The Fraser Mustard Oration

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AUSTRALIAN SYMPOSIUM
ON
EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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I am extremely honored and pleased to be here with you today for so many reasons.

Pleased, because there is so much to learn from what Australia is doing in the area of early learning and development for the youngest of our young.

The National Quality Framework provides hope and promise both within Australia and to those of us around the globe who are inspired by a nation that aspires to ensure quality non-parental programming for all of its children.

My personal hope is that boomerang politics that defines too many jurisdictions around the world can be replaced by evidence-based politics as it is here in South Australia and in my home province of Ontario, Canada.

The development of our children and the future prosperity of our societies should not become a political football….even it is the Aussie Rules version! The NQF, properly implemented, provides a transformational beacon for those of us outside of Australia, so I am so very pleased to have the opportunity to find out “how she going, mates?”

Indeed, the honor of being here is many-fold.

To be in the midst of those who understand the critical importance of early child development and the role early learning educators and other community leaders play, is always an honor for me.

And Premier Weatherill, with whom I had a nice chat earlier, is among the key political leaders, not just in Australia, but in the world, who understands that we need to look at government expenditures on the early years as an investment.
When Fraser Mustard would meet with political leaders around the world, he would evaluate their understanding of this with a brusk “He or she gets it!” or “Doesn’t get it, must have early child development issues!”

Premier Weatherill, gets it—big time--as evidenced by South Australia’s Every Chance for Every Child strategic priority.

Our collective future well-being and prosperity depends on the critically important work all of you perform to enable the healthy development of children and families.

This symposium’s focus on the need for a connecting “profession” of early child development is about how all professionals who work with young children and families need to work together in a truly integrated system.

“Our experiences in our first five years of life are critical to our future development, health and happiness. Gaps that open early get harder to close”
It is very important to note that no matter how governments and experts define quality early learning and other supports for young children and their families, it is the early years educators and their children’s services partners throughout our communities, who get the job done with our children and their parents and guardians!

For me, you are the real heroes of change and the job for the rest of us---center directors, public servants and politicians, experts---is to do all we can to enable and support effective relationships among and between the front line providers and the kids and their families or get out their way.

And to be asked to give the Fraser Mustard Oration, well that is very special for me personally.....although the word “oration” creates an expectation of rhetorical flourish that sets me up for failure.

Let me begin by telling you who Fraser Mustard was.....I am still getting used to saying “was” because although he died just ten months ago, his contributions to public policy as it pertains to early human development will have a great impact on that future I attributed to the work you and those who follow you, because of his influence around the world for governments to begin properly investing in early childhood education!

Who was Fraser Mustard? Whenever you hear about the benefits of aspirin regarding heart disease or you about the transformationally creative MacMaster Medical School in Canada, you can think of Fraser.

Or his creation of the word’s first virtual university research network? Or the new Fraser Mustard Institute for Human Development about to be launched at the end of this week.....

But the mark he has made on our thinking about early child development is likely his most significant global legacy. He is the co-author of a trilogy of significant early years reports, the last one published 8 months ago, a few months after his death.
For those of you who have not been in Fraser’s presence, here is a sample of his persona:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwoTYzx9vEE

Fraser told me how much he cherished his role as Thinker in Residence in South Australia during which he developed a series of recommendations that have been supported by the South Australian government and likely influenced other aspects of your nation’s approach to early human development.

“The challenge for all societies is to close the gap between what we know about the determinants of early child development and what we do.” SA report

He would be thrilled about the announcement last week of the new Fraser Mustard Centre, reinforcing Fraser’s “research into action” mantra. My heartiest congratulations to Telethon Institute and the Department for Education and Child Development.

I would like to begin by briefly tell a story about Fraser’s impact at home. In my own province in Ontario Canada, in 2010, our Premier introduced universal full day learning for all of our 4 and 5 year olds. This means that 250,000 kids will be provided full day learning and care paid by the taxpayers. And he did this at a cost of over 1.5 billion in the
context of an 18 billion dollar deficit...because he understood that it wasn’t just an annualized cost, it was a medium and long term investment.

Let me take you briefly through our ongoing journey. First, a word about our starting point, the context when it comes to providing support for children and families. In one word, fragmentation.

It was in this context, that the Premier asked me in 2007 to build on the work that Fraser and others had done and provide advice about how to develop and implement an integrated pre-natal to 12 years plan to support kids and families, with full day learning for four and five year olds as the fulcrum for change.

With the help of best practice lessons and experts from around the world, 83 roundtables and the input of over 20,000 practitioners,
parents and local experts, we produced *With Our Best Future in Mind* in June of 2009.

*With Our Best Future in Mind*

http://www.ontario.ca/ontprodconsume/groups/content/@onca/@initiatives/documents/document/ont06_018899.pdf

Every Child, Every Opportunity Curriculum Framework:

http://www.ontario.ca/ontprodconsume/groups/content/@onca/documents/document/ont06_023393.pdf

Summary of Evidence:

http://www.ontario.ca/ontprodconsume/groups/content/@onca/documents/document/ont06_018937.pdf
A few hours after I presented our report to the Premier and the public at large, the Premier, channeling his inner John Kennedy, said this to the media:

"Ask not what kids can do for you, but what you can do for kids."

-- Premier Dalton McGuinty, June 15/09

But I admit, that I was most anxious to find out what Fraser thought of our report. Here is an excerpt from diary---the back and forth of an insecure protégé and a brusque mentor:
As a result of the work of Fraser, as the great translator of the science and its important impact on practice---along with other key people--early child development and education or early learning and care, is now high on the agendas of so many governments around the world.

With the help of economists such as James Heckman and Steve Barnett from the U.S., we know more about the economic return on investments in the early years.

Charles: Fraser, so how do you like our report?
Fraser: It's a damned good appendix to our early years reports!
Charles: How do you mean?
Fraser: It's an appendix for implementation, a blueprint for getting done what I have been saying.
Charles: Oh, ok, just an appendix?
Fraser: Yes, just an appendix, now get on with it
This last point is critical. With most of the 28% of vulnerable children entering first grade not living in low income homes, it speaks to the need for early learning programs to be universal not targeted....and it is important to note that they are not mutually exclusive approaches.

Under a universal umbrella, naturally there needs to be special initiatives for low income families. But targeted programs for the poor have consistently been poor programs that are politically unsustainable. (This was a point of contention between Nobel Laureate Heckman and Fraser, with Professor Heckman arguing for a targeted approach, given the context of the U.S. and the public policy culture.)

So Ontario’s plan was informed by factors such as:

- Early Learning highest employment multiplier (job creator) of all economic sectors - 43.5% more then the next highest ranking industries
- Spending on Early Learning has an economic multiplier effect on local economies, generating up to $1.7 dollars for every $1 spent
- 2:1 to 17:1 payback on public funding for developmentally enriched early learning program from increased taxes by working parents + reduced social services
- GDP grows by almost 1% for every 1% drop in vulnerability rate going into grade 1. Over working life=20% jump in GDP, even after interventions to reduce vulnerability on front end
- Effective early learning programs benefit all: Majority of vulnerable children – more than 60% – live in moderate, middle-class and affluent families
Ontario’s Plan: *Enemy of the Status Quo*

The plan is a pre-natal to 12 year-old concept of seamlessness and integration. Full day learning for four and five year was the fulcrum, the starting point with the pre-and post periods to flow from this initial step.
We know from evidence that the two difference makers regarding the developmental trajectories of our youngest children, that the home environment and the non-parental early years environment are key. Naturally, how could it be otherwise. But it’s the relationship between the two that makes the big difference, which is why the quality of early learning educators is so paramount.

I also want to emphasize at this point that we need a comprehensive approach to the pre-natal to 12 year-old period. Let me explain.

While our Ontario report begins with a robust program for four and five year olds to ensure a smooth and effective transition to first grade and beyond, there are other elements that are critical to ensure the high impacts we need in a more efficient manner.

We need to have fully integrated children’s services and I will speak about this later.
As well, we need parental leave policies that provide parents, including fathers, with an opportunity to be with their infants and one year olds because we know about the importance of attachment and critical importance of breastfeeding and the like.

In our report to our Premier, we recommended a 400 day parent leave plan with a six week “use or lose it” component for the non-birthing parent, fathers or same sex partners, to enable the kind of involvement that is lacking among too many fathers in the nurturing of their young children. This recommendation is still to be implemented. Overall, we have made a start in Ontario. Many speed bumps along the way in Ontario, so much more to do, so much to learn from others like my many colleagues here today from across Australia.

And because of the importance of the home environment, we need far more imaginative programming and policies to support parent literacy and skills.

As well, from my perspective, the following are the key elements of staffing for success, factors that need to define professional early learning educators and others who work with young children:
Let me emphasize a few of these elements. When it comes to effective engagement of parents in my part of the world, this is not done very well. We have ways to go when it comes to the genuine and respectful partnerships we need that creates something larger and special than the sum of the home and early learning center parts.

When it comes to the full involvement of fathers in intimate involved parenting, a light year’s travel might get us there.

When it comes to reflective practice, I already spoke about the need for practitioners to use evidence to improve practice. But just as we support the emergent learning of young children, early learning educators must be emergent learners, always learning more about themselves as the learn from what they do with children, always learning from doing!

And when it comes to embracing diversity, I list anti-oppression training as a professional necessity for all of us to deal with human services of any kind. This broader umbrella—anti-oppression—serves
to include dealing with sexism, racism and homophobia. Those, for example, who wish to reach out and do something special in supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples, need to follow the seven generational wisdom of Aboriginal elders. Attending a two-hour seminar on equity issues is an insult to the importance of deeper work that’s necessary to lead from within.

So at this point our full-day learning program is well underway and is wildly popular with parents and working well for kids.

But what about children’s services more generally? What about more broadly defined integrated staffing models, a major topic of conversation for this symposium?

If you recall my fragmentation slide, our next big adventure is to overcome the challenges that families face when it comes to childcare, special needs, and so many other child and family services that parents find too complex and disorganized to navigate in a timely way.

Service gaps, overlaps and long waiting lists have defined our non-system. With this in mind, we are slowly developing the concept of Child and Family Centres that aim to totally integrate a community’s services. We intend to take systems of services and turn them into a service system. What I am about to describe will sound similar at first to other “hub”-like centres but it goes where few—if any-- have gone before.

This diagram depicts the kinds of services we are talking about:
I need to emphasize that when I use words like “integrate” and “system”, I am not using them loosely. At face value, so far this looks similar to Sure Start centers in the UK and other important initiatives including some excellent Australian examples.

But let me take you through what is required to have a true system in which parents can enter any agency, school or other organization and in doing so, they entire the whole system—the concept of “no wrong door”. What I am proposing goes well beyond the notion of a “hub” approach. It is NOT about co-location of services in a school although co-locating some services in a school might arise from the community-based process I will describe.

First, the continuum of change from isolation of organizations to a fully integrated system:
Continuum of Change

FROM FRAGMENTATION TO A NO WRONG DOOR SYSTEM
From isolated co-existence, some communities have agencies and organizations opening up conversations:
In many of our communities, we have facilitated movement to the next step, collaboration with many creative and coordinated partnerships.
But it is critical to understand that high levels of collaboration is often taken to mean “integration”. This kind of collaboration can actually be the enemy of real change, with the partners making only marginal changes to their practice, rather than the fundamental changes required.

So, we are now experimenting with how to achieve genuine integration in five demonstration communities.
Most of the demonstration communities have ALL of the key leaders and professionals in child and family services at a common table. Each one at the table has committed to go through a process of integration that means doing things differently, in most cases doing fewer things better rather than all things less well.

And there is a good deal of re-engineering of practice taking place. And each remaining agency or node in the system acts as a provider if the needs of the family match up--or a broker to another node in the system. Key to this role is the need for the brokering behavior to be rewarded by the funding mechanism that drives the system. From the families’ points of view, there is no wrong door. Enter one node or agency and they have timely access to what they need. From the resource perspective, it provides a huge gain on efficiency and the resources saved are put back into the system.

 Probably the most mature of our demonstration communities is London Ontario where over 100 different agencies are doing the hard
work of re-engineering what they are doing. One of their sub-groups or task forces is focusing on developing a truly integrated staffing model for the emerging system. Bringing together educators, family doctors and pediatricians, pharmacists, nurses, occupational therapists, special needs providers, child welfare leaders, community recreation providers +++++all in service of looking at how they can change their practice to ensure seamlessness and timeliness in supporting the needs of children and families in their community.

The work of these communities is ongoing. It is hard work. Changes to how practice is done, developing new governance models and the like does not come naturally to people of pride about their work. It will take a number of years to get this right but the results will provide higher quality and more timely services to children and parents and better value for the tax dollars.

SA’s Children’s Centres for Early Childhood Development & Parenting initiative is a great example of how to get started on getting this kind of system moving.

As a result of Fraser and others, so many countries around the world now agree with the importance of early years investment, but it is often difficult to determine where the line between lip service and the real deal lies.

In some countries like the Scandinavian countries and lately my own country, the public at large fully understands the need for government to be in the business of early learning investment. Could be because more and more voters in these countries simply understand the positive social and economic gain to be had for a society that flows from enabling the social, emotional and cognitive development of the youngest of our young?

Or could be the practical consequences of the high participation of women in the workplace in these countries that drives a high expressed need for non-parental support. Canada, for example, has the highest participation of women in the workforce in the OECD countries (tied with Sweden at last “count”).
Anyone who spent any time with Fraser Mustard would know how direct and forceful he could be. In the face of a political leader’s hesitation about the importance of spending resources on early child development, he could take on the demeanor of a five star general dressing down a disrespectful private!

In Fraser’s last early years report, published posthumously, he wanted to hold Canada’s provincial governments publicly accountable for doing the right things. He didn’t want a provincial government to play hide and seek with the evidence, to use rhetoric to mask real action. Under his direction, the co-authors have created the Canadian Early Childhood Education Index that would be independently produced and would report on a province’s progress every three years.

I should note, that while we had a national framework agreement similar to yours— but not as good—our current federal government scrapped it a few years back. This has not deterred many of our provinces from getting on with doing the right things and creating a bottom up approach to nation-building ensuring we continue to strive for affordable, non-profit, universal and high quality early learning care on a national basis. I predict that somewhere down the road, a Canadian Prime Minister will run to the front of the parade and institute a modern and new Federal framework.

In the meantime, Fraser’s index idea is very important.
The Early Childhood Education Index

Organized into five categories.

1. **Governance:** Is the oversight of early education split between multiple departments, or does it have coherent direction backed by policies with goals, timelines and sound service delivery?

2. **Funding:** Is it adequate to support program quality and provide reasonable access?

3. **Access:** Are there enough programs to meet demand? Are barriers to participation addressed?

4. **Learning environment:** Is quality supported by curricula, program standards and trained and adequate staffing?

5. **Accountability:** Is there constant quality improvement supported by data collection and the monitoring and reporting of child outcomes? Is research supported and the findings incorporated into practice?
The first report with provincial results was tabled a while back and as expected, those who did well were cheering, some of those who did not, attacked the methodology. But most took it the right way. “At this point, how are we doing and how can we progress?” While some of my colleagues in the Ontario public service were a bit defensive that we didn’t score “higher”, our Premier told me is it always great to get helpful feedback...another example of evidence-based politics!

So Fraser Mustard’s legacy will live on through his strong commitment to being accountable for doing the right things when it comes to our children and our collective futures.

From my vantage point, we also need to continue investing in research and evaluation that provides a constant flow of information that needs to inform actions of improvement.

Your national quality assessment process is naturally quite important and in its implementation we need to evaluate its effectiveness in promoting appropriate change as well as changes to the process and instruments of assessment as well. It’s all about learning along the way.

For me, while there are many different approaches to organizing our assessments and research, here are the key questions that need to guide our ongoing review of early learning programs. And with each question, I think we need to gather input, process and outcomes information.
I also want to emphasize that we need to further develop the relationships among and between the following for sustainable high quality impact going forward:

- **the practitioners**, the professional early learning educators and other professionals in the early childhood development “sector”;

- **the researchers**, those academics whom we rely on to provide important evidence to guide programming and policy decisions;

- and finally **the policy-makers** who need to be informed about both practice and evidence to make the right decisions about sustainable resourcing to make it all happen...now and in the future.
I have worked in the cultures of the three legs of the “impact stool” depicted here.

![Diagram of research, practice, and policy]

Those who work in our universities are rewarded for research deemed excellent through peer review, not by what practitioners or government policy makers think about their research. Those who work in the public service often work in anti-intellectual environments where the amount of money spent on research to inform policy can be slim and none! And those who deliver services such as early learning educators are generally not active users of the latest evidence…too busy delivering services.

The good news is that are examples of researchers who form genuinely reciprocal relationships with practitioners such as early learning educators, seeking their advice about what questions they would like a research project to answer.
In our work in Ontario, the professors involved in our research work also engaged parents in this way. Naturally, this kind of partnership raises the practitioner’s level of interest in paying attention to the research findings.

As well, unless an academic is a public policy professor, too many academics live with the mantra “if policy makers or practitioners pay attention to my work, fine, but not my problem.”

While it’s easy to make policy, harder to make good policy, governments are not very good at implementation because they do not involve practitioners—the ultimate implementers---in their policy making process at the beginning.

But we have also witnessed exceptions as well where policy makers and academics have also formed respectful and reciprocal relationships. And policy makers have a more sophisticated and respectful approach to implementing policy by involving practitioners appropriately.

When those who work in these three cultures work together....the world changes...for the better. In my view, the development of each of the three of these professional clusters depends on the reciprocal relationships they have with the other two!

I have been fortunate to have been involved in many large scale change projects and I am still learning more and more about the obstacles to change that need to be understood, including:
As I noted at the beginning, it is an honor to be here, standing here on the shoulders of my friend and mentor, Fraser Mustard. When I return to Toronto on Wednesday, we will be launching the Fraser Mustard Institute for Human Development. The institute is Fraser’s last big idea and naturally, it isn’t a bricks and mortar organization, it is a virtual vehicle to change the way universities educate when it comes to ensuring that what we know about human development affects how and what we teach across the academy.

Here is how Fraser described it to me a few years ago:

_I want to fundamentally change the way universities work. I want to ensure that politicians see the value of evidence for their policy making. I want professors of all disciplines to integrate the best of what we know about human development into their research and teaching and mentoring of graduate students. And I want them to create new bridges between and among their disciplines that go far beyond the old-fashioned and ineffective “inter” and “multi” disciplinary approaches. It is time to_
“trans-disciplinary” if we are to make headway in meeting tomorrow’s big challenges. And it is absolutely time to ensure that researchers of all shapes and sizes, armed with new and enthusiastic understanding of human development, to embrace two-way partnerships with practitioners.

Our global future will be brighter indeed if we continue to listen in to Fraser’s booming voice that reverberates still.

### Early Learning = High Impact

- A wonderfully enriched start for the youngest of our young
- Greater success in school for all kids;
- Greater well-being for all 12 year olds;
- Parents able to live more balanced lives;
- Earlier and more effective interventions for kids with special needs;
- Schools as community hubs, buzzing with activities;
- Youth violence, family poverty reduced;
- Major boon to taxpayers – an economic stimulus package that keeps on giving.

Let me conclude on a very personal note. From time to time, I am asked about why I am so interested in early child development. That’s easy. I am a father who also happens to be professionally interested in learning. The following is an excerpt from a convocation address I gave a few years ago--a graduation of early years professionals. This portion of my remarks is in the form of an open letter to my then 15 year old daughter Tai....who was sitting in the audience trying to avoid total embarrassment.
Tai, it was about a year ago that you participated in your first real graduation, celebrating your passage from elementary school to high school. I was so proud of you as I am today now that you have the first year of high school under your belt.

These transitions from grade to grade and school to school can be very difficult for many kids, but you seem to handle them so well as you meet new friends, adapt to new teachers and situations. You have a self-confidence about learning that is awesome.....And I think I know why.

Seems like yesterday. Fourteen years passing like a speck cannot interfere with the indelible memory of walking you to the front door of your very first out of the home learning centre, your first kinda school, child care centre.

You were about 15 months old. Wobbly walk, very hesitant holding my hand, squeezing my hand harder as I prepared to hand you over to strangers, two early childhood educators. You shed a few tears, and I kept hold of my tears until I was out of sight. A very emotional memory indeed.

It was about the morning of day three on our way to your first “school”, that you broke my clasp and ran---or wobbled more quickly but on your own---to the front door of the child care centre, so excited about your new home away from home.

And after a few more weeks, the end of the day pick-up was very difficult as I tried to pry you way from your play, learning beside other kids, still a few months shy of playing with other kids. Tai, in my opinion, this was the beginning of the joyful and confident lifelong learner that remains evident today.

Sure, Mom and I like to take a little credit for being your first “teachers” but we are clear about the critically important part those first two early childhood educators played in providing you with a healthy, creative, and trusting environment.
Fifteen months old to fifteen years old…in a flash.

My friends, to Fraser Mustard, I toast his memory with thanks for his influence on my thinking and professional development.

To my children, I toast their important role as my earliest early learning advisors...

And to all of you who work to enable the aspirations of families to live happy and healthy lives, I thank you for the inspiring manner in which you enable the development of children like Brycen, Indiana, Picabo, Jake, and Zach---my five grand children.

The one in the lower left is our daughter Tai........

Gen-next: My team of early learning advisors

My best to you for this symposium and more importantly, what you do as a result of this symposium.