Toronto First Duty:
From activist research
to public policy change

Canadian Association for Research in Early Childhood
May 26, 2012 Wilfred Laurier University
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TFD Background

• Robust child care movement with 30 years & dozens of reports calling for improved access to child care
• 1995 Royal Commission on Learning – recommends education begin at 3 & be combined with care in schools
• 1999 – Early Years Study popularizes science of ECD and recommends integrated program delivery
• Atkinson Foundation’s Early Years Challenge Fund to create a seamless continuum of ECE services from prenatal to formal schooling
  – City of Toronto (child care, public health, special needs services); Toronto District School Board (4 & 5 yr old kindergarten), Canadian Autoworkers (communications)
  – 5 sites, $5-M, 5 yr commitment; now in its 12th and final year
• Drives recommendations in EYS 2 & 3

Demonstrating what is possible for children and families
Documenting the benefits

TFD 3rd phase of research
• **Children** – improved school readiness, less draw on special education
• **Families** – less stress, felt better able to support children’s learning, more involved in school community
• **Community** – improved EDI scores; improved school/community connection
• **Educators** – less isolation, professional satisfaction, team protects against ‘schoolification’
• **System** - Integration travels with quality
• **Cost-effective** – serves more families for the same costs in ways they prefer to be served

Demonstrating what is possible for children and families
Designed to influence policy

- **Public Policy** - demonstrating and sharing practices in programming and policy
- **See, Touch, Feel** – the possibilities in action
- **Conversation starter** bringing decision-makers together with influencers & practitioners
- **Experiment** with practices of integration
- **Research** documented changes in programming, practice & public policy
- **Communication** - research was central & popularly communicated
- **Tools**: Foundation for Ontario’s new emergent curriculum, Indicators of Change, Child Observation Framework
- **Non partisan**
Policy outcomes

• 2004 - Ontario’s Best Start
• 2009 - *Our Best Future in Mind* - 0-12 strategy
• 2010 – Ontario legislation for full day school programs for 4 & 5 year olds with educator teams – teachers & ECEs – and extended day options
• Piloting a 0-12 continuum in a First Nations community
• Inspired Early Years Centres in Coquitlam & Mission, BC; Best Start in Peel, Early Child Development Centres in New Brunswick; Smart Start in PEI; extension of Schools Plus & new policy insights in Nova Scotia; feasibility study in Newfoundland & policy and program delivery innovation in Victoria, Australia

Demonstrating what is possible for children and families
Education Act changes pioneered by TFD

- Teaching team in FDK – ‘duty to cooperate’
- Developmental curriculum
- Extended day options
- Universality
- Unique in the Canadian context
Vocabulary skills in children ages 4 and 5 years by family income

Vocabulary skills in children ages 4 and 5 years by family income

Number of children with ‘delayed’ vocabulary

- Affluent
- Moderate
- Low-Moderate
- Poor

Barriers

- **Structure**: different professional ideologies and departmental and agency cultures
- **Combining universal and targeted programs**: Fractured funding structure
- **Communication**: Lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities
- **Resources**: Financial uncertainties
- **Staff**: Disparity in remuneration and working conditions, labour contracts and professional regulation
Scaling up

- Political will & leadership
- Bureaucratic capacity
- Strategy to combine universal versus targeted programs
- Creating the political space
- Costs???
The Quebec example

• 70,000 more mothers are working
• They pay $1.5-billion annually in taxes
• And draw $340-million less in social transfers
• Boosting the GDP by $5-billion

Quebec mothers have:

• Moved Quebec from the bottom to the top in female labour force participation in Canada
• Halved child poverty rates
• Boosted fertility
• Meanwhile, Quebec student test scores have moved from below to above the national average

Done right early education and care pays for itself

For every dollar Quebec spends on ECE, it collects $1.05 in increased taxes and reduced family payments, while the federal government gets $0.44.

For more information

• www.toronto.ca/firstduty
• www.earlyyearsstudyc.ca

Integration Conference, OISE/UofT
October 22, 23 2012