Examining the Human Resource Implications of Emerging Issues in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) /Communications Strategy Development

INCLUSION

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EXAMINING THE HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS OF EMERGING ISSUES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC)/COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT: INCLUSION

1.   INTRODUCTION

This document is one of four reports prepared for the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council as part of Phase One of the Examining the Human Resource Implications of Emerging Issues in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)/ Communications Strategy Development project.

In examining the issues and trends that have emerged during the last decade, the CCHRSC has recognized the need to examine them within the context of their relevance to human resources for the ECEC sector. The CCHRSC has specifically identified the integration of ECEC and Education as a public policy issue with potential human resource implications, and is the main focus of the research component of the project. At the same time, the CCHRSC has also identified the practice of inclusion as a program policy topic to be examined for potential human resource implications, along with program delivery models of school age and family home child care.

Preliminary research on these four topics was undertaken through a sector survey, key informant interviews, and literature searches.

Background to the Emerging Issues and Communication Strategy[1] Project

In the past ten years, there have been considerable efforts made across Canada to advance the development and delivery of early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs at the pan-Canadian and provincial / territorial levels.

At the same time, Canada participated as one of 23 countries in the 2003 International Thematic Review of ECEC conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The resulting OECD policy recommendations provided Canadian jurisdictions with an international framework of reference with respect to future ECEC policy and program directions.

The CCHRSC has recognized the need to examine emerging issues in the ECEC sector within the context of their relevance to human resources for the sector. The CCHRSC identified four issues requiring further exploration: [2]

- Human resource implications of integration of ECEC and Education on, as an emerging policy trend across Canada
- Human resource implications inclusion in ECE (cultural diversity, special needs)
- Program delivery model of school-age child care
- Program delivery model of family home child care

The project team conducted preliminary research on these four topics through:

- A sector survey
- Key informant interviews
- Literature searches

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[1] The evaluation of the current CCHRSC communication strategy as well as recommendations for communication efforts for the coming years is a concurrent aspect of the work on emerging issues, and will be the subject of a separate report.
[2] The latter two issues represent gaps in the HR knowledge / research about the sector, vs. 'emerging' issues.

Emerging issues and communication[3] survey

The purpose of the Emerging Issues and Communication Survey was to gather a wide range of perspectives on the human resource implications of the identified emerging issues in ECEC and to identify priority areas for key stakeholders. The survey also helped identify any key trends or themes to be examined in further detail in key informant interviews, and provide information for reports on each of the four issues to be examined.

The survey was developed for several target stakeholder groups:

- Employers, directors and front-line staff of full-day, part-day and school age centre-based child care programs
- Regulated family child care providers, and where applicable, family child care agency staff
- ECE provincial/territorial/pan-Canadian organizations
- Post-secondary ECE faculty
- Government officials responsible for licensing child care programs

The survey was not intended to provide a representative sample, but rather to be a preliminary look at the four identified issues, which will inform further examination.

Key informant interviews

The project team conducted a total of 30 key informant interviews regarding emerging issues in the ECEC sector. Key informants were selected from the following groups:

- Provincial/Territorial (PT) Directors of ECEC
- Pan-Canadian and PT child care organizations
- ECEC employers / centre directors
- Labour groups
- Post-secondary institutions
- Municipal policy staff
- Researchers
- ECEC stakeholders / experts in Inclusion (cultural diversity and special needs)

Literature review

The project team has conducted a review of recent studies and reports available from Canadian and international sources. Relevant literature is referenced within the context of reports on each of the four identified issues.

This report provides an overview of Inclusion and the associated human resource issues and priorities identified through the literature and stakeholder participation.

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[3] Survey findings specific to communication issues are intended to inform the development of recommended communication strategies for the CCHRSC.

2.   THE PRACTICE OF INCLUSION

"Children are aware very young that color, language, gender, and physical ability differences are concerned with privilege and power. They learn by observing the differences and similarities among people and by absorbing the spoken and unspoken messages about those differences. Racism, sexism, and handicappism have a profound influence on their developing sense of self and others."

(NAEYC: Anti-Bias Task Force 1989/2001)

What is Inclusion?

The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Division of Early Childhood have recently adopted a national position statement on inclusion, and have agreed on a shared national definition of inclusion as "the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society."

Dr. Sharon Hope Irwin of SpeciaLink, Canada's National Organization for Child Care Inclusion defines inclusion in the following statement:

> *Simply put, child care inclusion means that all children can attend and benefit from the same child care programs. It means that children with disabilities go to the same programs they would attend if they did not have a disability. Inclusion means all children, not just those who are easy and/or less expensive to include. All means all. For children with disabilities, this means that the necessary supports of training, equipment, physical modifications and extra staffing are available to all programs, at no extra cost to parents or to the individual programs. The principle of inclusion goes beyond the notion of physical integration and fully incorporates basic values that promote and advance participation, friendship and a celebration of diversity. Children with all disabilities are active participants, not just observers on the sidelines.*

In 2003, federal, provincial, and territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services agreed on a set of principles for effective approaches to practice in the *Multilateral Framework for Early Learning and Child Care* including:

> *Inclusive: Early learning and child care should be inclusive of, and responsive to, the needs of children with differing abilities; Aboriginal (i.e. Indian, Inuit and Métis) children; and children in various cultural and linguistic circumstances. Examples of initiatives that support inclusiveness could include special needs programming and supports, and culturally and linguistically appropriate resources and training.*

"...it is in the self-interest of diverse societies to make use of the best available knowledge about efficacious ways to ensure that diversity is understood and appreciated by incorporating best practices into policy frameworks and early childhood programming."

Friendly and Prabhu, 2010

More recently, the Government of Manitoba has adopted a definition of inclusion:

> *Inclusion means children of all abilities have equal access to and participate meaningfully in child care programs.*

When children are together as part of the group, their development is enhanced and positive social attitudes are fostered.

In a high quality, inclusive program the centre staff or family child care provider is responsive to the individual abilities and needs of each child. Opportunities are provided for all children to learn through play with their peers, supported by knowledgeable staff or provider. All children need support to reduce or eliminate barriers so they can learn and fully engage in experiences with their peers. Adaptations and strategies are specific to each child.... Occasionally, additional staff are required as part of a strategy to include every child. Genuine inclusion is more than just a child's presence. It ensures active, meaningful participation by every child in the daily program and with one another. How this occurs will be different for each child, based on individual abilities and needs. All children should be valued, have friends and feel they belong.

The SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale (2009) outlines six principles of quality inclusion:

- Zero reject — no child is excluded on the basis of level or type of disability.
- Natural proportions — programs include children with disabilities in rough proportion to their presence in the population.
- Full participation — activities and routines are modified and adapted to include all children.
- Same range of program options — parents of children with disabilities have the same options (e.g., full day, part day, flexible hours) that other parents have.
- Maximum feasible parent participation — parents are actively encouraged to participate in the child care program.
- Pro-action for community inclusion — staff and parents promote inclusion in the whole community.

Benefits of Inclusion

There appears to be a consensus in the literature regarding the benefits of inclusive practice in programs for young children (Lero, 2010). There are obvious benefits to children with special needs who participate in high quality early childhood education and care programs. As well, there is general agreement that inclusive practices also have benefit for the rest of the typically developing children in the program, including understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of individual differences. Policy and procedural guides for developing inclusive policies at the centre level developed by the City of Toronto[4] and the Manitoba Child Care Program[5] outline benefits for all children, families, child care centre staff or family child care providers, and boards of directors of ECEC programs.

> *"In an inclusive community, teachers work with specialists (occupational therapists, speech therapists) as a team. And, it generally involves using a strength-based, instead of deficit-based, perspective, which focuses on kids' assets and talents instead of trying to fix a disability."*
>
> *Dr. John Nimmo, Executive Director University of New Hampshire Child Study and Development Center*

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[4] City of Toronto. (undated) Inclusion: Policy Development Guidelines for Early Learning and Care Programs. Toronto: Toronto Children's Services**.**

[5] Government of Manitoba. (2009) *Writing an Inclusion Policy: A Guide for Child Care Centres and Homes.* Winnipeg, MB: Author

In one of the foundational papers to the development of New Brunswick's *EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE: English Curriculum Framework for New Brunswick[6],* it is noted that all children participating in inclusive programs have opportunities to "a) learn empathy and sympathy for self and others; b) develop an understanding of and respect for diversity and acquire a positive regard for each other; and c) raise questions and act to change unfair practices."

Recently, Friendly and Prabhu[7] have explained that given what we now know about how young children learn, there is a great potential for socially inclusive and universally accessible ECEC programs to play a key role in "building a foundation of respect for diversity by capitalizing on children's receptivity to these ideas about diversity in the early years." Early childhood educators generally agree that programs rich in cultural diversity help children to develop broader language skills, increase cultural awareness, and instill a feeling of cultural pride in all children. Culturally diverse programs celebrate similarities as well as differences, and therefore help to build a sense of connection with the child's community.

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[6] Whitty, P. (2007) *Culture and Diversity in Early Learning and Care.* Early Learning and Child Care Foundational Papers. Fredericton, NB: University of New Brunswick.

[7] Friendly, M. and Prabhu, N. (2010) *Can early childhood education and care help keep Canada's promise of respect for diversity?* Occasional Paper #23. Toronto, ON: Childcare Resource and Research Unit.

3. PROVINCIAL TERRITORIAL APPROACHES TO SUPPORT INCLUSION

> *"Early childhood education holds tremendous promise for raising a new generation, with each child not only proud of their own heritage and identity, but committed to standing up against bias in all its many forms."*
>
> *Margie Carter and Deb Curtis (2002)*

Over the last 25 years, provincial and territorial ministries responsible for early childhood education and care have shifted their focus from segregated programs for children with disabilities to the introduction of a range of programs and initiatives to support inclusive practices in regulated programs. Such programs generally support regulated centres with funding for human resources and/or materials/equipment, all of which is at no cost to parents of children with special needs. Supports are also in place for parents to assist with the daily fees charged for all children, typically by providing flexibility in eligibility criteria for subsidy.

Several jurisdictions have introduced programs intended to enhance quality in the ECEC centre, thereby improving the quality of the inclusive practices. For example, each of the Atlantic Provinces has introduced an on-site consultation model[8] to provide this type of support. Although the names and specific objectives of the Atlantic initiatives are unique to each province, each program builds on the principles of on-site consultation and uses a combination of assessment tools, including the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and the SpeciaLink Inclusion Quality Rating Scale.

Table 1 outlines current PT inclusion supports:

PT	Table 1: PT ECEC Inclusion Supports
NL	The **Inclusion Initiative** provides human and financial supports to licensees in order to include children with special needs in the regular programming of the centre/home. Features include: ▪ Regional Child Care Inclusion Consultants advise and support centres. This work may include adaptation to the existing program. ▪ Funding is available to employ an additional staff member if recommended by the Consultant. ▪ Funding may be provided to have a vacant space in order to reduce the number of children in the room. ▪ There may be child specific supports when appropriate. The **Special Child Welfare Allowance** provides funding for parents to support children with special needs. Program features include: ▪ Parents must meet eligibility requirements of a means test. ▪ Allowance is paid directly to parent who hires an individual to provide support in a child care setting. ▪ Setting may include regulated centre or family child care home or an unregulated home. Implementation of a new initiative in 2006 to improve inclusive practices in child care has begun. Funding is available for substitute staff to allow regular staff to attend meetings related to a child with special needs. Funding is also available for an additional staff position if the special needs of a child require significant staff time.

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[8] The on-site consultation model was developed by Drs. Pat Wesley and Sharon Palsha at the University of North Carolina's Frank Porter Graham Institute.

PT	Table 1: PT ECEC Inclusion Supports
NS	The **Supported Child Care** (SCC) program provides funding to support the inclusion of children with special needs who have developmental delays or behavioural issues that require intervention. The funding is intended to support a child care program to maintain or build capacity to provide an inclusive program. Program features include: ▪ All licensed child care centres are eligible to receive funding. ▪ Funds may be used for an additional early childhood special educator, or to purchase materials, equipment or resources. ▪ Level of support required is determined on a case-by-case basis, with decisions made in consultation with the centre director and the regional Early Childhood Development Officer. ▪ Facilities can assign a current employee to facilitate inclusion and use SCC funding to hire additional staff to enable an enhanced ratio. ▪ Eligibility is based on whether the centre is licensed, is in compliance with the Day Care Act and Regulations and has a child who is attending who has a special need. ▪ SCC funding is program based and is not determined by the diagnosis of the child/ren requesting admittance to the child care centre. ▪ The funding depends on availability and is not an entitlement. ▪ Families do not pay for the additional supports provided.
PE	The **Special Needs Funding** program provides financial resources to support children in inclusive programs by lowering ratios to allow for a successful transition and inclusion into the early childhood setting. Program features include: ▪ Centre applies for funding on behalf of the child. ▪ Some documentation is required in order to receive the additional support; social needs of the child will also be considered. ▪ Funding is not capped and there is no wait list for service. The **Child Care Subsidy Program** does not require parents of children with special needs to be employed or in training to be eligible for subsidy. The **Bridges Program** provides on-site consultation to licensed early childhood centres to support inclusion as an aspect of high quality early childhood education.
NB	The **Early Childhood Initiatives (ECI) Program** supports children with identified special needs in integrated child care services. Program features include: ▪ Children may be identified as having a special need based on a confirmed diagnosis at birth, developmental issues identified after birth, or a family risk factor. ▪ Early Childhood programs providing integrated day care services for children referred by the ECI program receive funding directly. ▪ Funding is usually used to provide for wages for an additional staff person. However, funding may also be used for transportation, materials and equipment and/or additional nutritional needs of the child.
QC	Admission to a regular child care program is at the discretion of the CPE, garderie or the family child care provider; however, Quebec's objectives regarding children with special needs in child care programs strongly favour inclusion. Supports include: ▪ a one-time grant to the centre and additional funding added to the regular operating grants ▪ an extra assistance measure is available for the integration of children with significant special needs.

PT	Table 1: PT ECEC Inclusion Supports
ON	**Special Needs Resourcing** provides assistance for staffing, equipment, supplies or services to support the inclusion of children with special needs in child care. Resource teachers generally work for agencies that provide a variety of services for children with special needs, and may serve children in several child care settings. The level of service per child can vary, depending on the child's needs, the local service model, and available resources. Consequently, the previous ratio of one resource teacher to four children with special needs is no longer applicable in all areas.
MB	The **Inclusion Support Program** integrates children with additional support needs into mainstream child care. Program features include: ▪ Non-profit child care centres, nursery schools and family/group child care homes are eligible for funding. ▪ To receive additional supports, children must have an eligible cognitive, developmental or physical disability; behavioural challenges; or be medically fragile with requirements for nursing support. ▪ Services are not an entitlement but there is usually no waiting list once a diagnosis has been made. ▪ Funding may support wages for additional staff, necessary renovations, equipment, training, or professional services. There is an added exemption in the **Child Care Subsidy** assessment if any member of the family has a disability. Children's Special Services staff work with the Child Care Program and the Departments of Education, Citizenship and Youth, and Health to coordinate and place children with additional support needs into child care programs, and to facilitate the transition to school. Children's Special Services also provides consultation and funding to non-government agencies that deliver therapy, respite and family support services.
SK	The **Child Care Inclusion Program** provides three types of grants to child care facilities to support inclusion: ▪ Individual inclusion grants are available to licensed centres and family child care homes to include children experiencing a delay or a condition of risk that may result in a delay. A referral is needed but not necessarily a diagnosis and the child must attend the program a minimum of 20 hours per month. The amount of the grant varies depending on the need within three defined levels. ▪ An enhanced accessibility grant may be paid to assist with the additional cost of including a child with exceptionally high needs. For this grant, the child must have a diagnosis and require significant additional support and the parents must be enrolled in an education program or employed. ▪ A training and resource grant for adapted equipment required to meet the needs of the child. Funding for inclusive child care is intended to support the centre as a whole and not to provide a worker allocated to a specific child. Parents of children with special needs pay for the space but not for the additional supports. There are no waiting lists for funding.
AB	The **Inclusive Child Care Program** provides for inclusion of children with special needs. Funding varies depending on the special needs of the child, the type of service required and the region. Funds are paid to contracted operators on behalf of eligible children. Children with special needs may receive Early Childhood Services (ECS) Program Unit Funding (PUF), and may receive care and education in a child care centre or a nursery school/preschool. Operators may choose whether or not to provide service.

PT	Table 1: PT ECEC Inclusion Supports
BC	The **Supported Child Development Program** (SCDP) is intended for children who require extra support to participate in inclusive child care settings. Program features include: ▪ The program supports children from birth to age twelve who have or may be at risk for a developmental delay or disability and require extra support. ▪ A developmental delay or disability may affect physical, cognitive, communicative, or social/emotional/behavioural development. ▪ Youth 13-18 years of age may also receive SCDP services on a case-by-case basis. ▪ Participation is voluntary and SCDP services are provided at no charge to parents; however, parents are responsible for child care fees. ▪ Twenty Aboriginal SCD programs provided direct services to children and their families, with an additional 35 initiatives in the process of building capacity for future services. A **Special Needs Supplement** is provided by the Ministry of Children and Family Development to assist families eligible for the Child Care Subsidy Program, who have a child with a designated special need, with the costs of child care.
YK	The **Supported Child Care Fund** provides funding for centres and family day homes in order to provide for adaptive equipment, transportation, programming support and/or additional staff. Program features include: ▪ Funding is based on the individual needs of the child. ▪ Children must be assessed by a child care professional in order to be eligible for funding. ▪ An Individual Program Plan must be developed for the child in consultation with staff, parents, and professionals in the community. The IPP must outline goals and objectives for the child. ▪ Child care regulations state that children with special needs in mainstream child care programs must be integrated to the fullest extent possible. The **Whitehorse Child Development Centre** provides special needs programming and supports across the Yukon. It operates an integrated preschool program as well as unlicensed preschool programs. It provides early intervention supports and resources to families of children with special needs. It operates a mobile outreach unit to support resources in all communities. The **Child Care Subsidy** program does not require parents of children with special needs to be in the paid labour force to be eligible for subsidy. Parents are still required to meet financial eligibility criteria. Parents do not pay for the additional supports.
NT	Care providers are funded to provide extra support to children with special needs, through higher operating grants, funded at the infant rate. Parents may be eligible for fee subsidies for their children with special needs even if they are not employed or at school. They must meet the same financial eligibility requirements as other parents receiving subsidy, and have a medical referral from a recognized health care official for the child to be in developmental care. Children may be placed on waiting lists for service.
NU	Care providers are funded to provide extra support for children with special needs through the daily operating grants, which are based on the age of the child and the area in which the centre is located. The operating grant for a preschool child is increased by approximately 50% for a child with an identified special need and is an entitlement. A letter from a recognized health care professional is required for the centre to receive the additional

PT	Table 1: PT ECEC Inclusion Supports
	funding for a child. In addition, centres may apply for funding to the **Healthy Children's Initiative** for adaptive equipment or for additional staff if necessary.
	Parents are eligible for fee subsidy for their children with special needs even if they are not employed or at school. This subsidy eligibility requires a financial needs assessment to be applied and parents must have a medical referral from a recognized health care professional for the child to be in developmental care.

Supports for diversity in early childhood education and care programs

While supports for children with special needs often require specific funding for additional staff, supports for cultural and linguistic diversity most often address program/curriculum approaches. Five provinces have already launched early learning frameworks/curricula for children in ECEC programs, while Manitoba is currently piloting a new curriculum. Each framework/curriculum specifically addresses the concept of inclusion:

- New Brunswick: The Vision outlined for the *Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum* includes a description of children who are "secure in their linguistic and cultural identities" and who are "respectful of diversity". As well, one of the Values articulated for the curriculum framework speaks of "inclusiveness and equity":

    We value diversity, and honour all individual, social, and cultural differences. We uphold the right of every child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life — regardless of race, religion, social economic status, gender, or ability — and encourage the provision of appropriate and equitable opportunities for participation.

    The curriculum outlines four goals for children, one of which is: "diversity and social responsibility".

- Ontario: "Respect for diversity, equity and inclusion are prerequisites for honouring children's rights, optimal development and learning" is one of the six overarching principles that orient *Early Learning for Every Child Today.*

- Quebec: The concept of "Cultural, social and physical differences and similarities" is one of the key reference points for attaining the six competencies outlined for preschool education.

- Saskatchewan: In *Play and Exploration*, one of the roles of the ECE is described as a "supporter of diversity", noting that "Children are encouraged to value diverse viewpoints, cultures and abilities."

- British Columbia: The principles of the *Early Learning Framework* include "The individual, cultural, and linguistic identities of children and families are respected and integrated into early learning settings, programs and activities."

Additional Jurisdictional Approaches

In addition to the above supports for inclusive programming and financial supports for parents, some jurisdictions have explicitly addressed inclusion in developing policy or regulatory guidelines for ECEC programs and family child care homes:

- In licensed ECEC programs operated by the City of Toronto, the Toronto Children's Charter guarantees that all children in Toronto are entitled to the right to participate in high quality ECEC programs. (Toronto Children's Charter, 2007) A resource *Inclusion: Policy Development Guidelines for Early Learning and Child Care Programs* is available to outline policy and procedural expectations.

- The Government of Manitoba has revised legislated regulations for ECEC programs to include specific reference to inclusion (Manitoba, 2009). The new regulations (2009) require all licensed programs to:
    - have a written inclusion policy[9]
    - provide a daily program that is inclusive of children with additional support needs and reflects the developmental capabilities of all the children
    - ensure each child in the Inclusion Support Program has an individual program plan (IPP) and that it is revised annually
    - ensure centre and nursery school staff are aware of the inclusion policy and the goals of each IPP.

Children are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms, but because of their unique vulnerability, it is incumbent upon adults to ensure not only that children are safe from exploitation and neglect, but that they have access to a fair share of society's resources and as such all of Toronto's children shall be entitled, if their parents so choose, to participate in high quality child care/early education programs designed to meet the best interests of the child.

(Toronto Children's Charter)

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[9] In order to support centres in meeting the new requirements, the Manitoba Child Care Program has developed a resource for ECEC programs: *Writing an Inclusion Policy: A Guide for Child Care Centres and Homes*.

4.   HUMAN RESOURCE ISSUES AND INCLUSION

"ECEC programs can help strengthen solidarity within a community across class, ethnic and racial boundaries. Diversity is a key part of the ECEC context in Canada and social integration of newcomer families is an important aspect of many ECEC programs."

Childcare Resource and Research Unit

Skills and Abilities of Early Childhood Educators

The Occupational Standards for Child Care Administrators (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2006) identify that administrators must be able to:

- develop culturally responsive practices
- develop an inclusive and developmentally appropriate curriculum
- observe and evaluate programs to ensure all children are included
- engage staff in the provision of a quality, inclusive environment for all children.
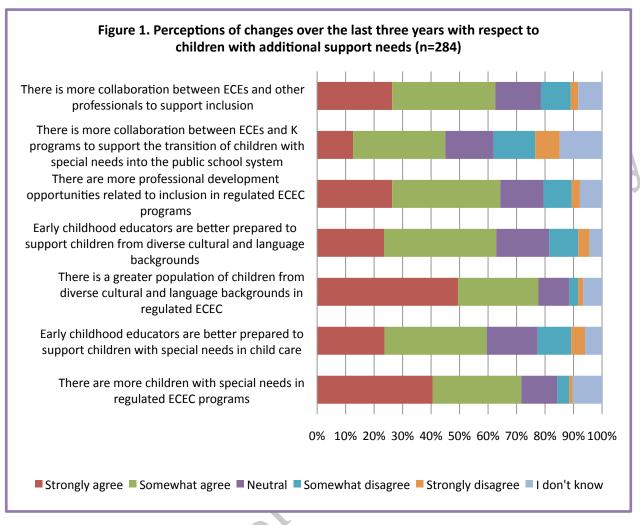
Similarly, the context for facilitation of children's development and behaviour as outlined in the Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators (Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, 2010) states:

Early Childhood Educators facilitate daily experiences that support and promote each child's physical, language, emotional, cognitive, social and creative development and behaviour using applicable observation tools while respecting inclusion principles and diversity issues.

Inclusion is explicitly addressed in the 2010 Occupational Standards for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). In defining the core knowledge and required skills and abilities with respect to Inclusion Policy, it is specified that ECEs be required to be able to develop inclusionary practices for program delivery; implement inclusionary practices into programs; implement an inclusive environment for children; and promote inclusion within the program. The Occupational Standards also note that ECEs are required to know inclusion policies and procedures; principles of universal design and how they support inclusion of all children; different aspects of inclusion (e.g., cultural, general, sexual orientation, special needs); and a variety of diverse family compositions.

In Canada, the majority of provinces and territories do not require specific additional post-secondary credentials for those who work with children with special needs. British Columbia requires specialization as a Special Needs Educator, which involves further study after achieving an ECE certificate (one year). In Ontario, a resource teacher must hold a diploma in early childhood education or academic equivalent and have completed a post-secondary school program related to children with special needs. If working with children with multiple disabilities, the resource teacher must also have a current standard certificate in first aid.

In the Emerging Issues Survey conducted for this project, all respondents were asked to give their perceptions of changes over the last three years with respect to children with special needs and from diverse cultural and language backgrounds. Figure 1 shows the breakdown of the perceptions of change over the last three years:

Figure 1. Perceptions of changes over the last three years with respect to children with additional support needs (n=284)

Legend: Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Neutral ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ I don't know

Overall a majority of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that:

- Early childhood educators were better prepared than they were three years ago to support children with special needs and children from diverse backgrounds.
- There are more professional opportunities for related professional development.
- There is more collaboration between ECEs and other professionals to support inclusion.
- There are more children with special needs and more children from diverse backgrounds in regulated child care than there were three years ago.
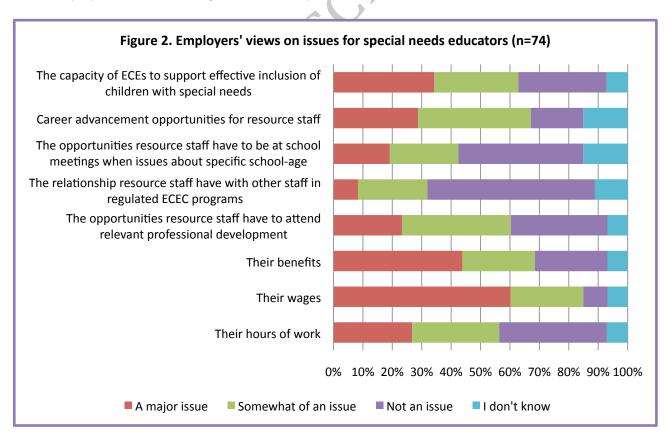
In previous research conducted for the CCHRSC, questions were asked about how well prepared new ECE graduates were to be able to work with typically developing children, and with children with special needs:

- The *Labour Market Update Survey* (2004) found that:
  - Students in ten ECE programs located across Canada reported that more than 70% of students felt well prepared to work with 'typical children' but less than 20% felt prepared to work with children with special needs.
- In surveys and focus groups conducted for the *Training Strategy Project* (2007):
  - The Student Survey – conducted with ECE students about to graduate – found that 90% felt prepared to work with typically developing children, while only 66% felt prepared to work with children with

special needs.

o The Faculty Survey found that over 45.4% of faculty in one-year certificate programs felt that upon graduation, students were not prepared to work with children with special needs. In two-year diploma programs, 29.4% felt that students were not prepared to work with children with special needs; 20% of faculty in three-year programs felt that students were not prepared to work with children with special needs.

o Focus group discussions with ECEs and with Employers agreed that new ECE graduates may not feel prepared to work with children with special needs, but noted that confidence in the ability to work with children with a range of different abilities or with children from diverse cultural backgrounds is built upon positive experiences in working in inclusive environments, and so therefore it should not be expected that new ECE graduates would feel they had the same level of confidence as they did in working with typically developing children.
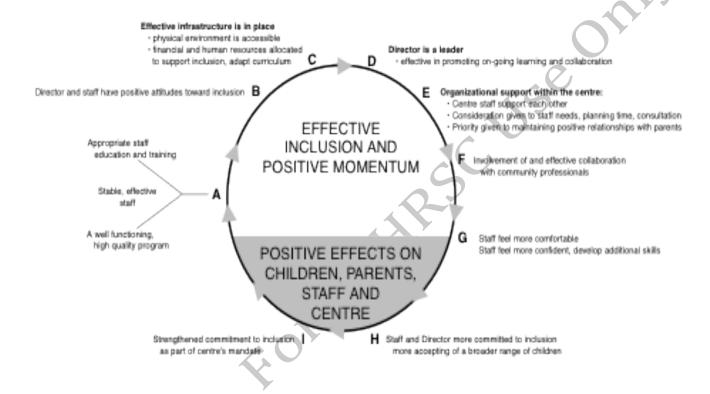
Employers' Perspectives

A majority of employers who participated in the survey reported that they enrol children with special needs in their programs. This percentage ranged from 100% in Ontario, British Columbia and all Atlantic provinces to 64% in Saskatchewan and 67% in Alberta. As well, 58% of employers indicated that the recruitment of special needs educators was more difficult than it was three years ago. Reasons included low wages, educators moving to the education system and fewer graduates of post-secondary ECE programs. The main issues for special needs educators identified by employers were wages, benefits and career advancement. Figure 2 shows employers' views on a range of issues for special needs educators:

Figure 2. Employers' views on issues for special needs educators (n=74)

Supports for Inclusion

Canadian researchers have noted that positive experiences with inclusion enable early childhood educators and resource teachers to develop stronger commitment to inclusion by providing understanding, learning opportunities, skill development, and more self-confidence. Irwin, Lero, and Brophy (2000) call this a "positive virtuous cycle". Figure 3 outlines this cycle:

Figure 3: A virtuous cycle that supports effective inclusion

The above diagram suggests the importance of a number of human resource factors including:

- Leadership skills of director
- Low staff turnover rates
- Ability to collaborate with community professionals
- Clear articulation of centre's policies
- Appropriate staff training and education
- Team building
- Positive relationships with parents
- Access to professional development
- Staff planning time and opportunities for consultation
- Financial and human resource allocation for inclusion support and curriculum adaptation

Perspectives of Key Informants

Key informants from across Canada were interviewed regarding their perceptions on the four issues studied for this project. Thirty key informants were selected based on consideration of their representation of different parts of the ECEC sector, geographic and linguistic representation, and their ECEC expertise. Responses regarding inclusion varied somewhat across this group, but there were a number of common themes among the perceptions of human resource issues related to inclusion:

Understanding of Inclusion: Several key informants noted that while early childhood educators voice their support for inclusion, many do not understand what it means to work in a truly "inclusive" environment. These key informants felt it was important that post-secondary programs provide more practicum placements in high quality inclusive settings; that ECEs have access to mentoring support when working in inclusive settings; and that there be more consistent and widespread training in and use of the SpeciaLink Inclusion Rating Scale, so as to support centres in their ability to move away from the "one-on-one" approach, and to be able to adapt their environments and curriculum to allow for inclusion.

Training Requirements: Some key informants noted that in most provinces/territories, there are no post-secondary training requirements for those who work with children with special needs. One key informant noted: "We have the least qualified adults working with the children with the highest needs."

Cultural Diversity Among Staff: Key informants noted the importance of ensuring that adults in ECEC programs are representative of the cultures of the children who attend the program. The 2004 Labour Market Update found that the level of cultural diversity among staff in the early childhood education and care sector was higher than in the public school sector. Even so, key informants felt that in many instances, it appears that there are disproportionate numbers of women of colour in the ECEC sector who are working in assistant level and support staff roles, rather than as lead teachers or directors. One key informant noted that there are growing numbers of immigrant women working as family child care providers in their own homes.

Importance of Professional Development: A number of key informants were surprised at the Emerging Issues Survey findings indicating that ECEs were better prepared to work in inclusive settings than they were three years ago. Many of the key informants were familiar with the findings of the Labour Market Update Survey and the Student and Faculty Surveys conducted for the Training Strategy Project. On the whole, key informants did not believe that students – upon graduation – were better prepared than they were three years ago. Two key informants suggested that it is possible that students are better prepared, as ECE post-secondary programs may have enhanced their curriculum with respect to inclusion, based on the previous survey findings. However, key informants noted that the survey question asked about ECEs and not recent graduates, and therefore agreed that ECEs are better prepared. For this statement, they credited ongoing and increased access to professional development opportunities focused on inclusion.

Mentoring Support: A number of key informants perceived that there had been substantial increases in funding from PT governments for programs and initiatives to support inclusion. Initiatives such as those currently underway in the Atlantic Provinces were noted because of the mentoring and on-site support that is featured in all of these initiatives. Key informants noted that these types of initiatives contribute to the overall capacity of the sector to support inclusion.

Inclusion as a Stand Alone Issue: Several key informants noted that it seemed to be "non-inclusive" to be considering inclusion as a separate issue. These informants emphasized that "inclusion" is an aspect of quality,

and that the focus of efforts should be on the broader issue of quality and the related human resource issues. Other key informants felt that any discussion of human resource issues to support inclusion needed to be considered within the broader context of the integration of ECEC and education. Current labour negotiations underway regarding those who work with children with special needs (e.g., education assistant, teacher assistant, special needs assistant) in some jurisdictions were noted as one of the challenges presented by integrating early childhood and education programs

> *"In the best of all worlds, we wouldn't be writing about inclusive child care. We would know that all child care centres include all children, regardless of level or type of special need. But we are not there yet."*
>
> *Dr.Sharon Hope Irwin*

Infrastructure: Many key informants expressed concern that as of March 31, 2010 funding for SpeciaLink, the National Centre for Child Care Inclusion, would force the organization to become a virtual resource. Concerns were noted regarding future access to resources, training, and research.

Human Resource Priorities to Support Inclusion

In the Emerging Issues Survey, stakeholder groups were asked to indicate their top three human resource priorities to support inclusion. Weighted rankings from employers, staff and post-secondary faculty are found in Table 2, which compares the top five priorities by stakeholder group:

Table 2: Weighted rankings of three stakeholder groups regarding priorities to support inclusion		
Priority ranking	**Employers (140 respondents)**	**Staff (121 respondents)**	**Post-secondary faculty (68 respondents)**
1.	More funding to support children with special needs	More funding to support children with special needs	More on-site consultation
2.	Improved government policies on funding eligibility	Improved government policies on funding eligibility	More funding to support children with special needs
3.	More on-site consultation	More effective recruitment of staff	Improved government policies on funding eligibility
4.	More inclusion content in post-secondary ECE programs	More inclusion content in post-secondary ECE programs	More effective recruitment of staff
5.	More effective recruitment of staff	More on-site consultation	More training and resources to work with parents from different cultural backgrounds

Key informants provided the following recommendations for related Sector Council work:

- Conduct an analysis of the role of and benefits of access to resource teachers, on-site consultants, and other mentoring approaches to supporting those who work with children with special needs – "Is there a new profession emerging in the ECEC sector?"

- Develop recruitment strategies to encourage individuals from other cultural backgrounds to consider post-secondary training and employment in the regulated ECEC sector.
- Develop professional development resources for employers and boards of directors to support effective practices in working with children, families, and staff from diverse cultural backgrounds.
- Conduct an analysis of the role of school age child care providers with respect to inclusion

Key informants also suggested:
- Curriculum development support is needed for post-secondary ECE diploma programs for topics such as planning and designing children's environments to support inclusion, working with parents and other professionals, and organizing practicum placements in inclusive settings.
- Support is needed for post diploma courses for administrators and/or those working with children with special needs.
- There is a need for increased types of professional development resources for early childhood educators, special needs resource staff, and inclusion resource staff to inform and support work with children and families of different cultures.
- There is a need for increased training opportunities in using the SpeciaLink Inclusion Rating Scale, in order to improve inclusion practices.

5. CONCLUSION

In the past 25 years, there has been a steady shift from segregated programs for children toward "integrated", then "mainstreamed", and now "inclusive" programs. In recent years, the concept of inclusion has been extended to also include consideration of the special needs of children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. While there is widespread agreement that inclusion is important, and that there are clear benefits for all children, families, and ECEC centres themselves, there is also a perception that there are many approaches taken under the name of "inclusion" which in fact do not support the concept.

Some of the recommendations made both in the survey and in key informant interviews call for actions and initiatives that fall outside the scope and mandate of work of the Child Care Human Resources Sector Council. Consideration of the recommended actions for CCHRSC work will need to be undertaken within a new environment that, at least for the next few years, has lost the resources and input from SpeciaLink, the National Centre for Child Care Inclusion. The CCHRSC will need to determine what is relevant to their mandate, and to the changing environment of the ECEC sector in Canada.

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