaders and professional development opportunities, all educators, can take a leadership role to establish an optimal learning environment for children and a supportive program for parents. On a first name basis to everyone, the early childhood educators and the teacher at TFD demonstrated reciprocal professional respect for their distinct area of expertise and collaborative approach to knowledge sharing in the best interest of the children and families they work with. The panel closed with Jane Bertrand, School of Early Childhood at George Brown who recalled that First Duty was established to demonstrate an integrated early learning program supported by

a comprehensive range of services including child care, family resources and special needs supports. The morning panelists highlighted the importance of a will to move forward but offered practical strategies on how to make it happen. This is a time for collaboration, joint professional learning which in turn will inform joint pre-service training, leadership development and integrated curriculum – all with children and their families at the focal point.

A message from the Early Learning Division

Jim Grieve, Assistant Deputy Minister – Early Learning Division, Ministry of Education reiterated that investment in the early years has a significant social and economic return for life long learning and success. Grieve advised principals to spend more time in early years programs, both in child care programs and the new early learning programs to understand the significant importance of play based learning. At full implementation, Grieve estimates that 20,000 early childhood educators will be required for the new early learning programs. Grieve clarified that every school that offers an early learning program is expected to offer an extended day program as well. He reminded participants “not to wait for the memo on child and family centres – get it started by consolidating services at the community level”.

Child and Family Centres: From Blueprint to Implementation

The afternoon panel chaired by Patricia Chorney Rubin of George Brown College focused on the following question – *what kind of structural changes and resources are necessary under municipal leadership to establish a comprehensive approach to child and family services?*

Kim Hiscott from Andrew Fleck in Ottawa outlined critical steps that organizations can take to begin planning for mergers and consolidation including identifying a community of partners, informing staff and board members and taking ownership for the planning process. Kathryn Underwood of the Ryerson School of Early Childhood suggested that Child and Family Centres could help streamline services for children with special needs and offer additional supports for families. Transitions into early learning programs could be a critical role played by educators within CFCs.

Laurie Hermiston of Indigenous Programs at Mothercraft reminded participants about the serious gap and absence of the Aboriginal voice to discussions. Despite Pascal’s recognition of the needs of Aboriginal children, she pointed out that she was the first speaker to mention them during the symposium. Aboriginal history and knowledge has to be embedded throughout our work. Petr Varmuza of Toronto Children’s Services suggested that every school could function as a child and family centre rather than every school having a CFC. He said “the cupboard is bare with thousands of children on various wait lists – integration means less duplication”. Child and Family Centres should be delivered at the municipal level – closest to the people and should be seen as essential services – more important than roads.

The symposium was attended by over 150 participants from a variety of sectors including, early childhood, education, family resources and early identification. Participants shared their questions with the symposium planning committee. (See appendix 1)

Appendix 1: Participants questions

1. If you have a P/J, should you have to upgrade to early learning by doing a course and vice versa?
2. Why would an ECE get a degree if they are going to still get paid the same low amount?
3. What about the salary differential between ECE's and teachers?
4. Is there the possibility of creating a specialized degree for both ECE's and teachers to qualify them for the program?
5. How do we align the values, philosophy, and respect for the whole child development across the different training institutions (ECE and teachers) to ensure graduates are exposed to a common vision?
6. What is it you think our leaders/principals need to be able to implement this vision?
7. What language will we use to create a level playing field between ECE's and teachers?
8. How do you (Mr. Grieve) intend to change the lexicon?
9. Will preparation time be collaborative?
 - a. How long will it take to be fully collaborative?
10. How will we balance parent interaction between ECE's and teachers?
11. How do we create an early childhood community that supports all children when we have differing visions? (need principals/teachers/family/community to share)
12. How long did it take First Duty to get to this level of collaboration?
13. How did they come to call educators in the room by first name?
14. What has the transition been like from teaching higher grades to the collaborative 4 and 5 year old team?
15. How is assessment and evaluation of student achievement different than your experience teaching older grades?

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