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

Phase 5 Report 2013 -2014

Investing In Quality
Early Learning and Child Care Peterborough

Table of Contents

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction

This report describes and documents year five of the implementation of the Raising the Bar quality assurance initiative in Peterborough City and County. The report contains the original logic model developed to measure the impact of the initiative, but also includes stories (found in blue text boxes throughout the report) and photographs, gathered over the course of the year, that serve to bring visibility to best practice. These artifacts come from a cross section of participating agencies, including single site and multi- site licenced child care programs, licenced home child care, nursery schools, and family support programs. It is hoped that those in the sector, whether they be administrators, educators or dietary staff, will see their work reflected in the report.

The report begins with a brief description of the background of the initiative and the local and broader contexts of the review year, 2013-14. The standards of the local Raising the Bar profile will be described in the three categories that form the profile, followed by examples of evidence of the impact of the initiative in our community.

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 Supervisor's Network, simply named the Child Care Network, which 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, this 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 early learning and 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.

Table summarizing the three levels of Raising the Bar

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.

Table 1

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 Quality Initiatives Coordinator to implement the community standards.

Table summarizing the local history of the Raising the Bar Initiative

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
Five Gold Year 3	October 1 2013 –October 1 2014	Second year of sustaining gold level standards for most programs

Table 2

Phase 5 2013-2014

In order to better understand the outcomes of Phase five, it is critical to examine the broader context in which the initiative takes place.

International Context

"High quality early childhood settings are associated with immediate and long- term positive outcomes for children" (How Does Learning Happen? 2014, p. 11)

The impact of children's early experiences on life outcomes continues to be a research focus at an international level. Indeed, many of the recent directives around early learning and care in Ontario can be traced back to recommendations from the Organization for Economic and Co-operative Development's (OECD) 2006 *Starting Strong* study, in which Canada took part. The OECD examined the provision of early learning and care in 20 participating countries and identified Canada as a 'policy laggard' (OECD, 2006), last in public spending on the early years, as well as a nation where children were least likely to attend an early learning program and those who did often experienced programs with low quality and undertrained staff (OECD, 2006). A number of recommendations were made which included:

- addressing the governance of the system
- investing in and expanding the system
- monitoring, measuring and addressing quality
- training and supporting the workforce, including curriculum supports
- investing in research

In November 2014 the fourth early years study, *It's Time For Preschool*, was released reporting that most jurisdictions across Canada were moving forward with the recommendations from the OECD.

Figure 1 http://timeforpreschool.ca/en/full-report/
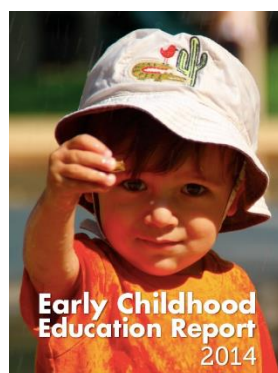
Provincial context

Over the past few years Ontario has emerged as one of the leaders in improving early learning and care for young children, families and educators. Such reports and initiatives as:

- With Our Best Future In Mind (Pascal, 2007),
- Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT, 2007)
- The Early Childhood Educators Act (2007) and creation of a professional college (2008) responsible for regulating the profession
- Full day kindergarten (2010)
- The Ministry of Education becoming responsible for early learning and child care (2012)
- Ontario Early Years Policy Framework (2013)
- The passing of Bill 10 regarding the modernization of child care, revisions to the Early Childhood Educators Act.

In May 2013, the Early Learning division of the Ministry of Education further demonstrated its commitment to supporting quality in the early years with the release of How Does Learning Happen?, Ontario's pedagogy for the Early Years, (2014) and supporting documents 'Think Feel Act' and 'Excerpts from ELECT, 2007. These are quoted from and referred to throughout this report.
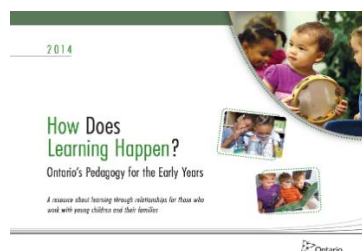
Figure 2 How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years

The new provincial directives and supporting resources have provoked leaders and educators across the province to re- think their work and examine how their current and held beliefs and practice align with the vision put forward by the Ministry of Education and the expectations of the College of Early Childhood Educators. Conversations around practices, such as using checklists to measure quality, are happening across the sector.

The year 2014 also saw the final stage of implementation of full day Kindergarten with all schools in the province now offering the program.

Further, the College of Early Childhood Educators (CECE) saw the model of continuous professional learning (CPL) move closer towards being mandatory for all registered early childhood educators with the passing of Bill 10 in November 2014. The Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice is referred to and quoted from throughout this report.

Figure 3 The four foundations from How Does Learning Happen?

Local Context

The provincial directives have impacted the local early learning and child care community in many ways. As the population of three and four years left licenced child care to attend full day kindergarten, programs continued to respond to the changing needs within the community with the re-designation of licenced spaces to create more toddler and school age spaces. Local nursery schools reported an increase in requests for spaces for two year olds.

The implementation of full day kindergarten has resulted in an exodus of early childhood educators from the child care sector to the two local school boards. In addition, for a variety of reasons, including career opportunities and family needs, a number of experienced supervisors left programs. This meant that seven programs participating in Raising the Bar gained a new supervisor during the review year. In addition, in several programs, the responsibility of managing the Raising the Bar initiative was given to someone other than the supervisor. These programs were made a priority for support by the Quality Initiatives Co-ordinator. Support included individual meetings, telephone and written correspondence, small group meetings, and two Raising the Bar check in days, one in April and one in August where experienced Raising the Bar participants were available to review binders and answer questions. The majority of programs participating in Raising the Bar were in their fifth year of participation and while some reported finding it challenging to find time to complete the binder, most were feeling comfortable and confident with the process.

Supporting the implementation of the new vision and directives from the Ministry of Education and College of Early Childhood Educators was made a work plan priority for the Investing in Quality staff who offered professional learning opportunities around the pedagogy, and were invited by several programs to present on the document at staff meetings. In addition staff, wherever possible, made visible how the standards and expectations described within the initiatives and resources are woven together and are not separate 'silos' or entities. For example, when an educator's practice supports healthy child development this meets requirements of their College's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, Standard IV, Raising the Bar, Standard 10 and the expectations described in How *Does* Learning Happen? These initiatives share the common goal of promoting best practice that leads to quality early learning environments for children. Examples have been featured in the IIQ newsletters and others are included in this report.

Figure 4 Participants at the mid-year Raising the Bar check in

Highlights of the Raising the Bar 2013-2014 profile

The chart below provides a quick overview of the changes (in red) you will find in the 2013-14 profile.

Raising the Bar standard	Details of change
Category 1	**QUALITY ASSURANCE**
1. Regulatory standards	Complete table 1a identifying areas for growth and include any positive comments from the licencing process
2. Health & Safety monitoring	Complete table 2 identifying areas for growth
3. Parent/guardian survey	Now on a 2 year cycle with report to be submitted with binder. In other words programs are only required to do a parent/guardian survey OR a staff survey each year. These will alternate.
4. Staff work environment survey	Now on a 2 year cycle with a report to be submitted binder In other words programs are only required to do a parent/guardian survey OR a staff survey each year. These will alternate.
5. Environmental assessment	Complete table 5a
6. Plans and action	Complete table 6 responding to information gathered from all other 16 standards
Category 2	**BEST PRACTICE**
7. Governance	No change
8. Policies	It is acceptable to write N/A regarding transportation policy if this does not apply to your program. It is not necessary to also provide an explanation.
9. Job Descriptions	No change
10. Supporting Healthy Child Development	Complete tables 10a 10b and 10c
11. Parent and family engagement	Complete table 11
12. Parent/guardian handbook	No change
13. Supervision and mentoring	No change
14. Staff meetings and team meetings	Complete table 14
15. Community partnerships	No change
Category 3	**PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**
16. Professional development and qualifications	Complete 2 reflections on professional learning
17. Professional involvement	See chart from College of ECE on page 45 for examples of professional involvement

Table 3

RTB review year 2013-14 at a glance

	Activity
December- January	RTB profile and workbook are modified to reflect the local community and to encourage reflective practice
February	RTB profile is presented to IIQ committee. It is approved. The profile, workbook and supporting documents are distributed to the community on USB keys.
January ongoing	Agencies participating in RTB are supported through meetings and emails
April 22	Agencies are invited to bring their binders for mid-year check in. 4 volunteers are present to review binders and offer support and suggestions. Participants request another check in at the end of August.
April to August	16 third party visits required by RTB participating agencies are conducted. The expanded DECA checklist is used as well as resources such as 'How *Does* Learning Happen?' and the College of ECE Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice.
June	ECE recognition event planning committee meets for the first time
August	Another RTB check in is hosted as requested in April
August	ECE recognition event planning committee meets
September	Agencies are supported as they finalize binders for submission
September	ECE recognition event planning committee meets. Strategic planning process begins
October 9	RTB binder submission day.
October 22	Peer review day. 6 peer review teams gather to review the 36 binders submitted.
October	ECE recognition event planning committee meets
November 12	ECE appreciation and recognition evening. Over 155 people gather to celebrate, network, be entertained and inspired. 114 individuals received platinum certificates recognizing their participation in more than 20 hours for professional learning during the review year.
November	Feedback letters are prepared. Binders are returned to agencies.

Table 4

Summary of Participation in the Raising the Bar initiative 2013-2014

Type of agency	Number of agencies	Number of programs	Master binders	# Binders submitted
Family support programs	1	6	1	7
Licenced Home Child Care	2 (one submitted to CKL)			1
Multi- site programs	3	9	3	12
Single site programs (includes 1 nursery school)	8	8		8
Programs with a sister program but not considered multi- site	8	8		8
Total	21	32	4	36

Table 5

Category Progress

Quality Assurance Standards 1-6

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:

- New: Standard 1: Rather than simply inserting a copy of a program's Licence to Operate a Day Nursery, local participants were asked to complete a table identifying any strengths and areas for growth identified in the licencing visits. Participants described the action plan for any areas identified for growth.

- New: Standard 2: agencies are asked to complete a chart describing areas for growth related to health and safety

- Observations by supervisors, education teams and the Quality Initiatives Co-coordinator

- Feedback from parents/guardians (Standard 3) and staff (Standard 4) surveys.

- New: The Peterborough profile places the parent/guardian surveys and the staff surveys on a two year cycle with the expectation of a written report describing the results of the survey and action plan to address feedback. Based on their needs, agencies determine which survey to begin the cycle with. This means that some participating agencies completed a parent/guardian survey this review year while other agencies completed a staff survey.

- Standard 6: the development of action plans (Standard 6) identifying for growth and ongoing sustainability. New: gather data from ALL standards to complete table.

- 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 Parent surveys in each program **(change: see note above)** -Child Care Centres conduct staff work environment surveys **(change: see note above).**	- # of parent survey's completed and returned -# of CCC staff survey's completed and	• 807 parents in 27 programs were surveyed in 2013-2014 • 255 surveys were returned. (return rate 31.6% for 2013-14) 139 staff in 12 programs were surveyed in 2013- 2014 • 122 surveys were returned (return rate 88% for 2013-14)	Child Care Centres & agencies are more equipped to monitor the quality of service on an ongoing basis. 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. -Delivery of DECA mentoring training.	-# of DECA community mentors trained -# of participants participating in DECA training (other assessment)	• 9 mentors are trained to support centres. • 225 Early Childhood Educators, Resource Teachers and Preschool Consultants have been trained in the use of the DECA to date. (10 trained this year) • 52 Early Childhood Educators have trained in the use of the ECERS-R to	Educators are becoming more knowledgeable and reflective about best practice.
Health and Safety training support Development of Child Care Centre Action Plans (gold standard)	-# of agencies accessing health and safety training. - # of action plans competed (phase 3) -# of programs in full compliance	• All staff in all programs have first aid and CPR. Cooks and supervisors have Food Handler certificate in 100% of programs that serve food. • 100% of programs that serve food included an action plan that included how they were implementing the Healthy Eating Indicators tool • 100 % of participating programs are in full compliance and have clear licenses.	

Table 6

Findings

Category 1 Quality Assurance Standards 1-6

Standard 1 Regulatory Standards

In general, having participants complete and submit Table 1 along with their licence had positive outcomes. The completion of the table appeared to encourage participants to develop plans to address areas identified on the DNA licence that required growth and helped to make visible their relationship to quality. This is consistent with the desire to develop cultures of quality improvement and to see quality as a dynamic process. Agencies were also encouraged to identify areas of strength in their programs. At the mid-year Raising the Bar check in in April, a discussion took place encouraging supervisors to engage program advisors, as part of the licencing procedure, in conversations around program strengths and ways to sustain identified best practice.

At peer review in October a supervisor shared that she asked the program advisor, during the licencing visit, to identify areas of strength observed during the visit. The next day the program advisor emailed her comments to the supervisor who included a copy of the email in the submission of the Raising the Bar binder.

Standard 3 Parent/Guardian Survey

Programs who opted to conduct parent surveys this review year surveyed families around such things as fundraising, nutrition/menu planning, playground design as well as the level of care they their child was receiving. Below is a chart and quotes from a dietary survey conducted by IIQ staff in 2014 that provides evidence of the importance of seeking feedback from families.
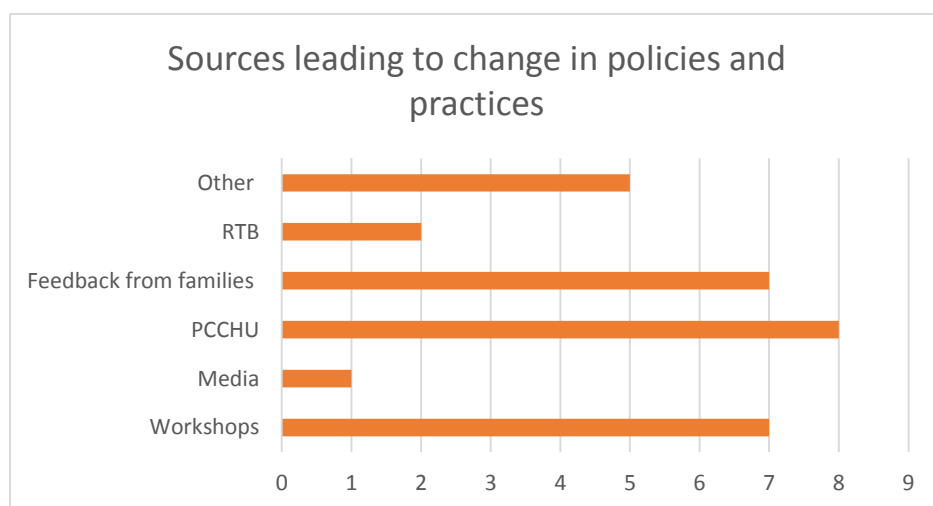
From IIQ dietary survey 2014

Chart 1 from the IIQ dietary survey 2014

Quotes from IIQ dietary survey 2014

"Twice over the past five years we have taken the time to review our dietary policies and make changes due to feedback from our parent surveys. Changes have been made as follows: dessert removed from menu, no juice served, only whole wheat bread and pasta served, limitations on margarine, ketchup, etc., homemade salad dressing and baking." (Dietary Survey August 2014)

"The two main area resources that sparked changes to be made were feedback from families and the health unit workshops." (Dietary Survey August 2014)

"We are very receptive to the feedback provided by our families on parent surveys and face to face conversations." (Dietary Survey August 2014)

The revision to Standards 3 and 4 required participants to write a report on the findings from the survey conducted. There was a significant range in the quality of the reports submitted, from minimum details to highly detailed reports. One supervisor requested support with writing a report on a recently conducted parent survey. The Quality Initiatives Co-ordinator met with the supervisor, offering some direction. The report that was eventually submitted as part of the agency profile was exemplary.

A concern, however, was raised around the confidentiality of the reports and whether participants were comfortable having others, during the peer review process, reading what might be sensitive information about their agency.

Standard 5

Environmental Assessments: evidence of shifts in practice

'Children can best create meaning through living in environments which support "complex, varied, sustained, and changing relationships between people, the world of experience ideas and the many ways of expressing ideas" (Caldwell, 1997)'.(Callaghan, p. 12 in Think, Act, Feel, 2013)

Programs continue to use environmental assessment tools resulting in a continued and growing interest around child centred programming, improving teacher observation skills, self- reflective practice, inquiry based approaches and documentation of children's learning. Investing in Quality staff have responded to these interests in a number of ways which have included:

- bringing in outside speakers to provide professional learning opportunities in the community, for example, Marc Battle (2013) and Dr. Carol Ann Wien (2014)

- presenting workshops, e.g. a workshop on loose parts (Spring 2013)

- presenting at parent evenings and staff meetings

- encouraging the sharing of educator experiences at network meetings

- purchasing related resources for the IIQ resource library

- third party and program visits

- mentorship

- encouraging educators to contribute to newsletters e.g. Spring 2014

Figure 5 & 6 Images from Dr. Carol Ann Wien's workshop on pedagogical documentation Oct. 2014

Third Party visits

"Educators are reflective practitioners who learn about children using various strategies. They listen, observe, document and discuss with others, families in particular, to understand children as unique individuals." (How Does Learning Happen? 2014, p. 19)

Standard 5 of the Raising Bar profile at the Gold level requires that programs engage in a third party environmental assessment every three years. This review year a number of programs were due for their second assessment since participating in the RTB initiative. In addition a number of programs required a third party assessment in order to achieve the Gold level this review year. This meant that a total of 16 programs, including family support programs, participated in a third party assessment. The assessments were conducted by the Quality Initiatives Co-ordinator using an expanded DECA checklist. In addition, How Does Learning Happen? and the Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice were used as another lens through which to observe playrooms. Findings were shared with educators and administrative staff which included conversation around the four foundations described in the pedagogy and best practice. Programs were encouraged to make the findings visible to educators and families, at meetings and through newsletters. Below is an example taken from a rural program.

Making connections to How Does Learning Happen? Children's sense of belonging and well-being in early learning environments.

The preschool playrooms are on the second floor where along the wall in the centre of the room are two windows that overlook the street below. The windows are low enough that children can look out of them and see their families leaving the program either by car or foot. On this day two girls were standing by the window watching intently as the mother of one of them climbed in her car and prepared to drive away. They discussed the colour of the mother's car and the colour and type of other cars with which they were familiar. The child whose mother was driving away, appeared to be completely at ease, secure and comfortable as the friends chatted. The window enabled her to be in control of her social emotional needs by watching, for as long as she needed, with a friend, as her mother drove away. When she was done she happily left the window to play. This provides a wonderful example of supporting children' social and emotional development. The window allowed the child to be independent at least from adults, in her need to see her mother off. She had a friend for support and was able to regulate her feelings and demonstrate her high level of comfort being left at this program.

This is a rich example of how pedagogy lives within even the physical structure of a playroom. Educators make decisions on how the room is set up, that is pedagogy, and ensuring that children have unobstructed access to the window embraces the vision and four foundations of HDLH? The educator can intentionally support children's curiosity, competencies and capabilities. Rich conversations with children, families and educators can take place around examples like this.

Best Practices in Management: Standards 7-15

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

- New: Standard 10: Programs complete tables 10a, 10b and 10c

- New: Standard 11: Rather than plan 2 events for families, programs complete table 11 describing the ways in which they engage families throughout the year.

- Programs develop handbooks for families (Standard 12). 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. New: complete table 14 describing how supervisors provide opportunities and support educators to meet and discuss practice.

Raising the Bar Category			Best Practices in Management
Activities	**Outputs**	**Progress in Outputs** **12 month timeline**	**Outcomes**
-Training to support the development of Policies, governance, job descriptions	-# of child care programs /agencies participating	• **32** Child Care Programs have signed on to participate in the project. (1 program has closed since last review year, one program now submits to Peterborough instead of CKL)	RTB participants are more aware of identified best practices in the child care field. 31 of the 32 programs that submitted for the 2013-14 review year were successful in achieving or maintaining the Gold standard. One program achieved the bronze standard
-Child Care Network & Business Partner meetings	-# of training opportunities	• **22** Training opportunities have been offered through Raising the Bar. (28 in 2012-2013 review year)	
-Develop an annual organizational planning model. (calendar)	- Frequency (#) of Child Care Network & Business Partner meetings	• **4** Child Care Network meetings have taken place from October 1 2012 to October 2013 (6 in previous review year…(see note below) **5** Business Partner Meetings have taken place from October 1 2013October 1 2014 (5 previous review year)	
-Promote parent education and training opportunities Promote parent involvement	IIQ staff attend prenatal health fair 2 times per year		IIQ staff promote quality, licenced child care and offer resources to families at prenatal health fair
-Facilitate annual recognition event			
-Develop a template for data collection	-# participants attending the recognition event	155 people participated in the RTB/ECE recognition event (175 previous review year)	

Table 7

New: Because many of the same people attend both Business Partners and Child Care Network meetings it was decided to reduce the number of Child Care Network meetings that take place during the year.

Findings

Category II Management Standards 7-15

Standard 10 Supporting Healthy Child Development

Programs continue to explore ways to observe, interpret, track, and make children's development and learning visible to children, educators and families. There exists a continuum of practice across the programs participating in the Raising the Bar initiative. Some programs are just beginning to explore ways of doing this while other programs are providing leadership in the local and broader community.

Figures 7 & 8. Documenting children's learning and development. Figure 8 from a parent support program

Standard 11 Parent and Family Engagement

"When we recognize and build on the strengths of families and the love they have for their children everyone benefits" (How Does Learning Happen? 2014, p.19)

There was evidence of effort and creativity in the area of parent engagement. Examples shared included fundraising events such as garage sales, an auction of children's art, and a spaghetti dinner. On other occasions families were involved in field trips assisting with supervision. It was noted that these events provided opportunities for families to network.

Results from a survey sent out by IIQ staff to dietary staff provides evidence that programs are implementing suggestions from families around diet and nutrition. Two programs spoke of families coming in to programs to share their own cultural cooking experiences with the children in the programs.

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.
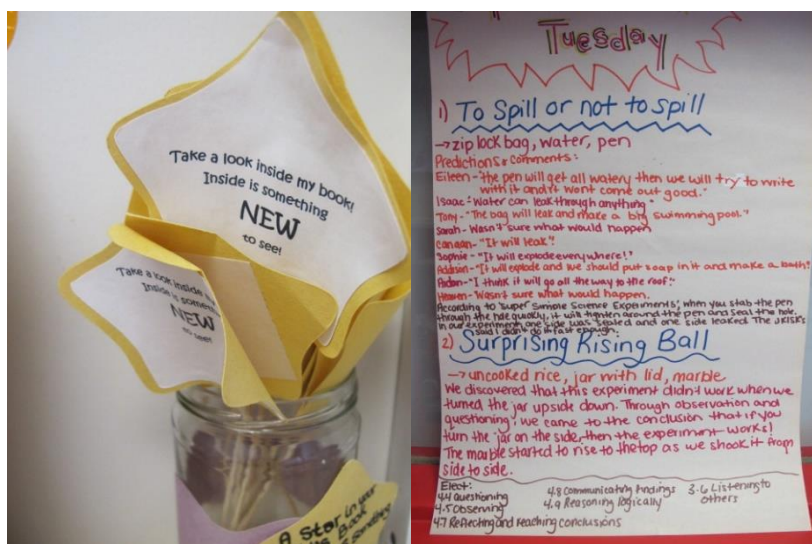
Figures 9 & 10 Engaging families in children's learning and development

Engaging families around children's play and development… stories from a toy lending library

Educators were curious as to how to bring visibility to the learning that happens in children's play and the importance of healthy child development when engaging with parents at a parent drop in and toy lending library. They noted that typically when a family returns a toy they make comments about their child having fun with the toy, or the toy being a favourite, but rarely comment on learning or development. In discussion with IIQ staff it was decided to develop a few broad questions that could guide discussions with families when they returned toys. Questions included:

"How did your child play with the toy?" "Did they play with it the way you expected or were you surprised at how they played with it?" "Did you learn something about your child that you did not know?"

IIQ staff modelled the approach with a few families returning toys. Staff were mindful in approaching families to ask questions, assessing each situation before approaching a parent. For example, if the parent had a child or children with them and appeared to be in a hurry staff would not approach, however, if the parent or caregiver appeared to be browsing and not time pressured, they would approach and ask if the family would be willing to answer a few questions about the toy(s) they were returning.

A number of families and caregivers with children of different ages agreed to answer the questions. Parents were very excited to speak about what they experienced and this showed in their voices. Here is an example of what one parent noticed when her child played with a drum she had borrowed from the toy lending library. She was very keen to share the story. Her child, a boy, aged 19 months was with her. He was happy to explore while his mother spoke about how he had played with the drum. She said that her little boy was very excited to play the drum. She noticed that he became even more excited when she turned the radio on and he played along with the music. She noticed that he explored different tempos and dynamics, being louder at times. She noticed that he even used an electronic book that he has to select music as an accompaniment to his playing. He could turn this on himself.

She went on to say that there are a number of musical instruments in their home including a guitar and an electric keyboard. She reported that he would hand the guitar to her and motion for her to play while he played the drums. He would also sing to her. She mentioned that she sings to him a lot.

Figure 11 the toy drum

When asked if he used two drum sticks, one in each hand, the parent confirmed this and demonstrated that he held them at an angle.

Educators reflected on what suggestions they could make around toys and activities to further support exploration and learning in this area?

In the spring an early childhood education student was placed with the agency. She continued the work of interviewing families and writing stories which were printed off and placed into a binder along with photographs and made available for families and educators to read.

This story provides a rich example of how children's development can be made visible to families and educators. It also demonstrates how the expectations of various initiatives can be wrapped together in best practice. This examples provides evidence of educators, families and children as being capable, competent and curious and (How Does Learning Happen? 2014) supports family engagement, RTB Standard 11, and meets the CECE Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice Standard IV. It also embraces the four foundations of well-being, belonging, expression and engagement for the child, the parent and the educators.

Professionalism Standards: 16 & 17

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

"Continuous professional learning is the systematic and intentional maintenance, enhancement and expansion of skills, ethical values and behaviours necessary to ensure ongoing, quality professional practice throughout a member's career." *CECE, 2104 CPL handbook*

Research shows that there is a positive correlation with the amount of professional development accessed by educators and level of quality in early learning and care environments. 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).

Standard 16 To maintain a gold level standard in the 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

New: educators are required to write reflections on two professional learning opportunities in which they engaged.

New: a professional development participation tracking form was developed for educators to complete to provide more detailed data around the professional development they accessed.

New: Standard 17: Educators are encouraged to explore ways, not just subscribing to a professional publication, to show how they are engaged in their profession.

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**
-Promote/deliver workshops/training	# of workshops and training offered	• **14** Workshops and courses have been directly offered to the child care community through IIQ and 8 have been offered with support from IIQ (**22** in total) (**27** in 2012-2013 review year)	RTB participants are able to apply the knowledge acquired through the professional education accessed through work.
-Recruit volunteer trainers/facilitators	# of participants accessing PD	• **545** participants have accessed the training offered to the community. (672 in previous review year)	**Indicator** Number and or percent of participants that complete the Gold level.
-Child Care Connections Newsletter: identify existing community PD calendar	-# of newsletters sent out.	• **760** Newsletters have been sent out to community members. (4 newsletters, 1902 centres and individuals) (**568** previously in 2012-13) month)	31/32 programs that submitted for the 2013-14 review year were successful in maintaining the gold standard. One program achieved bronze
-Mentoring through networking	Frequency of networking groups taking place. -# of networking groups	• **19** bi-monthly Networking groups have taken place attended by 196 educators Infant/Toddler Preschool, cooks, supervisor JK/SK/ School Age	
	-# of baseline assessments completed	• **20** Baseline peer assessments have been completed prior to beginning RTB. (20 previously in 19 month bronze phase timeline)	
-Develop a contact list of professional associations.		• Resources and contact lists posted and updated on IIQ website	
	Total # Hours of professional education offered	• **70** Hours of professional Development has been offered. **49** offered by IIQ and supported by **21** IIQ (**85.5** in previous review year)	
		• **114** Individuals received Platinum Recognition (**121** in previous review year)	8% decrease in # of individuals who achieved platinum recognition in 2013-2014 review year

Table 8

Category III Professionalism Standards 16 and 17

Standard 16 Professional development and qualifications

As table 8 above shows there was a slight decrease in the number of professional learning opportunities held during the review year. However, educators were encouraged and supported to engage in professional learning in ways other than attending workshops. This included reading and reflecting on articles selected by IIQ staff. Professional opportunities that were offered were of high quality and often involved presenters from outside the community, (STEM workshop, Aug. 2014).

Figures 12 & 13 Participants at a STEM workshop August 2014

Professional learning hours submitted in Raising the Bar submission 2013-14

Professional learning hours submitted in Raising the bar submission 2013-14 Note: Previous year data in ( )s.			
	Individuals	**Total number of hours**	**Average # of hours per individual**
Individuals who submitted PD hours	203 (181)	5421 (5426)	26.70 (30)
Individuals who qualified for platinum recognition	114 (121)	4499 (4731)	39.5 (39)
Number of agencies where all educators qualified for platinum recognition	6 (6)		
Percentage of total programs participating	25% (25%)		

Table 9

As seen in Table 9 above there was an increase from the previous review year in the number of educators submitting professional hours, however, there is a slight decrease in the number who received platinum recognition. As well there was a slight decrease in the overall average number of hours professional learning engaged in by individuals, but a slight increase in the average number of hours for those achieving the platinum recognition. The decreases identified may reflect the changes across the sector that occurred during the review year. This will continue to be monitored.

Measuring the impact of professional learning on child outcomes

Participants having just engaged in a professional learning opportunity may complete glowing evaluations and leave enthusiastic about the workshop, but it is difficult to assess the long term impact of the learning on educator practice and child outcomes. The solution is complex, however, a way to begin is to look for evidence is in actual practice. Below is an example of professional learning leading to improved outcomes for children and families.

Professional learning and quality outcomes for children and families

When conducting a third party visit in a toddler room of a local child care centre I observed that on a table just inside the room were a number of metal juice can lids spread out on the table. On each lid was an individual photograph of a child or a family member. One little boy was picking them up one at a time and looking very carefully at them. He picked up one, looked over to the educator in the room and said, "My daddy!". The educator verified that indeed it was a photo of his dad. Then he continued to look at the lids and selected one and carried it over to another child in the room and showed it to them, "Daddy" to them. The educator said, "You found a picture of Ryan's daddy".

For a number of reasons I recognized this as a quality experience.

It addressed the importance of having photographs of the children and their families available for the children to look at and for families to see themselves reflected in the room and develop a sense of belonging (HDLH?, 2104).

The presentation of the photographs on juice can lids was ingenious for the following reasons. It was very interactive and involved cognition in that the children could 'create' their families by finding all the pictures for their family. It allowed for children to represent their own individual scenarios by sorting the lids. It also opened possibilities for children to represent other communities, for example, if they went on a playdate with another child's family, or attended a birthday party. There were some photographs of grandparents who brought in and picked up the children on occasion. This allows for extended families to be constructed.

This resource supported the children's development in a number of ways.

The photographs are a representation of real people, understanding representation is a foundational skill in emerging literacy. They can learn to recognize their own family members as well as other children's family members.

They can classify and organize and count the material (cognition)

It creates a sense of belonging and well- being. They recognize themselves in the room and their families see themselves reflected in the room. (social, emotional and identity formation)

Fine motor picking up the lids from the table and holding on to them

It involves communication, language and literacy

It supports social development as they make contact with other children in the room and showing them the photos of their parents

It is open and supportive to the diversity of individual families (Think, Act, Feel, 2013, HDLH?, 2014 Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice, Standard 1 in particular) .

In discussion with the educator it was revealed that she had seen this resource at a workshop at the local annual early learning and care conference she attended. She was excited to return to her program and create the resource for her group of toddlers. This is a rich example of the connection between professional learning opportunities for shifting practice.

Newsletters

There was a significant increase in the number of newsletters sent to the early learning community The newsletters are seen as another way to make best practice visible to educators. Educators were encouraged to contribute stories of best practice to the newsletters. The newsletters also reflect what is going on in the community.

Professional Learning through Mentorship

"Pedagogical documentation invites us to be curious and to wonder with others about the meaning of events to children." (Wien, in Think, Act, Feel, 2013 p. 28)

Mentorship can be a powerful to shift practice and provides opportunities to observe children in everyday play and wonder together about their explorations and learning.

Here is one of many examples of the power of mentorship to lead to improved child outcomes.

During a third party visit preschoolers began using pencils that the visitor had brought with them. The educators observed that during a short period of time (approximately 45 minutes) the complexity of the drawings increased as they explored the lead and coloured pencils. One child drew and told the story of going to see fireworks with her mother. The coloured pencils were normally reserved for the school aged children. As the educator and visitor watched and wondered, the educator said, "The children have shown us that they are ready for these."

Figures 14 & 15 Educators observing the complexity develop in one child's drawing over a period of 45 minutes

Standard 17 Professional Involvement

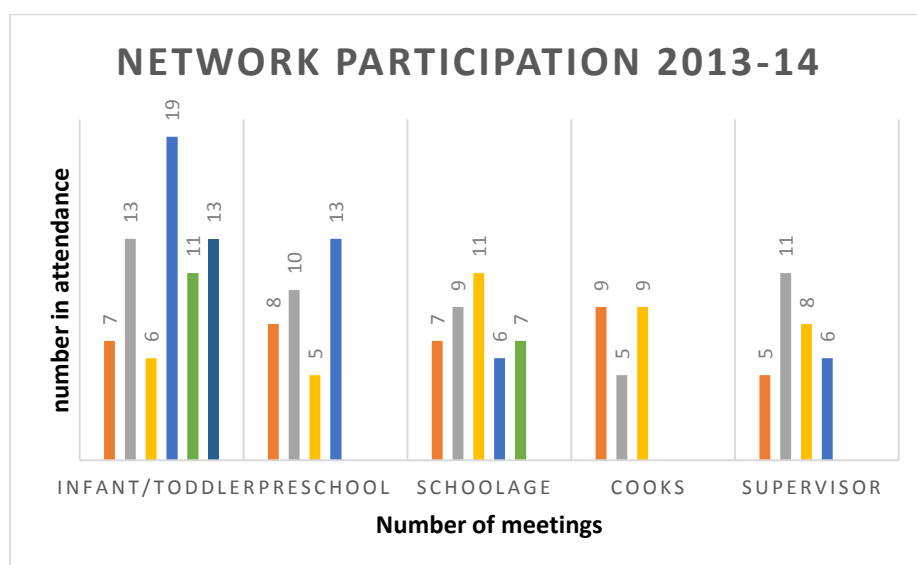**Summary of network attendance**

Chart 2

Locally, educator participation in networks has remained somewhat stable over time. Within the population of educators who attend network meetings there appears to be a core of individuals who attend meetings on a regular basis and others for whom attendance that is more sporadic in nature.

Feedback was solicited from the school age network to guide the future delivery of network meetings. Participants were asked to consider three components concerning the network: what to keep, what to add and what to throw away. The results from the informal survey is summary are summarized in table 11 below.

Keep	Add	Throw away
holding meetings in programs	Refreshments	
videos about practices in other jurisdictions		
a focus for the meeting		
the positive so network does not become a complaint session		
time for participants to share stories		

Table 10

Over the past few months How *Does* Learning Happen? has been a focus for the network meetings beginning with the four foundations. The school age network shared success stories around developing a sense of belonging for children, families, and educators in school age programs. One program shared how they had developed a number of clubs to which children can belong. Examples included Pokémon, hockey, photography, newsletter, and cooking. During the meeting, discussion took place around creating membership cards for club members and making the learning that takes place in these clubs visible to children and families. Since this meeting other programs have adopted the creation of clubs for the school aged children. Network meetings have provided a platform to share and build on success and best practice. For example, the clubs provide focus and opportunities for students to try activities that they may not otherwise try. Students in one program wrote and published a newsletter about their program that was distributed to families.

Quote from an email from a school age staff September 2014

"We had a blast planning the clubs and the children took control of everything as the adults overlooked. They chose several clubs, named them and a committee, designed plans of execution, drawing samples and lists of what they needed to carry it out. Every day we focus on different clubs with the exception of photography which is a constant. They have a notebook for each club to take notes, sign in, plan and write about their experiences. The photographers have been really funny!!!! So far, we have done Sports and Games, which has been really physical and fun, Photography, Science which has included baking and making playdough, Creative (lots of solid activities in this one) and the children keep coming up with more ideas."

Figure 16 Membership cards for the baseball club   *Figure 17 Celebrating successes!*

The email above describes how one program is embracing the images of children, families and educators and the four foundations as described in How Does Learning Happen? The children are seen as capable and competent and their well-being and sense of belonging is being supported as they explore and become engaged in the many ways they can express themselves (HDLH? 2014).

Standard 17 Professional involvement

"Every educator should feel he or she belongs, is a valuable contributor, and deserves the opportunity to engage in meaningful work" (How Does Learning Happen? 2014, p. 7)

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

A professional resource that has been recommended to educators is *Exchange Everyday*. This is a free on-line resource to which agencies and educators can sign up to receive on-line resources. Participants receive a daily email about an aspect of best practice in early learning and care with links for resources. A few months ago a new resource was featured in the email of the day. Seeing an application for licenced home child care providers, the home visitors of an agency were contacted. They forwarded the link to their home care providers. The home visitors were so excited about the new resource and wrote a short article about it for the next community newsletter. Below is their contribution.

> *Professional involvement: A story from a Licenced Home child care agency*
>
> *We have heard comments from our Early Learning and Care Providers that they would like to see more "real interactions with Educators and children" so they can see the process and listen to the way the educators solve problems with the children. As we all know, everyone learns differently, some are visual learners, some are kinesthetic learners, some logical. We know about the Ministry and what they have put up on their website for Professional Development. But it makes it a little challenging when all the resources are geared towards Centre Based Care.*
>
> *When we received the Exchange, we were so excited to see what an amazing resource we had at our fingertips. Not only "real interactions", but some are taken from inside homes, which the Early Learning and Care Providers can obviously relate better to. It was also done in 13 different languages, which was fitting as we have some that could watch the video clips in their own language and have a deeper connection to what messages were coming out of the video clips. I immediately saved the link and began an email to our Early Learning and Care Providers, sharing with them this wonderful resource.*
>
> *We have had quite a few who have enjoyed watching the clips, they have come away with new ideas and most importantly, they had the chance to reflect on their way of being with children and their growth in their knowledge of Early Learning and Care.*

This provides a rich example of professional involvement, leading to exposure to the latest research and resources around best practices, and resulting positive outcomes for children, families, and educators. Again this example illustrates the alignment of standards in RTB, the directives of the Ministry of Education and professional standards described by the CECE.

Celebrating achievements

ECE appreciation and recognition event

Communities participating in the Raising the Bar initiative are encouraged to hold an event annually to recognize and celebrate the work accomplished in the community around promoting and supporting quality in early learning and child care. In the local community this event occurs in November soon after the provincially recognized 'ECE Appreciation Day'.

 In the early spring a volunteer planning committee was struck and met several times to plan the 2014 recognition event. It was decided to make the foundation of belonging a focus for the evening. In recognition of ECE appreciation day and in preparation for the event educators were asked to submit stories of when they first knew they belonged working with children. Stories were retyped on parchment paper and at the event hung from branches in centre pieces on each table. Maryam Monseff, founder of the Red Pashmina Campaign and recipient of the YWCA's Peace Medallion in 2012 was approached to speak about the importance of having a sense of belonging.

> *"I knew I belonged in ECE the summer I worked as a nanny for a 5 year old girl. I met an ECE who told me I was very good with children and at this point I had never thought of a future teaching young children. I have never looked back, focusing my energies on furthering my education and enrolling at Ryerson. This introduced me to a brand new field. I have always been sure it was the right choice for me after more than 40 years in the sector."*

An example of one of the stories of belonging

Figures 18 & 19 Just a few of the 114 educators that received platinum recognition

Figure 20 Local RECE Ian Sheffield entertains

Figure 21 Maryam Monseff inspired the audience to think about the importance of their work and belonging

Professionalism: Standards 16 and 17
Findings

It is important to support educators to engage in reflective practice that is honest and authentic and leads to continued professional growth. In Standards 16 and 17 educators were asked to write reflections about their professional learning and involvement. However, similar to the concerns raised around submitting survey reports for others to read, some educators were concerned about submitting reflections for supervisors and peer reviewers to read. Educators were encouraged to submit their reflections, but if they felt very strongly about not wanting others to read it, their supervisor could verify that reflections had been completed. Most educators did submit reflections as part of the profile submission. Again there was a range of quality of the reflections submitted. Some showed the educator had put time and thought into the reflection showing evidence of shifts in thinking about practice, while others appeared to have been prepared in haste just to meet the RTB requirement.

Supervisors expressed frustration with having to 'chase' educators for information or educators expecting supervisors to remember what professional learning they had engaged in during the year.

General feedback

Most participants were pleased to have the Raising the Bar materials on a memory key. There were a few participants who experienced some computer software compatibility issues which were resolved through upgrades or by using another computer.

The anticipation and release of How *Does* Learning Happen? in the spring of 2014 provoked many to rethink their practice and the value of some of the standards of RTB.

Some educators were concerned about the amount of repetition involved having to submit documents for both licencing and Raising the Bar, the checklist approach and the time it took away from working in program. Some admitted that preparing for binder submission caused stress that effected their work. As one educator described it, "When I know I have to work on the binder and I am in program, I feel I am not really there for the children because I am worried about what is waiting for me in the office." *(from a conversation with an educator, September 2014)*

Others saw the value of the binder as a place where 'everything' was. This was useful for orientation of staff and board members.

However, there was an overall sense in the community of wondering what was next, seeking leadership and direction and around Raising the Bar and the new directives. To this end the strategic plan was a welcomed process by the community and the IIQ committee and staff.

Discussion

The Raising the Bar initiative provides a unique and valuable opportunity to gain insight into the local early learning and care community. The qualitative and quantitative data contained in this report describe evidence of the positive impact of the Raising the Bar initiative on the quality of early learning and child care programs across the community and offer suggestions for growing and supporting best practice. The standards form a framework for participants to describe the joys and challenges that exist in the sector. Participant engagement enables the monitoring and response to the significant changes that have, and will, continue to occur in the sector. Indeed, we are reminded that because it is dynamic, we will never 'be done'. 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. A strong foundation has been built and it is time to consider the next steps. As described in the Phase 4 report two types of quality have been identified, referred to as structural and process quality. There is increasing evidence that the vision articulated by the Ministry of Education has provoked participants to consider the relationships and dynamic processes that are integral to quality in early learning and care environments and indeed live within the pedagogy's foundations of belonging, well-being, expression and engagement.

Moving forward

Over the past year there have been many opportunities to engage in conversations with provincial leaders, researchers, and academics around the issues of measuring quality in early learning environments. Rich conversations abound as practitioners begin to engage with How Does Learning Happen? in their practice. The document is not a check list or a 'how to' manual, rather it describes a way of being. The following is a useful approach to explore as we move forward. In the1950's Benjamin Bloom identified six skills involved in learning and grouped them into two categories; lower order thinking skills which involve understanding, remembering and applying and higher order thinking skills which involve evaluating, analyzing and hypothesising. While this model was developed to support teaching, it is possible to see a relationship between higher order thinking skills and quality. When practitioners are encouraged and supported to move beyond the lower order thinking skills of simply understanding, remembering and applying to evaluating, reflecting critically on their practice, and developing new theories, quality and learning happens! In this case Ontario's pedagogy becomes the framework that guides and informs the higher order thinking processes and sees educators as researchers capable of '…learning and mak[ing] decisions about ways to integrate knowledge, theory, their own experience and understanding of the individual children and families they work with' (How Does Learning Happen?, 2014, p. 7) As we move forward into Phase 6 examining the seventeen standards of Raising the Bar using Bloom's taxonomy may provide further insight into how the standards align with the Ministry's vision and directives.

"By involving ourselves in a constant inquiry into what we believe….we will be on a journey of getting to be better and better as teachers all the time." (Callaghan, 2011)
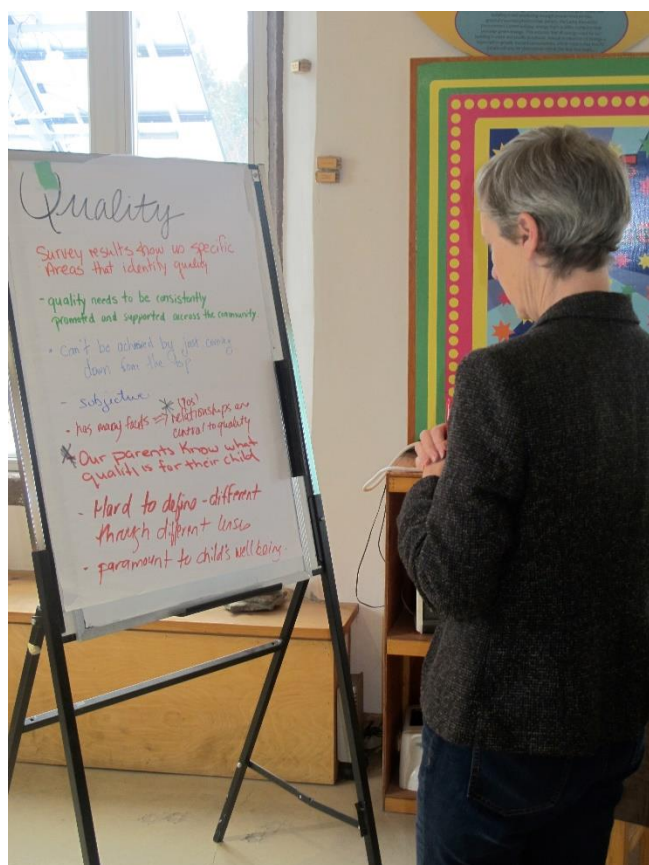
Figure 22. Retreat day…the strategic planning process… where do we go from here?

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