



Raising the Bar

Early Childhood Education

An ASCY Community Initiative

Peterborough's Early Learning and Child Care Community's
Commitment to Best Practices in High Quality Child Care

2012-2013 Report

Investing In Quality 
Early Learning and Child Care Peterborough



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Introduction

It is important to recognize that, for many reasons, the lives of families with young children have changed dramatically over the last few decades. Such facts as increased family workforce participation, a rise in the number of lone parent families and decreasing traditional family support have resulted in more and more children being cared for outside of their home and at increasingly younger ages. There is solid research that demonstrates high quality early child care environments increase positive outcomes in children and families and are cost-effective for society (McCain, Mustard & McCuaig, 2011). In the task of defining and measuring the quality of early environments two components of quality have been identified. One is referred to as structural quality which is concrete and fairly straightforward to define and measure (most of the DNA regulations address structural quality). The second is referred to as process quality, and includes such things educator/child interactions, family engagement, inclusivity etc. Research clearly shows that high levels of process quality have the most impact on the lives of children and their families. The six principals of Ontario's Early Learning Framework (Early Learning for Every Child Today, 2007) are concerned with process quality. However, process quality is more challenging and costly to measure and improve. Furthermore simply determining how to define quality does not always tell us how to improve quality so instead we need to create a culture of quality improvement. Peterborough City and County through the Investing in Quality committee and the Raising the Bar initiative, funding, and in kind hours demonstrate vision and strong commitment to supporting quality early learning and care environments for children. This report describes Phase Four of the local Raising the Bar initiative.

Background

Peterborough has a long and rich history of collaboration within the child care community. In the 1990's, the Peterborough Child Care Forum (PCCF) was established to support the professional needs of the early learning and child care (ELCC) sector through networks, professional development, resource borrowing and administrative support. While the Forum was in existence, the Executive Directors and Supervisors of local child care centres developed the Child Care Supervisors Network, simply named the Child Care Network, remains a strong and effective means of support and advocacy for the professionals working in the local ELCC sector. In the later part of the 90's, funding was pulled from the Peterborough Child Care Forum, leaving the community with limited professional support. The remaining dollars left from the PCCF moved to the Peterborough Family Resource Centre to be utilized for the annual child care conference. To date, the account is held in trust by Investing in Quality.

In 2007, a group of Directors, Supervisors, Special Needs Resource Agencies and Family Support Coordinators began meeting to discuss the existing, but often fragmented support to the professional needs of the local child care community. Through these meetings the need for strategic planning became evident. Two main areas of focus were identified: a process to measure, maintain and support high quality child care in the community and the coordination of professional development and resources. To address the latter, the Professional Development Committee was formed to develop a plan for the dollars in reserve at the Peterborough Family Resource Centre.

Through this Professional Development Committee, Investing In Quality – Early Learning and Child Care Peterborough (IIQ) was formed to address the former. The mandate of the committee was to look at best practices and a means by which to set community standards of quality within the local early learning and child care sector. After considerable research and discussion, Raising the Bar on Quality, developed in Hamilton, Ontario, was selected as the measurement tool for the Peterborough Community.



Raising the Bar is a program designed to help child care programs maintain community standards of quality early learning and child care services that go beyond the minimum Day Nurseries' Act licensing requirements. Raising the Bar on Quality consists of 17 standards encompassed within 3 categories; Quality Monitoring, Best Practices in Management and Professionalism.

The presence of a Raising the Bar certificate is a sign that the program is committed to maintaining provincial regulatory standards as well as local community standards in quality monitoring, best practices in management and professionalism. Raising the Bar participants voluntarily submit to an annual review process to ensure they meet community standards. After one year of participation in Raising the Bar, programs are expected to achieve bronze level and may progress further in subsequent years.

Bronze Level:	programs follow fundamental quality indicators and are also in full compliance with Ontario's Day Nurseries Act.
Silver Level:	programs have additional strategies to enhance quality. Some strategies include increased professional education for Early Childhood Educators, parent and staff surveys, and opportunities for parents to become more involved.
Gold Level:	programs demonstrate a long-term commitment to high quality in early childhood education. Short and Long term goal setting, increased professional involvement and community partnerships are some of the standards found at the gold level.

In order to measure the community impact and outcomes of the Raising the Bar initiative a logic model was developed by the Investing in Quality Committee. The logic model linked measurable outcomes with the activities identified in each standard (quality assurance, management and professionalism) with an appropriate output. Specifically, the Raising the Bar logic model was developed to measure the effects of efforts by Executive Directors and Supervisors along with increased support/mentorship by the project Coordinator to implement the community standards.

Summary of History		
Phase	Dates	Activities
One Bronze	September 1 2008 To March 31 2010	Ensuring compliance with DNA
Two Silver	April 1 2010 To May 20 2011	Some additional strategies that address quality such as parent, staff surveys
Three Gold year 1	June 1 2011 To October 8 2012	Additional components especially around professional learning, mentorship, community partnerships, healthy child development etc.
Four Gold year 2	October 9 2012-October 1 2013	First year of sustaining gold level standards for most programs

Examining the broader Context of the Raising the Bar review year 2012-13



The figure below depicts some of the changes that have and continue to influence the landscape of the early learning and child care sector. While many of the changes reflect a commitment to healthy child development and are responsive to the needs of families in contemporary society, the impact of these changes is being felt both locally and across the province.

The majority of programs participating in Raising the Bar were in their fourth year of participation and were feeling comfortable and confident with the process. There were however, a slight decrease in the number of programs participating in Raising the Bar for the 2012-13 review year. One program closed during the review year. In addition, another program experienced staffing changes and decided not to submit their profile for this review.

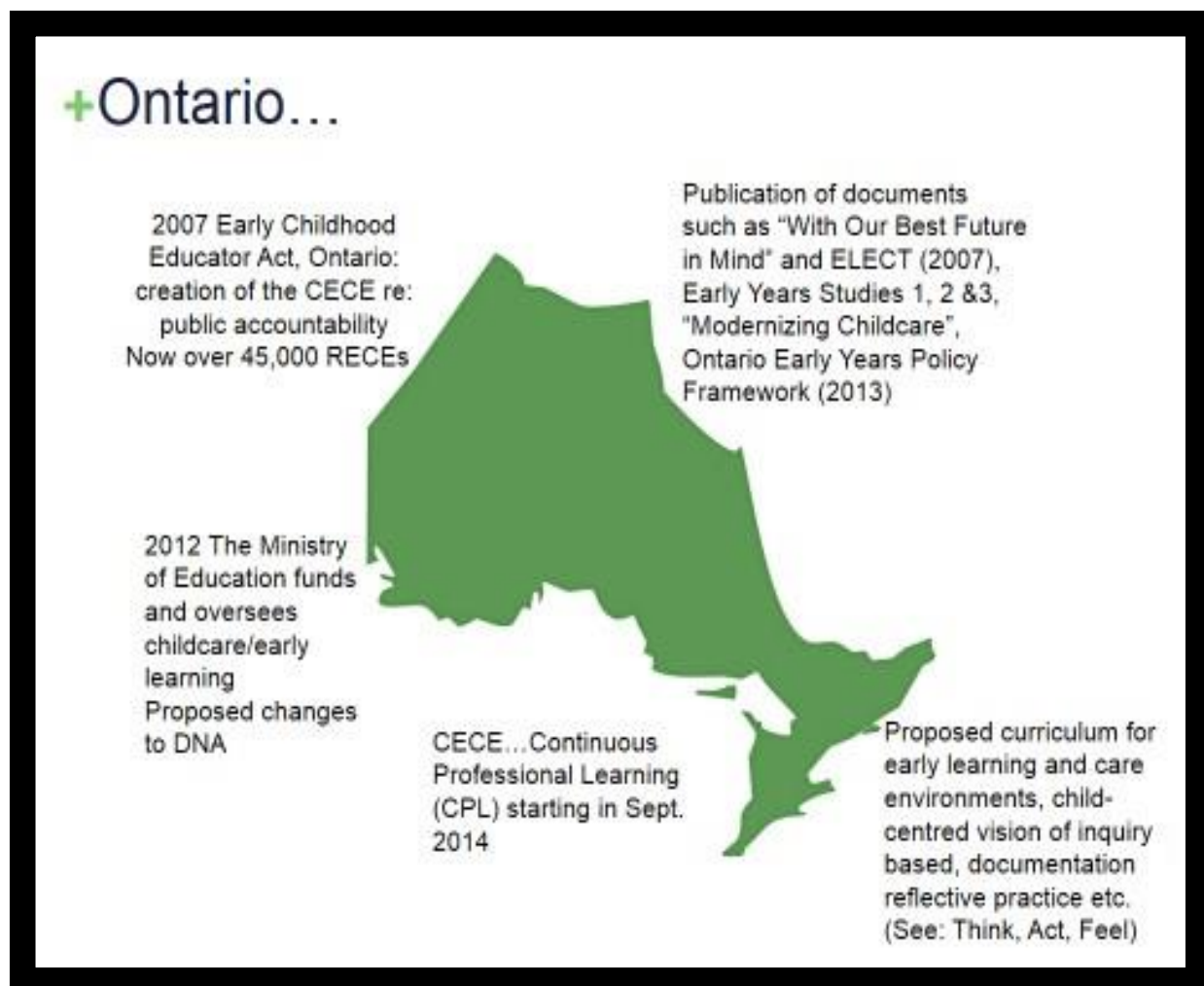


Figure 1



Category Progress

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is the systematic process of assessing whether a product or service is meeting specified requirements and desired outcomes. In the Raising the Bar initiative quality is monitored through:

- observations by supervisors, education teams and the Quality Initiatives Co-coordinator
- feedback from parents/guardians (Standard 3) and staff (Standard 4) surveys.
- the development of action plans (Standard 6) identifying for growth and ongoing sustainability.
- third party environmental assessments by community approved early learning and child care professionals. (Standard 5). These are in addition to annual provincial licensing reviews and local public health inspections.

Raising the Bar Category			Quality Assurance
Activities	Outputs	Progress in Outputs 13 month timeline	Outcomes
- Child Care Programs conduct annual Parent surveys in each program.	- # of parent survey's completed and returned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2134 parents were surveyed in 2012-2013 • 1008 surveys were returned. <p>47% return rate (49% in review year 2011-12)</p>	Child Care Centres & agencies are more equipped to monitor the quality of service on an ongoing basis.
-Child Care Centres conduct annual staff work environment surveys.	-# of CCC staff survey's completed and	<p>352 staff were surveyed in 2012- 2013</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 208 surveys were returned <p>59% return rate (85% return rate for 2011-12)</p>	Many programs now using on-line surveys for both parents and staff facilitating the process.
-Delivery of environmental assessment tool workshop for all participating centres.	-# of DECA community mentors trained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 mentors are trained to support centres. 	<p>Indicator Success 24/24 e.g.</p>
-Delivery of DECA mentoring training.	-# of participants participating in DECA training (other assessment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 215 Early Childhood Educators, Resource Teachers and Preschool Consultants have been trained in the use of the DECA to date. (15 trained this year) • 52 Early Childhood Educators have trained in the use of the ECERS-R to date. (10 trained this year) 	
Health and Safety training support	-# of agencies accessing health and safety training.	All staff in 24/24 programs have first aid and CPR. Cooks and supervisors have Food Handler certificate in 100% of programs that serve food.	
Development of	- # of action plans	100% (24 of 24) of programs included an action plan that included how they were implementing the Healthy Eating	



Raising the Bar Category			Quality Assurance
Activities	Outputs	Progress in Outputs 13 month timeline	Outcomes
Child Care Centre Action Plans (gold standard)	<p>completed (phase 3)</p> <p>-# of programs in full compliance</p>	<p>Indicators tool</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100 % (24/24) of participating centres are in full compliance and have clear licenses. 	

The Impact on Quality in Our Community

“Partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of young children.” Early Learning for Every Child Today, 2007

Parent Surveys and involvement:

Families were surveyed around such things as fundraising, nutrition/menu planning and playground design as well as the level of care their child was receiving.

There was evidence of a lot of effort and creativity in the area of parent engagement. Often families gathered at fundraising events such as a garage sale, an auction of children's art, and spaghetti dinners. On other occasions families were involved in field trips providing opportunities to network while providing additional supervision.

Most programs create and distribute newsletters for families.

The majority of comments from the peer review teams this year were related to family engagement practices and included comments about parent handbooks, displays and newsletters.

“With these standards, we have used the feedback and survey data for making adjustments to such things as our menus and outdoor spaces. Parents also feel more involved with the centre and that their opinions and suggestions do count and do help us to make changes that will better meet their needs.”

Environmental Assessments: evidence of shifts in practice

Programs continue to use environmental assessment tools and there is a growing interest in many programs around child centred programming, including improving teacher observation skills, self-reflective practice, implementing inquiry based approaches and documentation of children's learning. A number of programs have accessed professional learning in this area (e.g. Marc Battle) requested mentorship from Investing in Quality, including presentations at parent evenings and staff meetings, and borrowed resources etc.

“It has helped us observe the children, learn what their interests are, and plan around what they want to focus on, not what we plan. We have become child focused instead of teacher focused.”

“Staff have used the environmental assessment tool to improve their rooms, to better suit the needs of the children.”



“I feel that we are providing a better program for the children and that makes me feel more like a professional. We are helping families to see the learning in children’s play.....they are not just ‘playing’ with ‘toys’ and we are more intentional about the opportunities we are providing for the children.”



Best Practices in Management

Best practice is a technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has both validity and reliability in achieving a desired result. A commitment to using the best practices in any field is a commitment to using all the knowledge and resources at one's disposal to ensure success.

Research shows that there is a positive relationship between level of family engagement and program quality. Programs demonstrate their commitment to engaging families in a number of RTB standards. Participating programs provide information to families on the importance of high quality early learning and child development (Standard 10) and develop program handbooks for families (Standard 12). Opportunities are also provided for families to be involved in the program (Standard 11). In addition, programs demonstrate how they initiate and maintain community partnerships (Standard 15). There are detailed policies, procedures (Standard 8), job descriptions (Standard 9) and management practices to guide day-to-day practices along with specific strategies that support optimal child health and development (Standard 10). At the Gold level programs demonstrate that a minimum of nine staff meetings in addition to team meetings have been held in the review period.

Raising the Bar Category			Best Practices in Management
Activities	Outputs	Progress in Outputs 12 month timeline	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training to support the development of Policies, governance, job descriptions - Child Care Network & Business Partner meetings - Develop an annual organizational planning model. (calendar) - Promote parent education and training opportunities - Promote parent involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -# of child care programs /agencies participating -# of training opportunities - Frequency (#) of Child Care Network & Business Partner meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24 Child Care Programs have signed on to participate in the project. (1 program has closed since last review year) • 27 Training opportunities have been offered through Raising the Bar. (28 in 2011-2012 review year) • 6 Child Care Centre Supervisor Network meetings have taken place from October 1 2012 to October 2013 (6 in previous review year) • 5 Business Partner Meetings have taken place from October 1 2012 to October 1 2013 (7 previous review year) <p>200 people participated in the RTB/ECE</p>	<p>RTB participants are more aware of identified best practices in the child care field.</p> <p>Indicator Number and or percent of participants that complete the silver level. (see RTB silver standards)</p> <p>24 of the 25 programs that submitted for the 2012-13 review year were successful in achieving the Gold standard. One program achieved the silver standard and one program maintained a silver standard.</p>



Raising the Bar Category			Best Practices in Management
Activities	Outputs	Progress in Outputs 12 month timeline	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitate annual recognition event - Develop a template for data collection 	-# participants attending the recognition event	recognition event (174 previous review year)	



Figure 2

An example of engaging families in programming (Standard 11).

In one program, families were asked to describe their child's strengths on a scroll. The supervisor commented, "This one parent, well, it is always a challenge to engage her in a conversation. She is always in a hurry. At most it is a couple of words. Then I saw the time she had taken to write about her child and what she said and I almost cried." The program hosted a network meeting where a number of educators showed great interest in this example of engaging families.



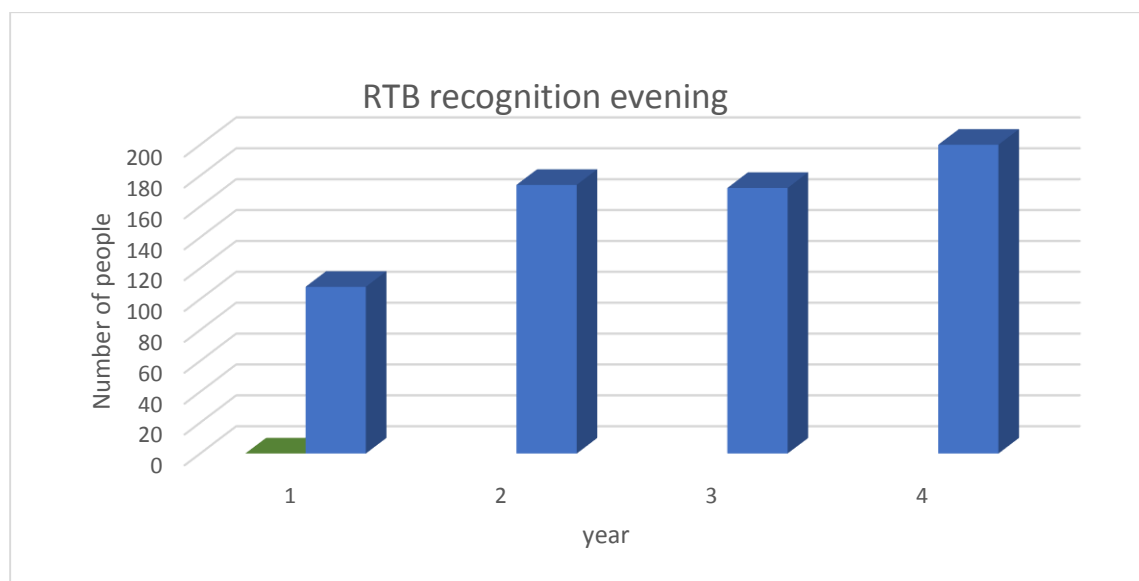


Figure 3 Attendance at the Recognition event



Figure 4

A Presentation at the ECE recognition evening Nov 12 2013

Participation in this annual event has increased steadily over the past four years.

Comments:

"Thanks you both for a fun, appreciation filled evening last night. I know that a lot of work went into the evening and the staff here only had great comments on the night. They especially enjoyed the drumming!"

"Just wanted to extend a THANK YOU from myself and staff. We really enjoyed the dinner, conversation with our fellow ECE'ers and the drumming circle was wonderful!"

"The food was great and the turnout was a testament of how important it is to feel appreciated."



The Impact on Best Practices in Our Community

Staff Engagement:

There is evidence that in a number of areas there is an increase in professional engagement among local educators. There has been a steady increase in attendance at the ECE appreciation event. There has been a significant increase in the number of individuals to receive platinum recognition and in 25% of programs participating in Raising the Bar all staff were recognized at the platinum level. There is also an increasing interest in the networks.

Community Involvement:

Again there was evidence that programs were becoming more involved in their communities with more frequent and more meaningful involvement. A number of program supervisors spoke with passion when they discussed the importance of engagement.

One program provided child care for a marathon that was being held in their community. Other programs participated in community parades, and participating in local fundraisers. Newspaper clippings in Raising the Bar profiles provided evidence that a number of programs in small communities were featured in local newspapers or received media recognition when participating in community events.

“We are continuing to build on our partners and find new areas in which to grow.”



Professionalism

“Knowledgeable, responsive early childhood professionals are essential.” Early Learning for Every Child Today, 2007

Research shows that there is a positive correlation with the amount of professional development accessed by educators and the level of quality. A number of the Raising the Bar standards encourage and support the development of a culture of mentorship and professional engagement.

Specifically, early years professionals participating in a Raising the Bar program maintain credentials and commit to ongoing professional learning each year. All directors and staff engage in ongoing professional learning through such things as workshops, conferences, and coursework to stay current with best practices and research in the sector of early childhood education and care (Standard 16). To maintain a gold level standard in Raising the Bar each educator in a participating program demonstrates that they have accessed a minimum of 8 hours or four separate events of PD. Further, educators who have completed more than 20 hours of professional development in the RTB review year receive a platinum certificate acknowledging their commitment to continuous professional learning. In addition educators demonstrate membership to a recognized professional organization (Standard 17) that offers professional development. First aid and CPR are kept current.

Raising the Bar Category			Professionalism
Activities	Outputs	Progress in Outputs 13 month timeline	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child Care Connections Newsletter: identify existing community PD calendar - Initial assessment to develop baseline measurement. - Mentoring through networking - Recruit volunteer trainers/facilitators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> # of workshops and training offered # of participants accessing PD -# of newsletters sent out. - Frequency of networking groups taking place. -# of networking groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 Workshops and courses have been offered to the child care community through RTB. (28 in 2011-2012 review year) • 672 participants have accessed the training offered to the community. (791 in previous review year) • 568 Newsletters have been sent out to community members. (4 newsletters, 142 centres and individuals) (644 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • 17 bi-monthly Networking groups have taken place attended by 197 educators Infant/Toddler Preschool, JK/SK/ School Age 	<p>RTB participants are able to apply the knowledge acquired through the professional education accessed through work.</p> <p>Indicator Number and or percent of participants that complete the Gold level. (see RTB Silver standards)</p> <p>22/24 programs that submitted for the 2012-13 review year were successful in maintaining the gold standard.</p>



Raising the Bar Category			Professionalism
Activities	Outputs	Progress in Outputs 13 month timeline	Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote/deliver workshops/training - PD certificates/cards - Develop a contact list of professional associations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -# of baseline assessments completed Total # Hours of professional education offered 	<p>Cooks Science (see supervisors network on page</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 Baseline peer assessments have been completed prior to beginning RTB. (20 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline) • Resources and contact lists posted and updated on IIQ website • 85.5 Hours of professional Development has been offered through RTB related events. (128 in previous review year) • 121 Individuals received Platinum Recognition (88 in previous review year) 	<p>33% increase in the number of individuals who achieved platinum recognition in 2012/2013 review year</p>

Professional learning hours submitted in Raising the bar submission 2012-13

Professional learning hours submitted in Raising the bar submission 2012-13			
	Individuals	Total number of hours	Average # of hours per individual
Individuals who submitted PD hours	181	5426	30
Individuals who qualified for platinum recognition	121	4731	39
Number of agencies where all educators qualified for platinum recognition	6		
Percentage of total programs participating	25%		

Figure 4 Professional Learning hours submitted in RTB profiles and Platinum recognition



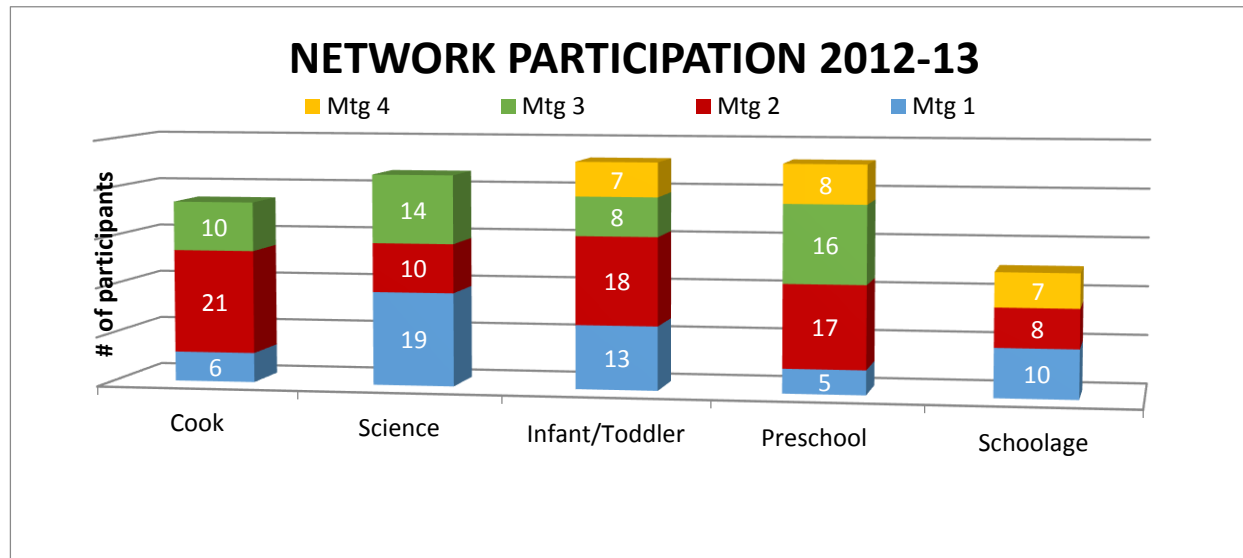


Figure 5 Attendance at network meetings

A total of 17 network meetings were held in the 2012-13 review year.



Figure 6

A network meeting hosted by James Strath child care program



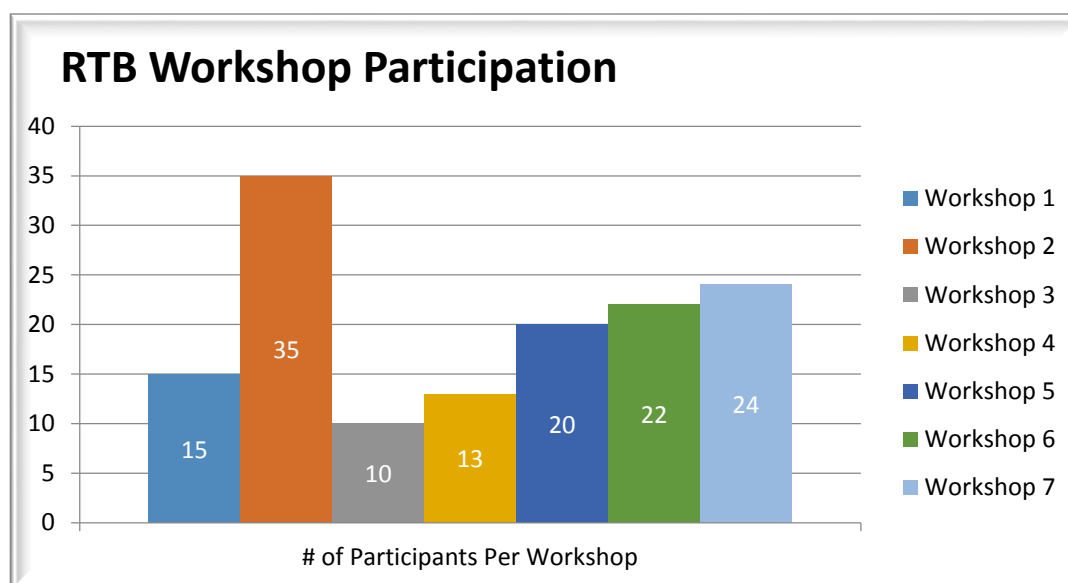


Figure 7 Examples of professional learning opportunities offered by RTB in 2012-2013

128 hours of professional learning were offered in the community. Investing in Quality staff heard through supervisors that there was an interest in creating an opportunity for supervisors to gather to learn more about the early learning framework and to discuss the success and challenges of supporting educators with its implementation.

A half day workshop was developed which provided some general background information on the Early Learning framework, acknowledging that people were in different places. The workshop addressed the continuum of development and focused on one of the principals that of the importance of engaging families as an integral part of part of quality early learning environments.

The impact of professional development on educators, children and families.

Below are comments received by the Investing in Quality staff:

“Wanted to say how much I enjoyed Saturday being with so many like-minded ECE's and Others!!!!”

“I felt so affirmed & recharged. Thank you both for all you do for us & our children, families & community.”

“Thank you for sharing all of your expertise, and offering to help and support us.”

“Our whole team enjoyed the conversation and are a bit a buzz they have a renewed excitement about their work with children and families. They felt affirmed by your comments and are eager to continue.”



Figure 8
Educators study the
Continuum of Development
at a presentation during a
staff meeting



Figure 9
Supervisors at a workshop on
Ontario's Early Learning Framework
for Supervisors
September 2013



Findings

Based on conversations with programs finding time to complete the Raising the bar profile for submission can be a challenge, but many programs involved from the beginning have developed strategies that facilitate the process and have been willing to share with others approaches that have been effective for them.



Figure 10 Peer review day

In examining the 17 standards of the raising the bar profile it is possible to identify standards which relate to structural quality and which support process quality. These are identified in the chart below

Structural quality	Process quality
RTB Standard: 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12	RTB Standard: 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 (these frequently involve the relationships or processes that exist between parties e.g. educator/child, educator/family, educator/profession and program/community

Naturally the categories are not absolute, for example, a high quality parent handbook (Standard 12) would contain elements of process quality and there are structural components present in supporting healthy child development (Standard 10).

When a quality assurance tool is first implemented it is indeed necessary to identify where participating agencies are in meeting the standards and to ensure that support is offered for programs to reach the standards.



In the spring of 2013 Investing in Quality, Peterborough sought input to review the 2013-14 Raising the Bar and the input received and implemented clearly demonstrate a commitment to addressing process quality. For example, in the Standards 3 and 4 around parent and staff environment surveys the local profile encourages reflection and asks for a report to be written and included in the RTB submission.

Interestingly, the Raising the Bar profiles, site visits and feedback from agencies and individuals provide evidence that participating agencies are naturally beginning to focus more intentionally on process quality. This awareness has been heightened by the vision for early learning and child care put forth by the Ministry of Education and by the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice developed by the College of Early Childhood Educators. Current research identifies that the most effective way to improve process quality is through the delivery of professional learning to educators.



Conclusion

The qualitative and quantitative data contained in this report, provide strong evidence of the positive impact of the Raising the Bar initiative on the quality of early learning and child care programs across the Peterborough community. Participation in improvement activities, networking opportunities and the demonstrated dedication to the seventeen standards also provides evidence of the improved coordination and communication among the centres, their staff and the child care community. Local educators accessed information and resources from the Investing in Quality office in the following ways: telephone, email, the IIQ website, borrowing resources, mentorship opportunities, and inviting Investing in Quality staff to speak at staff meetings and parent evenings. Site visits provided by Investing in Quality staff opportunities to foster relationships that support quality early learning and care environments.

Moving forward

The Raising the Bar initiative provides a unique opportunity to take the pulse of the child care community and gain insight and respond to the joys and challenges that exist in the sector and to monitor response to the significant changes that have and will continue to occur in the sector. As the community enters the fifth year of participation in Raising the Bar initiative a priority will be to support new programs and individuals new to the submission process. Six new programs will be participating in Raising the bar, including two nursery schools and one licensed home child care agency. At least five individuals will be responsible for preparing the binder for submission for the first time and two multi- site organizations will be preparing a site binder for a multi- site agency for the first time.

New agency profile forms (see Appendix A) will assist in tracking issues as they emerge from program site visits, community meetings, and requests for materials and resources. It is anticipated that these tracking sheets will provide valuable data on issues faced by programs and Investing in Quality staff in their work.

A newly developed professional learning tracking sheet (see Appendix B) will provide more detailed and statistically accurate data regarding engagement in professional learning in our community. This information will be used to inform the provision of professional learning opportunities that meet the needs of the sector. Further it will facilitate determining the number of people working towards diplomas and degrees in the community.

A continued commitment to strengthening the professional connections with other sectors concerned with supporting healthy child development. This includes the Peterborough City County Health Unit.

The Raising the Bar profile for 2013-14 includes opportunities that encourage reflection and support the development of a culture of quality improvement. Just as in our work with children we build on their strengths and encourage them to go deeper in their learning this too is the vision for early childhood educators and the programs in which they work. Raising the Bar is an initiative that provides a framework for the delivering, monitoring and supporting the important work of providing quality early learning and care environments.

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