

School Districts in Community Intersectoral Coalitions:
Models of Collaboration for Young Children

by

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B.ED., University of Victoria, 1973
M.ED., University of Victoria, 1977

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Supervisory Committee

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Dr. Ted Riecken, Member
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(Human Early Learning Partnership, UBC)

Dr. Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw, Outside Member
(School of Youth and Childcare)

ABSTRACT

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The study explored the differences that resulted when school districts participated in successful interdisciplinary community coalitions to improve the quality of and the opportunities for services for young children and their families—and ultimately enhance school success. The study examined the structure, function and impact of four successful intersectoral community coalitions in British Columbia. It determined that the coalitions' work resulted in improved coordination, services and access to programs for the early learning of young children. The types of services examined were those that addressed local needs; were examples of collaboration of different service providers, including schools; addressed different needs of children and families; were designed to promote the community's ability to care for its own families and to resolve issues and develop programs at the local level. The study employed case-study methodology—focus groups, interviews, data collection and analysis, and observations—to explore four diverse communities that had established programs in response to defined needs and had evaluated the effect of the services provided to children and families. The services examined were those that (1) capitalized on existing assets and resources; (2) planned for

and accessed new resources through partnerships; and (3) promoted promising research-based practices. The study focused on early-childhood initiatives that supported literacy development in the context of social, emotional, physical and cognitive development. The research questions examined the function and evolution of the intersectoral coalitions and the involvement of public schools in them; the characteristics that contributed to or impeded success; descriptions of programs and services initiated by the school district; and evidence of enhanced school success. The study noted social processes, relations, practices, experiences and actions. The study examined programs that evolved through the collaborative efforts of intersectoral professionals, and created social solutions for early learning issues. The study resulted in eight conclusions related to: (1) the pivotal role intersectoral coalitions play in community development, with four specific caveats; (2) the key role schools and school districts have to play if community coalitions are to reach their full potential; (3) the need for reliable data in order for proposed changes to be embraced; (4) the role of family literacy programs in meeting social and emotional needs as well as those of literacy; (5) the need for community coalitions to break down barriers to access in order to support the most needy families; (6) the momentum created by a sense of moral purpose and community consciousness as coalition work matures; (7) the need for sustainable and transformative leadership that changes as the coalition evolves and (8) the need for government to support grassroots movements by new service reorganization, funding mechanisms and related policy development. Through rich descriptions and respondents' quotes, the study provides a variety of models that can be replicated by community agencies seeking to establish a broad, coherent approach to services for young families.

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Thank You!

Janet Nadine Mort

Dedication

To the memory of:

*Clifford Smith, a best friend and esteemed colleague,
who through his life's work earned his own Ph.D.*

and

Mom and Dad—Henry and Margaret Swain— forever my source of inspiration.

*To my husband Michael Mort—as always, the wind beneath **my** wings.*

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Introduction and Background: Why Is Early Childhood Development So Important?

In the World Bank publication *From Early Child Development to Human Development*, Young (2002) noted:

Early Child Development (ECD) programs that comprehensively address children's basic needs—health, nutrition, and emotional and intellectual development—foster development of capable and productive adults. And, early interventions can alter the lifetime trajectories of children who are born poor or are deprived of the opportunities for growth and development available to those more fortunate. These facts are well known today and are founded on evidence from the neurobiological, behavioural, and social sciences and the evaluation of model interventions and large, publicly funded programs. (p. 1)

Many communities in British Columbia (BC) have been collaborating to support young children in promising ways. *The Surrey/White Rock Make Children First Executive Summary* focused on the health, well-being, and learning of children during their first six years of life. The report reviewed recent research and reported input from over 600 families. It concluded “Young children who experience good health, loving care, positive relationships, and play-based, language-enriched learning prior to school entry, are at a distinct advantage and have increased chances of lifelong success” (2004, p. 6).

The report continued:

Across the globe, politicians, policy makers, economists, financiers, and educators are taking notice for three key reasons:

- Spiralling costs of remedial and crisis interventions in health care, education, social services, and the justice system need to be brought under control;
- The future of the Canadian economy depends upon having a highly educated, innovative workforce; and
- Our economy now relies upon the participation of mothers in the paid labour force to increase the purchasing power and economic security of their families. (p. 1)

The Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD) based in Paris, France has been openly critical about the lack of services Canada provides for preschoolers. The OECD conducts routine reviews of services to young children in countries throughout the world. At the request of the Canadian government it completed a review of Early Learning and ChildCare services in Canada in 2003 and presented a final report that criticized the Canadian government for under-funding learning materials, facilities, research and training for early learning programs, resulting in “a patchwork of uneconomic, fragmented services ... often without a focused child development and education role.” The report continued “Significant energies and funding will have to be invested in the field to create a universal system ... with new understandings of how young children develop and learn” (p. 6).

A subsequent OECD report (2006) showed that while Canada is one of the OECD's wealthier countries, its provision of early learning programs is very poor; social programs and other support for children and families are limited.

After the OECD (2003) report was issued, the federal government committed hundreds of millions of dollars to the provinces to assist in childcare and early learning. The government did not specify the type of service to be provided and neither did it provide promised guidelines for the issues noted in the OECD report as essential for improving service—access, equity, financing, and quality. After one year of initial funding, the presiding government was defeated and the promised funding for childcare was withdrawn, to be replaced by grants of \$100 per month for each preschool child in a family. The grant was intended to be used to subsidize childcare but without any accountability measures to track the use of it and without any additional childcare spaces.

Researchers have increasingly been linking this lack of services in the preschool years to the failure of many children to thrive in school. Canadian school systems, designed to meet the learning needs of children aged five to eighteen, have been failing almost one-third of those they serve. For example, Statistics Canada (1999) reported in a Pan-Canadian assessment that 68 % of 13-year-olds and less than 50% of 16-year-olds attained the expected performance in mathematics. In British Columbia, in Grade 4, 23% of the students were not meeting provincial expectations in reading (FSA, 2003) while in Ontario, 36% were not meeting the provincial standard in reading (EQAO, 2003). About 25% of the adolescents in our country were not completing high school (Statistics Canada, 2001) in an age in which education has become essential.

Leading researchers in education, health, and social services have come to the conclusion that a major part of the problem lies in the kinds of experience that young children have had (or have not had) during their preschool years. Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) claimed that most reading problems faced by adolescents and adults are the results of problems that could have been prevented by good instruction in the early childhood years. Dr. Clyde Hertzman's HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership) series of studies (ECD Mapping Portal, 2005) used the *Early Development Instrument* (Janus and Offord, in press) to obtain data from almost all public school kindergarten children in British Columbia. The EDI results affirmed that up to 25% of BC's children struggled with developmental issues that interfered with learning and literacy tasks. In some kindergarten classes the percentage of children who struggled with these issues was as high as 40% and sometimes greater.

Dr. Hertzman's research has provided compelling new information about the early years and a child's developmental needs. Since 2002, Dr. Hertzman's mapping study has reported its findings on a neighbourhood basis throughout BC. "School districts became involved as kindergarten teachers played a major role in administering the Early Development Indicators (EDI) measurement tool which established a subjective measure of each child's language, cognitive, social, emotional, communication, and physical development" (Mort, 2004, p. 3).

In 2004, I conducted the EDI Impact Study, which examined (a) the value that school districts placed on the EDI data; (b) the resulting involvement of districts in intersectoral community coalitions; and (c) projects that were initiated to support the identified clusters of vulnerable children. This survey of 41 school districts revealed that

as a result of the “hard data” presented by the HELP studies of individual school districts (ECD Mapping Portal, 2005), most school districts have become actively engaged in coalitions that include health and social service agencies in an effort to support early learning initiatives. Most of those interviewed believed that an intersectoral collaborative approach to service delivery might offer service users and caregivers a better chance to work productively towards positive outcomes for young children.

Many BC communities have established protocols for the delivery of coordinated services. The following excerpt from *A Community-Based System of Services for Early Childhood Development* developed by the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) and School Districts described this vision in its *Memorandum of Understanding*:

- A. The Parties agree that the most effective and efficient approaches require collaboration and partnerships across the broad area of domains and sectors that influence the development and well-being of children.
- B. The Parties agree that a mix of universal, targeted, and critical services will contribute to the well-being of all children.
- C. The Parties agree to build a relationship based on mutual trust and mutual respect.
- D. The Parties agree that their relationship is a shared responsibility based on openness, mutual accountability, and transparency.
- E. The Parties agree on the need for a respectful and ongoing dialogue regarding early childhood development issues. (2004, p. 3)

This type of *Memorandum of Understanding* has been replicated in communities across the Province of British Columbia. At the same time, federal and provincial initiatives have been launched on behalf of young children:

In October 2005 Social Development Canada announced the designation of six Understanding the Early Years (UEY) sites in British Columbia and an additional 15 across the rest of Canada. Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a federal government initiative that provides communities with information on the "readiness to learn" of their children, the family and community factors that influence child development, and the local resources available to support young children and their families. This neighbourhood-specific information is used by communities to design and implement focused policies, programs and investments that enable their young children to thrive in the early years. (Social Development Canada, 2005)

Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2006) of the University of Victoria, British Columbia launched the *Investigating Quality Project (IQ)* in 2005 in an effort to expand consideration of early childhood learning in "broader, more critical and creative discussions" (p.11). The project initially identified research, practices and individuals who were playing important roles in furthering the discussion. A series of forums were held to explore key perspectives including topics such as indigenous approaches, international perspectives and innovative strategies. As well, through a participatory action research model, a multi-faceted group of early childhood educators studied and implemented innovative practices to enhance offerings to young children in their own

settings. The Ministry of Education in British Columbia has used their work in the development of a provincial framework for early learning programs in BC schools.

In BC the Ministry of Education (2007) also announced the establishment of as many as 85 Strong Start pilot sites in schools across the province. The Contribution Agreement between school boards and the Ministry of Education specifies objectives and characteristics. Programs were expected to:

- Promote language, physical and social/emotional development of young children;
- Provide opportunities for parents/caregivers to observe and practise effective strategies that support early learning; ideally have an outreach component to reach the most hard-to-serve families;
- Be located in schools offering Kindergarten;
- Be staffed with at least one certified Early Childhood Educator, trained to work with young children;
- Offer inclusive environments that welcome all preschool children in the neighbourhood five mornings per week, together with their parents/caregivers (program emphasis will be on 3 to 5 year olds) for regular activities;
- Be designed in collaboration with the community to meet the unique needs of the neighbourhood;
- Be linked to services offered by health authorities, community agencies and other social service providers (e.g., early screening, libraries, parent resource centres, childcare resource and referral services, referrals for children who may have developmental or other special needs);

- Provide opportunities for service agencies to connect with parents/caregivers and children to provide them with information and services (e.g., public health, libraries, ESL, literacy);
- Create family-friendly environments where parents/caregivers can make connections; and
- Be offered free of charge for parents/caregivers to attend with their preschool children. (Source: Ministry of Education, 2007)

However, concurrent with the introduction of the StrongStart sites, the provincial government reduced child-care referral services and reduced subsidies for childcare. This created a perceived conflict in its commitment to serving young children and families, and placed schools in the center of controversy over how best to apply limited resources in this regard.

Statement of Purpose

This doctoral dissertation examined the differences, if any, that resulted when school districts participated in successful interdisciplinary community coalitions to improve the quality of and the opportunities for services to young children and their families. This dissertation examined the structure, function and impact of four successful intersectoral community coalitions (that included school districts) in BC, to determine whether the coalitions' work resulted in improved coordination and enhanced services and access to programs for the early learning of young children.

The types of services examined were those that:

- uniquely address local needs;
- provided examples of collaboration of different service providers;

- address different types of needs of children and families; and
- are “not for profit.”

Such services were designed to promote the community’s ability to care for its own children and families, and to resolve issues and develop programs at the local level.

The study explored four service-delivery models that (1) involved multiple stakeholders; (2) that have established programs in response to defined needs such as the data gathered through the EDI (Early Development Instrument) process (Janus & Offord, in press); and (3) that have attempted to evaluate the value of the services provided to children and families. The services were those that (a) made the most of existing assets and resources; (b) planned for and accessed new resources through community partnerships; (c) and promoted promising research-based practices. The study focused on early-childhood initiatives that support language and literacy development as well as others that were pertinent and were drawn to the researcher’s attention in the process of data collection.

Terms of Reference

For the purposes of this study the terms are defined as follows:

Asset-based development – I adopted the definition of Kretzmann and McNight (1993) who proposed a comprehensive strategy for mobilizing communities that involves the entire community’s assets in a complex process of regeneration based on a common vision and plan—by locating, assessing and mobilizing the assets in each of their neighbourhoods.

Early Learning (birth to age 5) – While many terminologies are applied throughout this document to this population by others, I sometimes refer to this group as

early learners when I am writing from the perspective of a school educator and in reference to the Ministry of Education in BC which uses this terminology to refer to its new mandate of providing services to the birth to age 5 population.

Hubs—The interpretation of the term *hubs* has become confusing and controversial in British Columbia. The provincial government has defined it as all-inclusive, often referred to as “one stop shopping,” but has provided minimum funding to support the concept. Some grassroots community movements appreciated the concept and have moved towards it but stopped short of a complete hub site as defined by government. The reasons include (a) the lack of funding; (b) better services provided elsewhere; (c) a lack of interest on the part of some service providers; (d) the complexity of making change within government silos (vertically aligned functions within Ministries); or (e) because hubs did not fit their community needs. Some communities preferred to offer a satellite approach to services and have developed strong interconnections between agencies that appear to work well for them.

Ball (2005) studied the concept and reality of hubs, particularly in Aboriginal settings. She described the nature of these hubs as “evolving integrated service models centred around Early Childhood Care and Development programs as a part of their community development approach” (p. 2). Their purpose was to mobilize community involvement and meet a range of service and social support needs. Her research convincingly demonstrated “how multi-purpose, community-based service centres can become a focal point for social cohesion and can provide a cultural frame around service utilization that informs external service providers and offers cultural safety for community members” (p. 3).

This concept of hubs is the working definition or frame I used throughout the study although some communities preferred to refer to such sites as Family Centres. They believed that not all services had to be provided on a single site but that the social cohesion and opportunities to network about a wide range of social needs was still possible, desirable and doable in ways unique to their community.

Intersectoral coalitions—The term *intersectoral coalitions* has been commonly used in the province of BC in the same way Knapp, Barnard, Brandon, Gehrke, Smith, and Teather (1993) used the term *interprofessional collaboration* as follows:

Interprofessional collaboration in human-service delivery is an interactive process through which individuals and organizations with diverse expertise, experience and resources join forces to plan, generate and execute solutions to mutually identified problems related to the welfare of families and children. (p. 140)

This is a broad definition that is used to define the term *intersectoral coalitions* in this study with the proviso that membership will vary from community to community and may include parents, volunteers, non-professional groups and members of the private sector, as determined by each community. I used the term *intersectoral coalitions* with this meaning throughout and clarified its meaning with participants in the study because different members of the coalitions have used different terms in their respective professions. Brown and Duguid (2000) took the position that even though information (such as that provided by the Early Development Instrument) is important, it is “people in their communities, organizations and institutions, who ultimately decide what it all means and why it matters” (p. 18). Logically then, the way communities collaborate becomes a vital factor.

Fullan (2001) emphasized the importance of the concept of intersectoral work as follows:

To be successful beyond the short run, all organizations must incorporate moral purpose; understand complexity; and respect, build, and draw on new human relationships with hitherto uninvolved constituencies inside and outside the organization. Doing these things is for their own good and the good of us all. (p. 70)

This view was apparent in the coalitions previously described in the EDI Impact Study. Fullan also stated that collective action would be short-lived unless it led to a deep sense of internal purpose among organizational members.

Bailey and Koney (1996) emphasized the importance of equality in the membership of collaborative groups and the enhanced potential for resource exchange. Billups (1987) proposed that the outcomes of a highly-functioning team effort are considerably greater in scope and value than the cumulative effects of individual practitioners who are working separately. Abrahamson and Mizahri (1996) proposed that exposure to other professionals would allow individuals to expand their knowledge and expertise, while providing support, dividing responsibility and cushioning the effect of failure. Klein (1990) suggested that an intersectoral team with a comprehensive outlook has a greater chance of understanding the objective reality of a client.

Hertzman's (2000) application of the term *intersectoral coalitions* has been relatively new in education. One of the purposes of my study was to explore the use, the understanding, and the function of intersectoral groups that include educators.

Promising Practice—I use this term to refer to practice that has been substantiated by research evidence (qualitative or quantitative) implemented by classroom practitioners and perceived to encourage desired outcomes.

Research Questions

According to Mason (2002), the main virtue of expressing the research questions is to (a) focus on the essence of what it is we want to explore; and (b) create the backbone of the research design. The following questions formed the backbone of my inquiry:

1. How do intersectoral coalitions evolve? What constitutes the membership of different coalitions and why are they different? How does leadership evolve?
2. How are these coalitions defined in the context of early childhood development initiatives, especially in the area of language and literacy development?
3. What criteria do intersectoral coalition partners use to determine whether their coalition is successful or unsuccessful?
4. What, according to these coalition partners, are the factors that are essential to the successful functioning of the coalition?
5. What, according to the coalition partners, are the impediments to the successful functioning of the coalition?
6. Does the intersectoral coalition contribute to improved coordination and quality of service to children and families? If so, how does it contribute? What is the evidence of this?
7. Which projects or services have been a direct result of coalition work? How have different partners contributed to the services offered?

8. To what degree are services coordinated through the use of a hub or center? If a hub is used, what evidence is there that the coordination of services is improved through the use of a hub?
9. What role have the EDI (Early Development Instrument) data played? Have the data been believed and valued? Which projects or services, if any, have been a direct result of the EDI data?
10. According to the coalition partners, are school districts an important part of the coalition work? If so, how? If not, why not?
11. Is the opportunity for school success enhanced by coalition work? What is the evidence of this?
12. What are the similarities and/or differences in the function, roles, and evidence of success between the work of the different coalitions in this study?

Theoretical Framework

My study is qualitative in nature and uses case study methodology as the main framework. It explores the hypothesis that school districts play a pivotal role in strong intersectoral community coalitions in enhancing early learning and language and literacy development in the lives of young children. The study explores the attitudes, actions, and discourses of those engaged in the case studies to develop knowledge and evidence about successful intersectoral coalitions and the services they provide. The study generated knowledge and explanations about the social processes, social actions and meanings that evolved in the case studies (Mason, 2002).

My ontological perspective.

It is my belief that when people with integrity, professional wisdom, and clearly defined goals engage in effective problem-solving processes, they can create and implement powerful action plans based on collaborative effort. Providing people with opportunities to share understanding and interpretation, attitudes and belief systems, to tell stories of meaningful experience, and to reach new intercultural understandings through organized discourse is an important investment in the development of shared vision. It is a pivotal first step in working from a common agenda. With strong leadership, the act of developing this shared vision establishes an effective, collaborative relationship.

My belief about leadership is that in a constructivist-collaborative act such as forming a coalition, it is important to permit leadership to evolve as the members of the group come to understand each other's point of view. However, it is also my belief that the collaborative group needs at least one leader who understands and can articulate the evolving vision of the group in a passionate way.

My research included an interpretivist view. It is my experience that collaborative groups often see themselves as engaged in ordinary conduct when in fact they are engaged in complex and potentially powerful human interaction. The result of this interaction may be an enhanced ability to create social solutions to critical issues. Through my research I demonstrate the connections between social processes, relations, practices, experiences, understandings and leadership. The result is four usable models for intersectoral coalitions to examine as they coordinate services for young children. In the process, and in the post-modern tradition, I examined my assumptions about all

aspects of the study, made these assumptions available and considered the applicability of such assumptions to the research questions and research participants at hand.

My epistemological perspective.

What did I count as evidence or knowledge of certain social phenomenon as I engaged in my research? Constructivist interpretation played a key role, not just in my own role of naturalistic observer in direct contact with the phenomenon, but in the role of those who would reflect on my observations. This was particularly important in that I was analyzing the behaviour and language of the people being studied. As Stake (1995) noted, “The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it ... [with] thick description, experiential understanding and multiple realities” (p. 43).

I used a number of strategies where possible and appropriate (Mason, 2002). I argued evidentially when I was able to gather my evidence and provide a strong base to demonstrate that my data—where possible quantitative—constituted evidence. I argued interpretively through narrative, or ethnographically, demonstrating that my interpretation was sensitively considered from different perspectives. I argued evocatively using illustrations (when possible from experiences in non-text forms with families) to enhance understanding or empathy in the reader. I argued multivocally to make the reader aware of a multiplicity of interpretations and voices and to demonstrate that I considered many viewpoints in my interpretation. My arguments were developmental, comparative, causal, or a combination, based on which theory best represented the knowledge or evidence.

Scope of the Study—Stages 1 and 2

Having completed the *EDI Impact Study* (2004) and as a result of my subsequent work with HELP, I was aware of many communities in the province that had developed unique and apparently successful coalitions, services, and opportunities for young children. The study demonstrated that there are multiple individualistic and successful ways for communities to design services specific to their needs. This was a significant feature of the findings in the original *EDI Impact Study*. Members of communities consistently reported that they wanted to be self-determining, at arms length from government direction, and free to design services that were most relevant to their community's needs.

When I conducted the 41 interviews in the *EDI Impact Study*, I was captivated by the enthusiasm of the evolving coalitions and the passion and dedication of those interviewed in the majority of the districts. The present study was initiated two years after the *EDI Impact Study* was completed, in part to follow-up on insights gained from it. I came to believe there were as many as ten sites that held promise as potential models for effective coalitions in early childhood. With limited resources and time, however, I chose to study only four of these communities selecting those of similar size but in different geographic locations. Using four sites permitted me to look for variation in coalition models based on different community needs and planning processes. This was one of the most important points made by *The EDI Impact Study* (Mort, 2004)—the need to encourage different models that would be unique to different communities. This study was designed to gain deeper insight into the complex and new practices of school districts

joining other forces in the field of early learning—how they became involved, what role(s) they played, and what other districts could learn from their experiences.

Timelines

Maintaining the balance of working with four communities simultaneously was challenging as many had scheduling issues that the research team had to accommodate, so timelines shifted frequently. Refer to Appendix C for the detailed timeline.

Once the analyses of the data were completed it became obvious that the literature review (developed prior to the community visits) was no longer compatible with the results of the study. In answer to the questions, the respondents—especially in the first three case studies—focused much more on the leadership aspects in their responses and far less on programs. This was unanticipated and was, in part, because many of the programs were new. I realigned the literature review, therefore, to include more recent studies of leadership issues and less on program issues.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

The following chapter reviews literature relevant to this case study in the following three areas:

1. Family literacy and parent support programs;
2. Community building and asset-based development; and
3. Leadership in the context of communities

I chose these three topics to support the research design described in Chapter 1 based on my prior knowledge of the four sites resulting from the EDI Impact Study (Mort, 2004). Community intersectoral coalitions, leadership and community partnerships were the major focus of the research questions in Stage 1 with three of the communities. The focus extended to the addition of parent participation and viewpoints in Stage 2 in the fourth community. Improved early child development programs were of prime importance to the coalitions and were a source of great interest to me. The purpose of the study, however, did not include observing them extensively (other than to understand the context of respondents' comments) or engaging with children in the programs in an evaluative way. I decided, therefore, not to include research on early child development programs in the literature review. The exception was the engagement of families in preschool literacy programs which I knew to be a consistent focus in all four communities.

Families, Parent Support Programs and Emerging Child Literacy

In my search of the literature I chose to define family literacy in its broadest sense. This was based on my belief and experience that the relationships between

children and parents (and other adults) are critically important to literacy development and school success. I believe that family literacy assists parents to help their children to succeed and that children develop the language and pre-literacy skills they need in their early years with the support of their parents or primary caregivers. (Throughout the chapter I use parent and caregiver synonymously.) I chose to organize the review in three categories based on my prior knowledge of the work in the four communities:

1. The importance of the interactions and relationship between child and parent;
2. The potential of intergenerational and intercultural programs; and
3. The connection between family literacy and societal issues.

It became clear that there is no commonly-accepted definition of the term family literacy either in the literature or in any of the four case studies examined in this document. Shanahan, Gadsden, Goldenberg, Morrow, Neuman, Purcell Gates, and Reder (1996), in a forum called *Family Literacy and School Practices: Critical Theoretical Issues*, proposed and published several important interpretations of the term *family literacy* as follows:

- Morrow suggested that “family literacy encompasses ways parents and children use literacy at home and in their community” and that such activity is created “to support the acquisition and development of school-like literacy behaviours of parents, children, and parents and children together.” (p. 1, par. 3)
- Neuman proposed that in family literacy programs, “skills learned and practised by an adult and the child produce an intergenerational and/or reciprocal transfer of skills ... that literacy is not transmitted from one individual to another. Rather

literacy involves a transaction between participants in a set of social practices” (p. 3, par. 2).

- Goldenburg viewed family literacy as “a set of participation structures for children and adults in the intellectual life of the school, home, and community, rather than as a service delivery model for literacy education” (p. 3, par. 4).

Literacy BC (2002) uses the following definition of family literacy:

The family is the strongest element in shaping lives. It's the most powerful support network there is. It's where the cycle of learning begins, where the attitudes of parents about learning become the educational values of their children. Through education of more than one generation, family literacy programs build on a family's strengths and provide the tools and support it [the family] needs to become stronger and more self-sufficient.

Most of the definitions of family literacy emphasize that parents play a leading role in the training and implementation of literacy in their homes and schools.

1. The importance of interactions and relationships between children and parents.

Early research in emergent literacy shows that parents' skills and practices influence the school achievement of their children (Sticht & McDonald, 1989; Teale, 1986). These studies examined practices in the homes of young children and concluded that positive literacy practices in the home, prior to school attendance, have a significant effect on the skill development of a young child. The concept of a parent as a child's first teacher emerged from these studies and others like them. One of the key assumptions in this approach is that exposure to print materials (through either listening to stories or

participation in storytelling and discussion) will support the development of literacy skills. Hlady (1995) emphasized that sharing literacy experiences on a daily basis is important; the understanding of print is related to the frequency of involvement in literacy events at home. Elster (1994) clearly supported the holistic approach to language acquisition. Emergent literacy approaches rely on the relationship between an adult and a child, in which meaningful interaction is created in order to develop language and literacy by exposing the child to print in a variety of contexts. Silvern and Silvern (1995) also discussed the importance of the home environment in a child's literacy environment as did numerous others before them such as Clark (1976), Teale (1986) and Durkin (1964). An innovative view in its day, Goelman, Oberg and Smith (1984) proposed that literacy is a way of thinking, learned through communication in families.

Several major studies have focused on how to provide support to parents in settings other than the home, particularly in educational settings. Cairney and Munsie (1995) advocated that parents be full partners who are given control and responsibility in educational programs developing the literacy of their children in every stage of the process of literacy acquisition. Come and Fredericks (1995) supported this view while proposing that parents would initially need the support of educators in order to establish a successful program, but should assume control of the program once educators withdrew. These authors emphasized the importance of building and maintaining self-esteem in parents by developing adult literacy skills in the process of working with parent and child.

Edwards (1995) used parents instead of educators as leaders in her school programs and achieved a powerful result: parents openly shared their fears and doubts,

validated other parents for their unique approaches to literacy, discovered they did not need high levels of literacy to be able to help their children, and were trusting of fellow participants. Cronan and Cruz (1996) showed that a considerable gain in children's language skills occurs if parents are given intensive training in reading techniques to increase conceptual development. In the PRINT project, Fagan, Anderson and Cronin (1998) advocated that parents learn to introduce literacy in five major ways: books and book sharing; talk and oral language; play; environmental print; scribbling, drawing and writing. They proposed that parents should learn how to provide these opportunities and materials, acknowledge and recognize their children's achievements, and interact with their children while they are engaged in these activities. Paratore et al. (1995) acknowledged the important role parents play in children's learning, while they examined methods for reinforcing collaborative roles between teachers and parents in educational settings in ways that would translate to enhanced literacy experiences in the home. Bredekamp and Kopple (1997) studied developmental risk factors predictive of children's difficulties in school and subsequent low-income status as adults and proposed preschool programs as a solution to improve long-term outcomes.

2. The potential of intergenerational and intercultural programs.

Cultural issues require a sensitive approach to family literacy issues.

Ethnographers have studied differences between home and school practices and have examined styles of interacting through oral and written language. They have documented interventions that are respectful of how language and literacy reflect the values, beliefs, and views of the world in different cultures (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Heath, 1983; Delpit, 1995). Since immigrant children are likely to learn English more quickly than their

parents, the possibility for intergenerational learning in families, supported by a family literacy program, has implications that reach beyond the preschool child.

Some intergenerational family literacy programs aim specifically to reconnect generations in positive ways. They focus on the children's English while tapping the memories, knowledge and stories of adults in the family to advance literacy and connect generations. In other programs, the intergenerational factor is an incidental part of the family literacy thrust. Ventura-Merkel, Liederman and Ossofsky (1989) identified nine types of intergenerational programs, many of which could easily be included in family resource programs. Dunn, Beach and Kontos (1994) documented one measure of success in the increase of time for reading with children as a result of the implementation of a senior volunteer reading program.

The concept of extended family playing a potentially significant role in different cultures was also raised by Morrow, Paratore and Tracey (1994) who emphasized the different ways that extended family members quite naturally support literacy at home and in the community. Fagan (1997) proposed strategies designed to teach parents to introduce literacy to their pre-school children while cautioning that the literacy experiences of different families and cultures should be honoured and the self-esteem of the parent protected. Auerbach (1995) examined culturally specific perspectives in family literacy programs recommending (a) a focus on multiple literacies, (b) opportunities for participants to bring with them culture-specific literacy practices, and (c) content that centers on critical social issues in participants' lives. Morrow and Neuman (1995) emphasized the importance of adults' enhancing their own literacy practices while promoting literacy with their children, regardless of cultural influences.

3. *The connection between family literacy and societal issues.*

The *National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth* (2005) has helped to raise awareness of the negative effects of child poverty and the related need for support for family literacy intervention. They caution that educators must be always mindful that literacy is only one issue in the complex lives of families.

Recent studies also raise question about drawing conclusions based on any one social factor alone. Purcell-Gates, L'Allier and Smith (1995) found that while some children of low-income families showed poor scores on literacy measures, others with equally poor scores lived in literacy-rich environments. This pattern also was discovered in a study conducted by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at UBC, where it was found that some groups of children are ready for school literacy programs regardless of the socio-economic factors in their community (HELP, 2005). Auerbach (1995) raised concerns about the need for public policy and the importance of avoiding a deficit-based approach that focuses on poor families. Snow, Barnes, Chandler, Goodman, and Hemphill (1998), who studied multiple low-income families, pointed out that many homes of poor, uneducated families offer rich literacy environments that use literacy to problem-solve and pursue personal goals, thus providing positive models for their children. They subsequently developed a profile of five components of the “family as educator” which included the literacy environment of the home, parental teaching, parental education, opportunities to learn and parental expectations.

Researchers have frequently focused on children who have not had supportive home literacy environments (Purcell-Gates, 1995; Purcell-Gates, L'Allier & Smith, 1995) as a negative predictive factor for future school success.

Regardless of the approach, researchers are clear that the role of the parent or other significant adult in a family literacy program is crucial. No one model is ideal as a family literacy program; there are too many variables and too little research on defining an ideal model. Purcell-Gates (2000), in a research synthesis, noted that the family literacy field is rich in studies that show positive change in participant learning but lack rigorous design. In such studies the lack of a control group makes it difficult to attribute the documented changes to the intervention.

In a summative document on family literacy practices in Canada, Thomas and Skage (1998) identified five issues as a focus for future research and policy development: (a) community partnerships and interagency collaboration; (b) staff development; (c) appropriate family literacy involvement; (d) documentation of program effectiveness; and (e) family literacy research.

Strengthening Community Development and Families through Schools

As the research becomes clearer that Canada (among many other countries) must reorient its priorities to provide for its young children and their families, it has also clarified how this might be most effectively achieved. Many believe that the school system—with its infrastructure, resources and public policy underpinnings—is a logical key community partner for providing such service.

The work of Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) is significant in that they stated unequivocally that “the full solution lies outside the schools as well as within” (p. 13), and that “school reform should not be separated from wider urban reform” (p. 12). At the same time, they take the position that because of its geographical convenience and its connection to the lives of many families, the neighbourhood school is the most obvious

focus for community building efforts. In *Common Purpose: Strengthening Families and Neighbourhoods to Rebuild America*, Schorr (1997) stated “Successful programs see children in the context of their communities, and deal with families as part of neighbourhoods and communities” (p. 6). She proposed that schools were the logical focal point of organization for neighbourhoods.

Other researchers have noted the importance of engaging the broader community in the education of young children to achieve greater success. As an alternative to traditional needs-based approaches to community development, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) proposed asset- or capacity-focused development for neighbourhoods based on the belief that community development takes place only when local people are investing themselves and their resources. They based this premise on the experience of many communities—that it is essential “to locate all of the available local assets, to begin connecting them in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness, and to begin harnessing those local institutions that are not yet available” (p. 6). An important part of my study focuses on the multiple ways that the intersectoral coalitions are strengthening the sense of community and applying community planning and assets to support the development of young children.

Schools are being seen increasingly as significant potential partners in community building initiatives where top-down and bottom-up forces integrate in an on-going dynamic manner, moving towards empowering and mobilizing community and school forces. In *Breakthrough*, Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) noted:

.... What follows from this [thinking] is that state policy makers and senior civil servants need to think and act differently and need to surround themselves with

other leaders who can help to do this The severe social consequences of failing to address economic and education gaps between the highest and lowest performers have not been appreciated by policy makers and educators who focus only on the latest innovations or narrow intervention schemes. (p. 94)

The Canadian publication, *The Early Years Study 2* (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007) emphasized throughout how a child's early experiences have far-reaching effects on brain development and therefore cognitive, emotional and social behaviours. It affirmed the progress communities have been making to innovate, collaborate and construct a collective vision of how to bring the science of early child development to the grassroots level. It exhorted government, however, to create the infrastructure, the policy, and the financial support to embrace the most effective community models and replicate them.

In developing community plans, McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2007) proposed early child development and parenting centres as an organizing framework for integrating services—as a meeting place for families in an intergenerational and cross-cultural approach that combines nurturing, care, nutrition and learning. Proposed programs would be affordable, equitable, and optional. “Respectful, reciprocal partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of young children” (p. 138). “Ideal centres are located in neighbourhoods, responsive to community needs and supported by a legislative and funding framework” (p. 140). Particularly significant to me, with regard to the four community case studies cited in this document, was their definition of *early childhood service integration*:

Service integration, consolidation, collaboration, coordination are often used interchangeably. Integration implies it is a community-driven process intended to enhance community-capacity and social capital with the goal of providing a comprehensive range of supports contributing to the well-being of the whole child ... all facets of the child's community contribute to his/her welfare and are interrelated—safety, nutrition, physical, and social/emotional health. From the parents' perspective, it means ready access to a flexible continuum of appropriate services. For policy makers and the public, integration provides accountability and a stable and effective base for new early childhood investments. (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2000, p. 145)

The authors pointed out that the path to integration is not linear and would be different in a variety of local circumstances. While complete integration of intersectoral services remains an ideal that many strive for, it is generally acknowledged that there are many stages through which organizations working towards integration naturally pass. The authors provided helpful clarification of their understanding of and use of the terms.

Program co-existence – programs located in proximity but operating as distinct and separate services.

Program communication – programs that share information, are aware of and inform others about services and coordinate schedules.

Program coordination – programs that overlap with each other through staffing, space or schedules and activities.

Program collaboration – programs that encourage a consolidation of management and administrative functions, joint planning and delivery of services, multi-use of space, and common equipment and program supplies.

Program integration – Programs that lose their individual identities to offer a full and flexible range of full-year/full-time activities that meet the changing needs of families.

It is possible for communities to take impressive steps towards integration by working through many smaller steps in a carefully planned way, as evidenced by the case studies in this document. However, to resource local assets and to design and implement them in a cohesive and meaningful way—not as another patchwork quilt—requires strong and visionary leadership that has the capacity to mobilize masses of people at the community level.

Leadership in the Community Context

My lengthy career in educational leadership positions has meant that I have kept abreast of both experiential and research-based views of promising leadership practices. I was unfamiliar with the recent literature on leadership, however, beyond the field of schools. I was pleased, therefore, to take the opportunity to learn more in preparation for the case studies. I wanted to be able to identify positive leadership practices in the light of recent literature. My review of the literature on leadership (relative to the scope of my study) inspired me to consider the topic in two categories: (1) the most valued practices of inspiring leaders; and (2) leadership issues related to systemic and enduring change

1. The most valued practices of inspiring leaders.

I decided to begin my review by re-examining Kouzes and Posner (2007), who first began their study of leadership practices over 20 years ago. In their recent research, they explained that the evidence has been consistently building on leadership practices that are not “the property of a few shining stars” but rather “have stood the test of time” (p. 64). They identified five practices of exemplary leadership that have also been consistently identified by other researchers:

1. Modelling the way by finding your voice and clarifying your personal values;
2. Inspiring a shared vision by envisioning the future by imagining exciting and ennobling possibilities, and enlisting others in a common vision by sharing aspirations;
3. Searching for opportunities by seeking innovative ways to change, grow and improve, and by experimenting, taking risks and learning from mistakes;
4. Enabling others to act by fostering collaboration, promoting positive goals and building trust; strengthening others by sharing power and discretion; and
5. Encouraging those involved by recognizing their contributions and showing appreciation of individual excellence; celebrating the values and victories by creating a spirit of community.

I decided to consult the work of researchers who have been publishing since 2000 to explore whether the issues did, in fact, remain the same. I discovered that, in general, the same topics were raised repeatedly but expressed in more compelling ways—almost as if there was a new sense of urgency tinged with a missionary tone.

Quinn (2004) quoted Cooperrider (2001) who proposed that the visionary role of the leader is critical in bringing diverse groups together to celebrate a common, proactive purpose, but used a term that appeared new to the literature:

It could be argued that all leadership is *appreciative leadership*. It's the capacity to see the best in the world around us, in our colleagues, and in the groups we are trying to lead It's the capacity to see with an appreciative eye the true and the good, the better and the possible. (p. 122)

Gardner (2006) also placed *trust* as one of the highest priorities of effective leadership. He said that trust is linked to resonance—when one trusts an institution, one feels at ease and resonates; the loss of trust results in the disappearance of resonance and a connected rise in resistance; the capacity to change minds hinges on whether or not one is trusted.

While Kouzes and Posner identified *collaboration* as one of the five consistent themes, Fullan (2006) used different language to reference the same idea: “It is not so much seeking alignment as it is seeking permeable connectivity—lots of two-way horizontal and vertical mutual influence” (p. 74). In *Breakthrough*, Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) noted that the traditional concepts of leadership are expanded to the concept of *distributed leadership*: “One in which the role of leaders is seen both as fostering a focus on teaching and learning and as developing other leaders who can go even further” (p. 97). Within this concept it would be part of a school district's role to (a) influence the moral mission of all schools with related capacity building through professional learning communities; (b) encourage classroom practices that serve individual needs; and (c) form partnerships between schools and communities.

Of all of the new material I viewed, none captivated me quite as much as the metaphors Quinn (2004) used to describe leaders who inspire others in his book *Building the Bridge as You Walk on It: A Guide for Leading Change*.

Quinn (2004) summarized his views as follows:

To make the decision to follow your vision can be very difficult. The end result is that gratification from deep change comes from the work of others who accept, embrace, and move the vision. In fact, it is through the work of others that the true contribution of a change leader is made. (p. 81)

Quinn (2004) elaborated on the importance of a vision's being grounded in the fundamental ideas of the people who work with it. He explained:

Even when a vision seems to come from the leader, as in the case of Gandhi, the vision moves others because it is deeply in touch with their reality and hopes.

That is why they respond. And the vision is credible because they can see that it is not a castle in the air, but a vision that is grounded in their lived experience, in bread and salt. (p. 139)

Finally, I turned to a writer/researcher whom I have admired for the past two decades, Andy Hargreaves. Hargreaves and Fink (2006), in *Sustainable Leadership*, revisited and summarized case-study data that emerged from several extensive research projects in the United States and Canada. They posited that when modern educational leadership is driven by moral purpose and leaders focus on what is important and sustainable, organizations would thrive. The book drew on the corporate and environmental research on sustainability to examine educational change over time and

identified seven principles of sustainability in language that was not commonly used in the previously reviewed studies. The seven principles were:

1. *Depth*: finding moral purpose in deep and broad learning and leadership and caring for others;
2. *Length*: facing the fact that all leaders eventually die and the challenges of leadership succession, therefore, are important for sustainability;
3. *Breadth*: distributing leadership, engaging others at all levels and in different ways in the act of leading change;
4. *Justice*: taking risks; doing no harm and actively improving the environment in which the change is introduced;
5. *Diversity*: creating cohesion and networking among its constituents;
6. *Resourcefulness*: recognizing and rewarding leadership by nurturing and protecting those in the organization; and
7. *Conservation*: examining and reviving organizational memories by honouring the past while forging new paths.

As I completed the review of the book, I wondered why the authors felt the need to use uncommon terminology that seemed so foreign to leadership principles that have been studied and discussed over the past two decades, as Kouzes and Posner proposed. In response to my question, Hargreaves and Fink (2006) stated that these are not just “buzzwords” or “randomly assorted ideas” but “that the origins and underpinnings of the idea of sustainability really matter; they give it moral substance, conceptual precision, and strategic power” (p. 21).

2. *Leadership issues related to systemic and enduring change.*

The intent of my study was to examine the way intersectoral coalitions formed and the role that leadership played in guiding the implementation of new community programs. It seemed important, therefore, to consider the research on this type of leadership separately from the qualities and characteristics of inspiring leaders.

The complexity of providing leadership in multidisciplinary collaborative practice poses a challenge. Ovretveit (1993) stated that more problems are created by inadequate leadership than by any other factor, usually because of ambiguity in the role description and implementation. Roberts (1989) emphasized openly discussing the need for defined leadership and group acceptance of the leader and his or her defined role. Tjosvold (1986) proposed that leadership in teams should place a high priority on helping different disciplines understand one another's priorities and act toward a common purpose.

It was my perception during the *EDI Impact Study* (2004) that coalition leadership emerged in a variety of ways, more often in a transformational manner rather than through traditional practice. The concept of *moral leadership* when working with systemic change has been gaining prominence. Fullan (2001) noted that “to strive to improve the quality of how we live together is a moral purpose of the highest order” (p. 14), a critical factor in a climate of change. Sergiovanni (1999) described moral leaders as “people of substance, [who have] distinctive qualities with moral underpinnings” who “anchor their practice in ideas, values and commitments” (p. 17).

Wheatley and Kellner-Rogers (1996), observers of leadership in *A Simpler Way*, consider emergent organizing or self-organizing as a concept that is critically important

to organizational transformation and leadership. They emphasize the uncertainty and risk of being agents for the future in this way:

We don't have to look beyond ourselves to see self-organization. Each of us has frequent, personal experience with the concept. We see a need. We join with others. We find the necessary information or resources. We respond creatively, quickly. We create a solution that works—but then, how do we describe what we did? Do we dare to describe the true fuzziness, the unexpected turns, the bursts of creative insight? (p 63)

Gardner (2006) dedicated an entire book to his research and reflections on the act of, and importance of, and the art of changing people's minds when attempting to change the culture of a system or organization. He noted:

The secret is to accept that some changes will happen anyway, know that other changes may be impossible, and concentrate efforts on the changes of mind that are important, won't occur naturally, but can be achieved with sufficient effort and motivation Shifts of mind are most likely to come together when we use seven levers of mind change: reason backed up by research, reinforcement through multiple forms of representation, real world events, resonance, and resources all push in one direction—and resistances can be identified and countered. Conversely, mind changing is unlikely to occur—or to consolidate—when resistances are strong and most of the other points of leverage are not in place. (p. 211)

Hargreaves (2007) identified three sources of human resourcefulness that are important when attempting educational change:

1. *Trust* – Effective organizations depend and thrive on trust—human interactions that provide evidence of understanding and good intentions, sharing information, telling the truth, keeping confidences, and being willing to admit mistakes;
2. *Confidence* – the willingness to invest in change with money, time, reputation, emotional energy, or other resources ... in one's self, in team members or colleagues, in the structures and policies of the organization, and in the external environment that provides resources; and
3. *Emotion* – Positive emotion creates energy; negative emotion saps it.

Kanter (2004) opined about maintaining confidence:

Once lost, confidence is difficult to regain. On the way up, success creates a positive trajectory ... people who believe they are likely to win are also likely to put in the extra effort at difficult moments to ensure that victory. On the way down, failure feeds upon itself ... the momentum can be hard to stop. (p. 139)

Hargreaves and Fink (2007) proposed that organizations must accommodate the memory of the past, as well as the present and future.

Sustainable leadership needs a rear view mirror as well as a driver's windshield.

Without it, things will keep overtaking or rear ending you ... the past may instead be something that needs to be healed ... if, as change leaders, we do not face our past we will find we keep repeating the mistakes from it. (p. 249)

An important facet of this study has been how the very act of bringing intersectoral groups together combined their differences. A second important facet was how those differences were handled in terms of leadership values, language, problem-solving strategies, and other characteristics of professional behaviour. Exploring different

opinions on how these separate identities established partnerships, built teams and solved problems was a vital process, especially with respect to organizational structure, decision-making, communication, leadership, power, and the sharing of resources and roles.

CHAPTER 3

Design and Procedures

Chapter 3 describes the research design. The design includes the research methodology; a description of the participants in the study; the time frame and the methods used to document and analyze the experiences of the four communities; and the involvement of school districts in the community coalitions.

Research Methodology

I chose to use case-study methodology as my major methodology for reasons described by Stake (1995) and Yin (1994). Stake proposed the following reasons:

- The researcher can look for the detail of interaction in a specific context—a study of the particularity and complexity of a single case;
- A case study lends itself to the social study of people and programs;
- A case study permits the researcher to seek out both the unique and common features of a situation;
- The case under study can be one among others;
- The case chosen for study represents a system; and
- The researcher enters the system with a sincere interest in learning how it functions.

Yin proposed that a case study is a preferred methodology when:

- How and why questions are being asked;
- The focus is on contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context;
- The investigator has little control over events; and

- The case study contributes to our knowledge of organizational and social phenomenon.

For these reasons, using a multiple case-study approach was a logical choice to examine the four communities and the work of their coalitions. Frequent references are Merriam (1988), Seidman (1991), Stake (1995) and Yin (1994). Case studies typically involve the use of systematic interviewing and observation to obtain data. According to Mason (2002), it is important to use the same method to explore patterns and themes that occur throughout the data, described as cross-sectional data indexing. She pointed out, however, that non-cross-sectional or case-study forms of data organization:

Involve ways of seeing and sorting your data which do not necessarily use the same lens across the whole in this way. Essentially, these forms of data organization involve looking at discrete parts, cases, or contexts within your data set, and documenting something about those parts specifically. (p. 165)

I used both cross-sectional and non-cross-sectional models as I moved deeper into the analysis process. In other words, I looked for both the common and consistent factors in my study as well particular factors in their context. I looked for:

- Distinctiveness of different parts;
- Understanding of interwoven parts of the data or social processes;
- The organization of data in terms of themes, issues or topics; and
- An emphasis on context.

This process helped me to develop an analytical view of the data, make comparisons and build explanations.

As Mason (2002) suggested, I used this method in addition to cross-sectional indexing so that I could “build explanations based on two alternative ways of slicing the data set” (p. 166). The case studies are broad in nature because they draw on a wide range of data sources.

Selection and Description of the Four Communities

Ten communities were initially examined because of their considerable self-reported success in the *EDI Impact Study (2004)*. These ten were narrowed to four communities which were selected because they were of similar size, had fully functioning intersectoral coalitions, were within a reasonable distance, and actively engaged the school district. Port Alberni, Qualicum, the Sunshine Coast and Grand Forks (Boundary) were finally selected as my four case studies.

My study comprises: (a) four individual case studies of community intersectoral coalitions; (b) an examination of how they function with specific attention to the role of the school district; and (c) the development of programs for early learners resulting from coalition activity. The study, by its definition in Chapter 1, includes the topics: (a) community mobilization; (b) organizational change; (c) development of early learning programs; and (d) leadership. The unit of analysis for Stage 1 (four school districts) was the coalition’s work; the unit of analysis in Stage 2 (one of the four school districts) was extended to include the viewpoints of parents. Initially, I decided to limit the time frame for the case studies to a maximum of one year, May 2006 to May 2007. In fact the final visits took place in March 2007.

Each community was unique. Port Alberni is a mill town that suffered economically when a number of the mills were shut down. The town has been making an

significant effort to redefine itself as a tourist attraction, a retirement community, a sports-focused site and a gateway to rich environmental experiences—and has been succeeding. The economy is slowly improving and the townspeople feel an intense sense of pride in the community. From this pride has emerged a determination to care for its people as a high priority and, in the case of this study, the community has made a strong effort to care for its children. I was principal of a school in Port Alberni for five years in the 1970's and therefore knew some of the individuals in the interviews although I had not been in touch with them for many years. Although the intersectoral coalition has been strong and in place for over 11 years, the school district has only recently (in the past three years) become actively involved with it.

The Parksville/Qualicum region has a very varied socio-economic composition ranging from outlying communities that face major social challenges to prosperous retirement communities and two small towns that thrive on a tourist economy in the summer. It is situated along the coast and property values are systematically escalating. The coalition has been in place for many years but seven years ago, the presiding superintendent became convinced that early learning, or the lack of it, was an important factor in subsequent school success. He decided to invest in *time* so that staff could promote connections between the coalition and the school system. Early learning programs began to flourish in the community and still do.

The Sunshine Coast is another community situated on the coast north of Vancouver. It too thrives as a summer tourist attraction. Part of its uniqueness is the number of somewhat disconnected small communities that exist along its shoreline. The communities are significantly different from one another. Each community has its own

identity, competes for resources, and resists centralized decision-making. The school district serves all of the communities, yet each community has its own infrastructure for many other services, thus creating inevitable tension. As in the other districts, a coalition had been in place for some time but the school superintendent decided only four years ago to become actively involved in early learning work in connection with schools. As a result, each community independently initiates early learning programs and participates in community decision-making at the coalition table.

The town of Grand Forks (regionally described as Boundary) has also experienced serious economic recession over the past 20 years as industry withdrew from the region. The population is geographically dispersed over seven smaller communities served by local resources as well as the school district. It is located near the border of the United States at a considerable distance from other BC towns. Services to the community have been complicated by provincial indecision about which of the other towns should provide its government services. As a result, Grand Forks has refocused its energy into becoming as self-determining as possible.

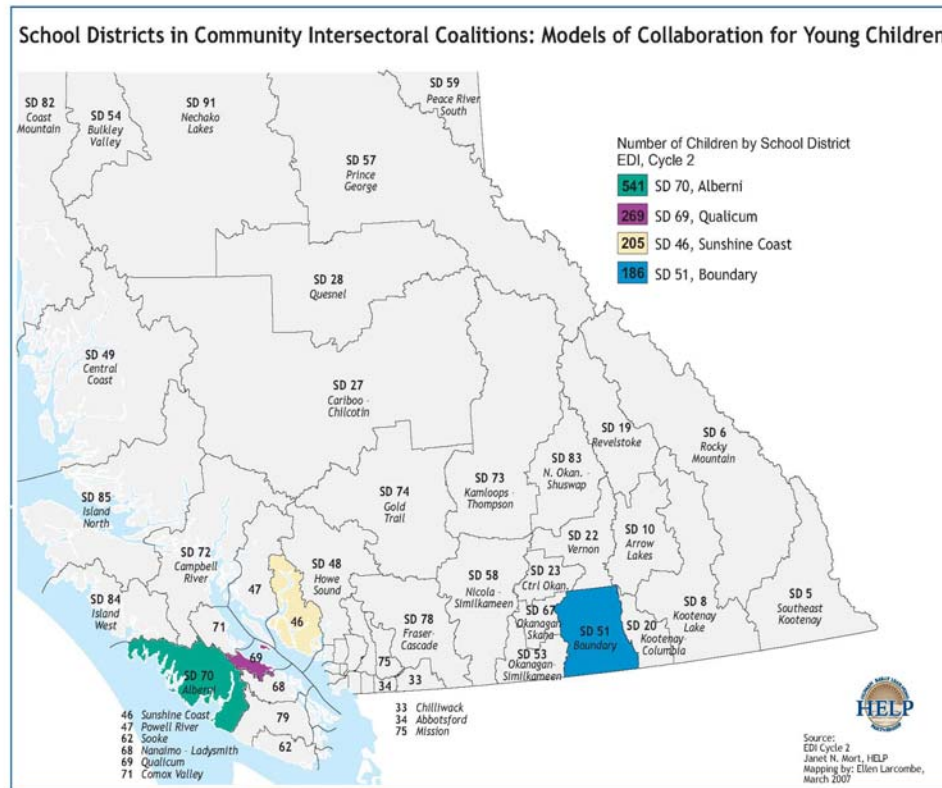


Figure 1. Location of the Four Case-Study Sites

Research Questions

To establish the research questions, I examined the final report of the 43 districts in the *EDI Impact Study (2004)* using open coding to conceptualize early observations from that study. I could then use the codes as a basis for clarifying and exploring emerging patterns of similarities and differences in the questions to be applied in this study. This process provided me with a basis for constant comparison so that I could watch for concurrence as well as exceptions as the data emerged. The process permitted me to develop more insightful questions as the interviews proceeded and eventually I merged several to result in eight final questions.

1. How long have you or your district/community been engaged in coalition/early learning work?
2. How would you describe or define your coalition/program?
3. What is your role within the coalition/program?
4. Describe the role of leadership in your coalition/program? How did it evolve?
What are the most important characteristics of coalition leadership?
5. List and describe the most important factors that contribute to the success of the coalition/program in your opinion. If you had to narrow your choices which would be highest on your list?
6. What gets in the way of success?
7. In your perception what benefit, if any, has accrued to young children, families, staff, parents or community groups as a result of the coalition/program work particularly in the area of language and literacy? How do you know or what makes you think so? What do you accept as evidence?
8. How does the EDI work impact on your planning and to what degree?

I conducted a pilot study in Qualicum, in April 2007 and found that a number of the questions overlapped and some, depending on the experience of the respondent, were not applicable. After the pilot study, I began each interview by reviewing the questions with the respondent to determine which were applicable (in their experience) and which order of priorities made most sense to him or her. This helped to make the interview sessions more meaningful and focused. I was aware that case-study research is an evolving process so I allowed questions to change to suit the circumstances and developed new and/or deeper questions if they related to the study and seemed to extend

the response of the interviewee, especially if it related to program information with which I was unfamiliar. I was aware that these communities were moving quickly to implement innovative programs and knew that I too had to be prepared to adjust to the pace of change they were experiencing.

Data Sources and Selection of Participants

Because of the magnitude of the composition of a community coalition with its many partners, my study was organized and drew upon a range of data sources such as Mason (2002) suggested: people, organizations, settings, texts, objects, events, and combination(s) thereof. Yin (1994) stated “The case study allows an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events—such as individual life cycles, organizational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change” (p. 14). Data sources differed at each stage but were varied enough to provide triangulation for each question.

Stage 1: Four districts

School-district contacts for EDI and ECD had already been established by superintendents. I contacted the superintendents by letter to ask them to confirm a district contact to assist me and to arrange appropriate approvals for the visit. I subsequently contacted the district contacts, provided them with the consent form and questions and asked them to identify a minimum of ten individuals who could provide me with the most pertinent information for on-site interviews, given the goals of the study. Criteria for participant selection were identified as those individuals (a) who were actively engaged at the coalition table; (b) represented the key stakeholders including education, health and social services; and (c) were actively involved in implementing early learning programs.

The district contact was also invited to include types of participants who might be unique to the community. Letters of agreement were sent in advance, appropriately completed and collected at the interview. Each interviewee was invited to provide corroborating documents to supplement the interview and many did.

Activity in Stages 1 and 2 (in italics) included:

Name of Community	Date of Week-Long Visit	Approximate Number of Respondents Representing Organization in the Coalition (rep. = representative)	Number of Years of Coalition Work	Number of Years of School District Involvement
Parksville/ Qualicum	May 2007 and 10 days in January/February 2007	30 SD 69 Superintendent Literacy Teacher Coordinator Preschool Lit. CCRR rep. City Library rep. Ministry of Health rep. Infant Development rep. First Nations Head Start rep. Project Literacy rep. SOS (Societies) rep. <i>Stage 2: Coordinator of Bus, Mother Goose, 6 Bus Drivers and 12 Parents</i>	10 years	7 years
Sunshine Coast	September, 2007	12 SD 46 Superintendent Admin Student Services SD 46 Director Literacy Teacher Principal 2 PALS Teachers 2 Coastal Health reps. Sechelt Band (Education) rep. FN Preschool teacher FN Head Start rep.	11 years	5 years
Grand Forks (Boundary)	October, 2007	10 SD 51 Superintendent SD 51 Retired Superintendent SD Director Principal	17 years	17 with 5 in Family Centre Structure

		Family Centre Coordinator Bank Community Relations Speech Pathologist Health rep. Infant Development rep. MCFD rep.		
Port Alberni	December, 2007	10 SD 70 Superintendent Principal Literacy Coordinator Coalition Coordinator Dental Hygienist Parks and Recreation rep. Infant Development rep. Kiwanis Family Centre rep. Health rep. CCRRC rep.	11 years	3 years

Figure 2. Details of Site Visits in Stages 1 and 2

The selected participants included the superintendent or delegate, school board members, family services society representative, child-care resource and referral agencies, public health nurses, MCFD representatives, health authority representatives, health and social services frontline workers, principals, ECE professionals and teachers.

Stage 2. Community Selected for In-depth Analysis – Parksville/Qualicum

I chose Parksville/Qualicum as the community where I would conduct the in-depth study for several reasons. The school district had played a strong role in providing leadership in literacy-related programs for early learners. While the scope of community involvement was great, the program comprised many small but significant programs that could be readily replicated one-by-one in other communities without significant cost or infrastructure. Since one of the goals of my study was to provide replicable models for others, this was an important factor. In addition, the community was receiving attention province-wide with many other districts seeking to understand how to apply the

Qualicum experience in their own district. I believed that documenting their story in detail would be of value for others in the province.

Stage 2:

<i>Sources of Information</i>	<i>Strategies to Elicit the Information</i>
<p>As well as the types of selected participants identified in Stage 1, our Stage 2 research team interviewed an additional group of approximately 25 parents and senior citizen volunteers as well as 6 ECE and early learning professionals, business leaders and early learning program managers—supplemented by program observations and expanded document review.</p>	<p>I conducted eight separate trips to the Qualicum community over a six-month period and organized my strategies accordingly.</p> <p>Strategies included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal interviews • Focus groups • Observations at meetings and on site in classrooms • Document review • Data gathering (minutes, financial issues, etc.)

Figure 3. Further Details about the Stage 2 Site Visit

I conducted four to six interviews a day depending on the nature of the interview and location of participants. I minimized the number of interviews by conducting focus-group discussions where my research assistants were seeking common input or where participants had limited experience in the topic being addressed. Boxes of historical records were collected and reviewed in advance of the first visit as well as at the end of the last visit.

Case studies of communities were my major methodology, therefore, I used multiple methods to collect the data and multiple types of participants in the interviews and focus groups—particularly observations, data analysis, focus groups and individual

in-depth interviews and referenced key researchers' views on these methods. Morgan (1993) noted the importance of distinguishing between the advantages and disadvantages of selecting each. Merton, Fiske and Kendall (1990), Morgan (1988) and Krueger (1988), focused on how design relates to the question under discussion and which is most appropriate considering an economy of time and money, depth versus breadth, interview dynamics, communication context, analysis and sampling issues, communication context, method as intervention, and logistical considerations. Mason (2002) cautioned the researcher to build a strategy on assembling data that can be used to form a developmental explanation of social change, especially when drawing comparisons between contexts where a phenomenon has developed differently. She emphasized the importance of “finding a coherent and consistent approach to answering your research questions” (p. 32). At the same time, she proposed the integration of different methods:

- When analyzing something in greater or lesser depth using different methods accordingly;
- When seeking to corroborate sources; and
- When answering the same research questions from different perspectives.

Wherever possible, I attempted to gather quantitative data as well as qualitative data because I had been impressed by the impact of quantitative data on reinforcing the qualitative data in my *EDI Impact Study* (2004).

1. Individual in-depth interviews—Stages 1 and 2.

The work of Holstein and Gubrium (1995) on active interviews provided good direction for the framework of interviews that were a prime source of information for my study. They described the active interview as interpretive practice: “The procedures and

resources used to apprehend, organize and represent reality ... involving respondent and interviewer as they articulate ongoing interpretive structures, responses and orientation” (p. 16). Yin (1994) proposed that interviews are one of the richest sources of data in case studies because they provide the researcher with similar information from a variety of sources. He stated:

Overall, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs. These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific respondents, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation. (p. 85)

All respondents were invited to meet individually with the researcher but in some cases I received requests for two individuals to be interviewed together, usually because of some form of job sharing. In these cases, I extended the length of the interview to accommodate them both. My interviews were structured using the questions outlined in Appendix B; on occasion, however, the discussion became less structured as an interviewee wished to engage in further discussion that was related but unforeseen by the posed questions (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). The questions were presented to the interviewee in advance of the interview. Interviews were conducted at the work site in most cases, although a few respondents chose other sites and times for the interview. In most cases the interviews were recorded (when the respondents agreed). Appropriate permission was secured at the outset of the interview. Transcripts were not developed from the tapes although I took notes during the interviews; tapes were reviewed after the interviews and quotes extracted from them.

I asked district contacts to address respondent selection in terms of representation—how well the characteristics of those sampled represented the characteristics of the population of interest, which included intersectoral professionals, leaders and administrators, parents, volunteers, the business community, and representatives of other engaged groups as they became known to me. I used Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) concept of "people as a wide range of voices, assigning narrative competence to all those placed in the category, recognizing their common worth as human beings and, hence, respondents" (p. 25). In doing so I encouraged descriptions of diverse and complex experience rather than the collective opinions of the groups they might be representing.

I took an active role in the interviews, in a neutral and non-judgmental stance, to solicit responses by encouraging clarification and elaboration. I avoided influencing the content of the responses by using open-ended questions. I used interviews in both stages—between 8 to 12 interviews in each of the four communities in Stage 1 and approximately 30 in the community in Stage 2 (Qualicum).

2. Document collection—Stages 1 and 2.

Each of the coalitions had been documenting their activities and progress. The results that were in the public domain were made available to me. I requested that they show me pertinent letters, memos, meeting minutes, progress reports, grant applications, media articles, data, reports, surveys and other documentation prior to or during my initial visits in Stages 1 and 2, so that I could learn about the history of their initiatives. I collected fewer documents in Stage 1 than in Stage 2 where my study was in greater depth.

3. Focus groups—Stage 2.

I used focus groups only in Stage 2 of the design (with the one district) to collect viewpoints in a controlled setting, with large numbers of participants, and at the same time. These were the users or clients of the services provided by the coalition. My use of focus groups was connected to the in-depth individual interviews, the review of data, and participant observation. The reason was to validate or triangulate the data and information being gathered by checking the perceptions and insights of a larger number of participants in an economical way. I used the focus groups at the end of the interview stage in Qualicum to validate perceptions from the earlier phase and to gather insights that would have been less available without the group interaction.

Prior to the focus-group stage, I trained two researchers in the art of conducting focus groups (Kleiber, 2004) and briefed them on my expectations. The two research assistants moderated the focus groups, which consisted largely of parents and volunteers, to establish evidence of satisfaction with the perceived quality and impact of the services being provided to young children. I felt confident about using these particular researchers because they were retired school counsellors and administrators, skilled in the art of communicating sensitively with people. I decided to use my research assistants for this task because, by the end of the interview process, I needed the views of the focus groups to see if they would validate the data collected in the interviews; I had become quite well-known in the small community and did not want my presence to bias the group responses.

I left the selection of focus-group participants to a public process—providing open invitations through regular newsletters to members of constituent groups and including anyone who volunteered. The research assistants conducted six small focus

groups to include volunteers based on the time of day and location that were most convenient for the constituent group (largely retired seniors and non-working parents who had child-care issues). Each participating member had signed the letter of consent provided to him or her before the focus group and reviewed at the beginning of the meeting. Focus groups ranged in size from two to six. The use of the research assistants, in this regard, was very important as they had limited knowledge of the results of my interviews and were therefore open to opinions of any sort. Kleiber (2004) cautioned, “An atmosphere that is structured to be non-judgemental and to promote candid expression allows for a range of opinions to surface. Consensus is never a goal of focus groups” (p. 91). The assistants did not audiotape all the focus groups because several individuals expressed discomfort about being taped. In those cases, the researchers took careful notes. I accompanied the research assistants on the site visit (although I occupied myself elsewhere analyzing documents); we met between focus groups to employ a method of constant comparison to identify emerging themes and issues and to allow for constant tailoring of the interview questions (Morgan, 1993). Kleiber (2004) encouraged the use of “a method of constant comparison in identifying emerging themes and issues after the first group and before each subsequent group” (p. 93). Questions that guided the focus groups are identified in Appendix B.

4. Participant observation with parents and children—Stage 2.

Observations were conducted only in the Qualicum district in Stage 2 with those involved in programs that were sponsored by the coalition. Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) provided guidance on how to observe young children while conducting research. They proposed participant observation as an ethnographic type of research using

naturalistic observation techniques—taking part in the children’s activities to determine their “constructed realities as expressed by their actions and in their thoughts, beliefs and feelings” (p. 132). Priessle and Grant (2004) described four participant observation roles: (a) the complete participant who usually does not reveal the researcher’s role; (b) the participant as observer who has a role in the community and is known to be conducting research; (c) the observer as participant, conducting short visits for the purpose of interviews; and (d) the complete observer role where the observer is removed from the event and intends to be noticed as little as possible. I used the latter three roles primarily but acted as “the complete observer” to document proceedings at meetings while observing leadership behaviours and interrelationships in meetings.

My purpose in conducting the observations was to enhance my perception of the main purposes of the study—to explore the following through observation:

- Evidence of coalition influence in coalition-initiated programs as identified in interviews;
- Evidence of school-district involvement as identified in interviews; and
- Evidence of enhanced language and literacy skills and the opportunity for school success as identified in observations and interviews.

Following the observations, I interviewed immediate sponsors of the program and available parents to check my perceptions.

Data Analysis during Data Collection

At the end of each day I reviewed the data by: (a) highlighting key points that needed to be corroborated or extended in subsequent interviews; (b) marking with an asterisk the points where I believed I might be able to secure documents or might need to search for more information that would validate or enhance my understanding of the issue; (c) numerically marking notations where I believed there would be an exemplary quote on the tape; and (d) reflecting on the experience of the day with a trusted colleague or debriefing the day with the research assistants. Stake (1995) proposed that expertise in case-study work is greatly enhanced through reflective practice. I used axial coding to validate the relationships between events, to analytically determine connections between categories and to consider context, actions, interactions, and consequences that might need to be re-examined for clarification the next day in subsequent interviews.

This process helped me to maintain the focus of the study. It set boundaries and allowed me to be more specific about the questioning strategies through the notes on my reflections after observations and interviewing. On a daily basis, I asked participants for their reactions to emerging opinions, interpretations, and themes to help me clarify thinking and planning for further stages of the study. I did this by (a) summarizing what I believed I had heard at the end of interviews or focus groups as a perception check; (b) by returning transcripts to individuals for reflection; and (c) by reviewing notes on observations with my research assistants for reaction and further suggestions.

I used a separate binder for each community as a way of organizing the information that I gathered. The data were organized in the same way for each

community even though there were different subheadings specific to each community coalition.

Data Analysis after Data Collection: Non-cross-sectional Indexing

Reviewing the tapes and notes.

For each community I created a fishbone chart (a tool for diagramming categories) with major “bones” (or data slices) that reflected the main research questions:

- Coalitions;
- Leadership;
- Successes;
- Roadblocks;
- Benefits to Children and Related Evidence; and
- Use of the EDI Results.

Using the audio tapes and notes simultaneously, I drew “minor bones” (categories within categories) on chart paper to reflect the responses raised in each interview that were related to the major bones. On each bone I noted the initials of the respondent so I could re-examine the viewpoints later if necessary. When the four charts were completed, I posted them on the wall along with the research questions so that my original purpose would be foremost in my mind.

Initially, I used this non-cross-sectional way of organizing the data to look at each case discreetly, as “whole” life stories—looking for the particular in its context and the holistic rather than the cross-sectional. As Mason (2002) described, I was looking for the distinctiveness of each case study. I wanted to understand the interwoven parts, social processes and practices; to be able to organize data on themes or topics that were not

necessarily a part of each case study; to place an emphasis on the individual context of each community; and to be able to make comparisons between the four case studies by being specific about the particulars at each site. In this way, I was able to analyse the holistic unit of the community as one case study to produce an explanation of history, processes, practices and results. These findings could then be compared cross-sectionally to look for commonalities and/or differences in the four case studies.

Organizing and presenting the data.

I used Janevick's (2004) checklist for data analysis, reporting, and interpretation by:

- Looking for empirical assertions supported by data;
- Using narrative vignettes and exact quotations to support data;
- Scanning all documents and connecting them to analyses;
- Including interpretive commentary related to the data;
- Including as theory the “making of ideas” through adductive reasoning, “thinking about data in theoretically and conceptually inspired ways” (Mason, 2002, p.181);
- Including a thorough description of my role as researcher;
- Stating clearly all ethical issues that arose; and
- Having a peer reviewer examine transcripts and categories. (p. 109)

Tools and strategies most appropriate to organizing the data included diagrams to show direction or causal links; maps, flowcharts, and organizational tables; descriptive narratives; checklists; quotations from participants; and segments from field notes.

Different methods, different data sources and multiple investigators helped to triangulate

the data and enhance its trustworthiness. In addition, I documented my own interpretations, presentations of new or changed theoretical positions, and conclusions.

Developing a coding system.

Once all the data from each site were recorded on the four charts, I developed a numeric coding system, which I applied to each community. This process involved (a) identifying threads within the fishbone for each community that were (b) different from the six major bones derived from the research questions; but that (c) appeared consistently throughout the chart for that community. To accomplish this, I coded the data with numbers—breaking down, conceptualizing, and reconstructing the data in new, meaningful categories. This process permitted me to re-organize and re-label the data to lead to a set of categories that answered the research questions but resulted from the comments of the respondents, potentially leading to new, important and unanticipated information that was solidly substantiated by the data.

To establish coding families I considered setting and context, definitions, relationships, perspectives, processes, activities, events, strategies, and methods. Once the categories had been determined, I looked for patterns and relationships. Glaser and Strauss (1967) referred to coding as either *open* (examining, comparing and categorizing); *axial* (putting data together in meaningful new ways); or *selective* (selecting core categories, relating them to others, and validating the relationships).

Grand Forks (Boundary)	Coalition History, Future/Vision, Change Strategies, Leadership, Success Stories, Shared Resources, School Participation, Roadblocks, Programs, Synergy, Social Issues, Results/Data, EDI Impact
------------------------	--

Port Alberni	Coalition History, Leadership, Successes, Sustainability, School Involvement, Relationships, Funding, Other Agencies, Roadblocks, Benefits, Programs, EDI Impact
Sunshine Coast	Coalition History, Structure, Program Successes, School District Initiatives, Roadblocks/ECE, Funding, Leadership, Benefits, EDI Impact
Parksville/Qualicum	Relationships/Inter-connectedness, Programs, The Bus and Munchkinland as focal points, Leadership, Funding, History, Volunteers, Business Involvement, Ongoing Evolution, Social Issues, Literacy, Community Spirit

Figure 4: Axial Coding Families

Data Analysis after Data Collection: Cross-sectional Indexing

I used cross-sectional indexing to index the whole of the data set according to common themes, and selective coding to relate each community to the others. I chose to do this because one of my primary goals in the study was to search for different grassroots-generated models that could be used to establish possibilities for intersectoral coalitions and their work with early learning initiatives. It was also my goal to determine whether lessons were apparent for communities intending to establish school programs through coalition cooperation. This second step of sorting, organizing and indexing across communities expanded my view beyond the impressionistic to the general.

To create the cross-sectional indexing system I needed to determine what kind of categories I wanted to establish. To do this I revisited my ontological and epistemological viewpoints (p. 14), so that my indexing system would be consistent with the assumptions of my research design (Mason, 2002). Some of these categories were reflective and interpretative, based on (a) what I thought I could infer from the data; (b) what was implied; and (c) how it connected across the four case studies. Some were literal. In either case, I needed to be able to retrace my thinking to the actual data in order to ensure that I remained true to the original context of the source of the data and to validate the resulting explanations, perceptions or conclusions. This strategy reinforced the process of continually alternating between the intellectual puzzle, research questions and data.

Creating the indexing system was the beginning of more interpretive activity, challenging my conceptual, theoretical and analytical capacity. Some of the considerations were relatively straightforward. For example, the issue of funding appeared as a major topic in all four districts. The task of re-examining the data on the individual charts, tapes and notes revealed that, in fact, the issue of funding—although a source issue—was viewed very differently. To one district it was a major frustration and deterrent while to another it was an obstacle to be overcome.

In other cases where new threads that resulted from the numerical re-coding did not appear to be related, checking the original data revealed that some connections were significant. For example, issues that were expressed one way in a community just beginning coalition work were connected to issues expressed differently in an experienced coalition—at different points in the evolutionary process, but related.

At this point it is important to emphasize that I chose to use the collections or slices of indexed data as loose and flexible groupings of unfinished resources rather than end-products—a way to view the data thematically across the data set. This method encourages “a wider range of analytical and explanatory logic,” important for this complex study of four communities (Mason, 2002, p. 157).

Limitations of the Research

The focus of my research was to examine the structure, function and impact of four successful community coalitions that included school districts as part of the coalition. I wanted to determine whether the improved quality of coordinated services that resulted (if any) would translate into greater opportunities for young children in early learning.

Selection of participants.

I accessed participants through school district contacts; however, this approach raised the possibility of bias in the selection of participants because all stakeholders’ views needed to be considered. I compensated for that by ensuring that I included at least one other objective interviewee of my choice along with one or more coalition representative(s) in the four district visits. If I found myself confused by competing views, I phoned some of the respondents after the visit to clarify perspectives to my satisfaction. In the final stage of the research in the Qualicum district, multiple perspectives from numerous stakeholders were included.

Understanding of terminology.

The concept of intersectoral coalitions is relatively new to school districts, and therefore their participation in such coalitions is new. I discovered different

interpretations of the roles, responsibilities and merits of this new relationship. I considered this an important part of my exploration but was aware that there were discrepancies in viewpoints and accepted these as legitimate.

The absence of a program evaluation focus.

In three of the four case studies, participants described some of the programs developed through coalition work. In the case of Qualicum, we interviewed parents and staff about (a) the effectiveness of programs; and (b) their degree of satisfaction with the programs. In some cases, we participated in the programs, but made no effort to evaluate their effectiveness. The study did not attempt to determine the child outcomes achieved by the programs. This step would be desirable and necessary once the programs have matured so that their impact can be measured over time.

The absence of an effort to seek out opposing views.

While I documented controversial viewpoints in the interviews, as they were raised, I did not seek out respondents who might have had controversial views on the topics under investigation, including those who had not participated in or understood the thrust of the coalition work. This was not the intention of the study, but it would have provided additional insight especially for forward planning in these communities.

The absence of the voices of children.

I intended to include the voices of children as an important part of the research but was restricted by the fact that many of the youngest clients did not yet speak. Those who could speak were not able to express their opinions on the topics under investigation; most were toddlers. I compensated for this by relying on observation where possible and

appropriate, and by including their parents' opinions on the benefits experienced by the children.

Shifting governance and resulting tensions.

During the course of my research, an announcement was made that school districts would be assuming new responsibilities for ECD (Ministry of Education, 2005). Subsequent announcements were made about 85 drop-in pilot sites and significant funding for school districts to implement ECD programs. At the same time, significant cuts were announced in childcare. The resulting resentment and anxiety may have clouded some of the participants' views. The potential shift in funding, roles and responsibilities and the subsequent uncertainty have resulted in territorial conflict between members of the coalitions. I was aware of this and included these perceptions in my documentation as an important aspect of examining the change process.

My limited experience in the community-planning field.

My administrative background and career experience has featured systematic organizational change and organizational leadership, particularly in educational organizations. Because of the responses of those interviewed, I found myself partially engaged in a related, but new field—that of community mobilization. In order to accommodate this shift, but also rely on my experience, I chose to use the lens of leadership to view community activity. I refreshed my academic understanding of leadership by consulting experts who study the importance of leadership in encouraging integrated community-service agendas. I redesigned my original literature review to accommodate this shift.

The respondent emotion factor.

Qualitative studies are by their nature subjective. Qualitative researchers have a responsibility to be aware of their own biases, intellectual shortcomings and possible misinterpretations of the literature and data that may result from these biases. In these case studies, where energy, enthusiasm, commitment and considerable emotion were demonstrated by respondents, it would have been possible to be caught up in the emotion of family pain and anecdotes. I made a deliberate effort, therefore, to tell their stories through direct quotes without reporting my own emotion. It was particularly useful that I strategically made no effort to interpret data on site. Instead, I waited until some time had passed before I interpreted and analyzed the data from all sites at the same time, thereby avoiding what Stake (1995) referred to as “going native”—or, stated somewhat differently, avoiding the impulse to let the interaction with the case study colour an academic perspective.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine the intersectoral community coalitions that actively engage school districts in planning and developing early learning programs for children from birth to age six. The study was divided into two stages. The first stage involved all four communities through interviews and document examination. From the results of Stage 1, one community was selected for a more in-depth impact study that required the addition of focus groups with parents, observations, extended document examination and an increased number of interviews.

I used multiple methods with participants playing a variety of roles. My purpose was to collect data that could lead to developmental explanations of social change. I was

looking for situations where potentially important phenomenon had developed that might serve as a model for others attempting to promote similar social change. Most interviews were taped; notes and tapes were reviewed several times during the process. Different methods, data sources and investigators contributed to the triangulation of the data and therefore enhanced its trustworthiness.

In the analysis, I used non-cross-sectional and cross-sectional models looking for common and consistent factors in the four case studies, as well as particular factors in each context. The original coding of the data was based on the original research questions. A second coding permitted me to re-organize and re-label the data. This subsequently led to new, important and unanticipated interpretations.

I chose to use the second coding system of loose and flexible groupings of data as unfinished resources. I constantly re-examined the research questions, the original coding of responses and respondents' quotes to maintain the integrity of the original data source. At the same time I explored potential new linkages and connections across the four case studies. This approach enhanced the validity of explanations, perceptions and conclusions. Over the course of the 10-month study, political decisions were made that dramatically affected the early learning environment in BC and other parts of Canada. The study was completed in a conflicting climate of, on one hand, positive action on the part of many school-based educators to implement new early learning programs and, on the other hand, a climate of fear and professional concern among early learning professionals. It is my hope that the findings in Chapters 4 and 5 of this study will enhance understanding among those dedicated to improving the lives of our youngest children.

CHAPTER 4

Results and Discussion

This chapter will present the results of the research questions for each of the four case studies. Each study begins with a brief description of the community. Results are organized according to the non-cross-sectional coding described in Chapter 3. Due to the disparate lengths of time the different communities have been involved in intersectoral coalition work, the headings are different for each study.

In the first three case studies, only eight to 15 coalition members were interviewed. This posed a problem for the promise of anonymity; for this reason, all respondents are quoted with a letter, number and as being a personal communication. The letter represents the first letter of the community in question; each person was assigned a number that can be traced back to the original tapes. B3 personal communication, for example, represents an interview from Boundary, respondent number 3. When pertinent, and when I was able to maintain anonymity, I provided a reference to the role of the respondent in the accompanying text.

The Boundary (Grand Forks) Community: Case Study 1

History and Evolution

Background

The Boundary area has a population of over 12,000. Approximately 70% of the residents are identified as rural, while 4.2% of the population identify themselves as

Aboriginal. The nine schools enrol over 1,000 students with 30 or more students identified as having special needs. The enrolment has been declining due to population movement following a weak industrial base. The fiscal challenge for the school district has been how to keep small, rural schools open—considered a high priority—while still offering a wide range of services. A community member commented:

I feel so proud of our district that it values its little schools and sincerely believes that those schools are the heart of the community. It's been a lot of work and a long hard road for our district not to just take the easy way out by closing schools and saving money—they have really remained committed to the notion that schools in our community have to play a pivotal role in the development of the community. Other districts are closing their schools: Not us! We have 42 students in one small school and 48 students in another, and we are proud of it! (B 3, personal communication, October 2006)

The district adopted a four-day school week in an effort to make savings and, at the same time, collaborated with other agencies to enhance services to families.

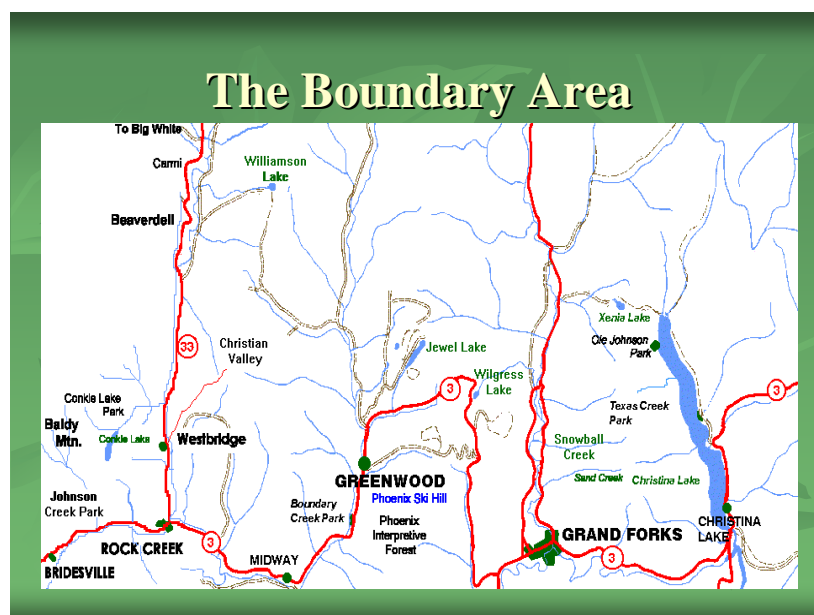


Figure 5. Boundary SD 51: Map of Boundary Region

Staff reported to me that in 1998, a study commissioned by the Ministry of Children and Families (MCFD) indicated that the Boundary region suffered from a lack of geographic identity—being neither part of the Kootenay or Okanagan regions—and as a result had not been well served by either. (We were unable to locate the study itself but it was validated by several respondents.) The study concluded that program funding was significantly lower than in more centrally located, politically represented communities. The downturn in the lumber industry resulted in massive job loss and difficult socio-economic living conditions for those remaining in the community, which came as no surprise to the Boundary intersectoral community coalition.

The following statement from a community member illustrated the frustration and the determination that resulted from political indecision, economic downturn and a passionate commitment to the region:

We are really lucky because over the years we have been tossed between two other regions almost like a foster child and it has caused us to say if anything is going to happen for kids in our community it is going to have to come from us. We can't depend on initiatives that are being introduced in other regions. We have this analogy about a dynamic that goes on here that we would rather "pee on all the bushes" on our side of the boundary. We take ownership of our kids and we want to be involved in [the] decision-making that happens and we want to be agents for change to make our community and the systems within our community better for our kids. So when you look at resiliency some communities who haven't had the experience that we have had don't become resilient because they

haven't had to. But we became resilient because it was a simple fact that we couldn't count on anybody else to take care of our area. (B 4, personal communication, October 2006)

Evolution of the Boundary Coalition

For approximately 17 years, the efforts to serve the families of Boundary and ease the socio-economic challenges faced by the community have been led by a coalition of *The Boundary Child and Youth Committee (CYC)* whose mandate has been to pursue programs and services that strengthen and enhance the social fabric of the community and the well-being of children. Since 2001, the community has held three major events to plan for this change in services:

1. *A Collaborative Workshop* of CYC, Ministry of Children and Families management, school district personnel and elected officials;
2. *A Vibrant Communities Forum* that included 250 community members in a strategic visioning process; and
3. *An East Boundary Joint Planning Committee* to continue public comment and discussion. Approximately seven years ago, this committee established a goal and wrote a proposal to secure government funding to develop and document a model to achieve this goal.

The coalition Child and Youth Committee (CYC) comprised the Ministry of Children and Families (MCFD), Boundary Family and Individual Services Society (BFISS), Public Health (PH), Boundary Childcare Resource and Referral (CCRR) and Boundary School District (SD51). CYC developed a model that would be innovative, consolidated, comprehensive and community-based. The purpose was to promote

capacity building, strengthen resiliency, and empower families and the community to care for their children. It proposed a transparent, accountable and responsive service-delivery model, one that capitalizes on the use of existing capital assets. It set out to maximize partnerships and promote excellence in its service.

It was clear in all the interviews that respectful relationships were the reason for the success of the coalition. An interagency staff member described the reason for the coalition's success:

Our coalition works because people treat each other with respect; we work together with trust. If we say we are going to do something, we follow through. There is the courage to ask difficult questions; we can always ask each other if there is a better way; we are doing things that make sense. Egos get checked at the door so if we sit down together we are honest, blunt, we are fair, considerate but we are not going to be offended if we challenge each other. Because of the relationships and trust, generally there is a freedom to share in a respectful way the specific information about families. That does not happen unless you have relationship confidentiality. I think too often confidentiality issues get raised and used in a way that gets in the way of good service to families. So I don't use the word confidentiality without using the word integrity. You have to believe when you share something that it is going to get handled and managed in a respectful way for everyone. (B 2, personal communication, October 2006)

Coalition members tell a legendary story about the day they decided to impose themselves on a meeting with government officials in Trail. They considered it the only opportunity to present their proposal. The story (told by many during my visit) described

the blizzard they awoke to on the morning of the meeting. The road conditions between Boundary and Trail were so treacherous that no sensible local citizen would choose to travel but the committee was determined to get there, regardless. Not only was the weather a problem, but also the equally tenacious attitude of the politicians they were to meet. Faced with plane cancellations in Vancouver, they drove from Vancouver to Trail in the blizzard. The result was a meeting that would change the face of services to families in the Boundary region.

This fortuitous meeting, as the story goes, was one in which the vision was described and the needs were recognized. The politicians made a decision to advocate for the proposal to provide a model for other communities to consider. As a result, a \$50,000 start-up grant was secured for consulting services to develop the model, and the real work began. In 2001, the original coalition (CYC), which continued with its broader mandate, established a new entity to implement the vision of the new pilot, *Boundary Integrated Services Model* BISM (which is a sub-group of CYC). All members sit at the CYC table.

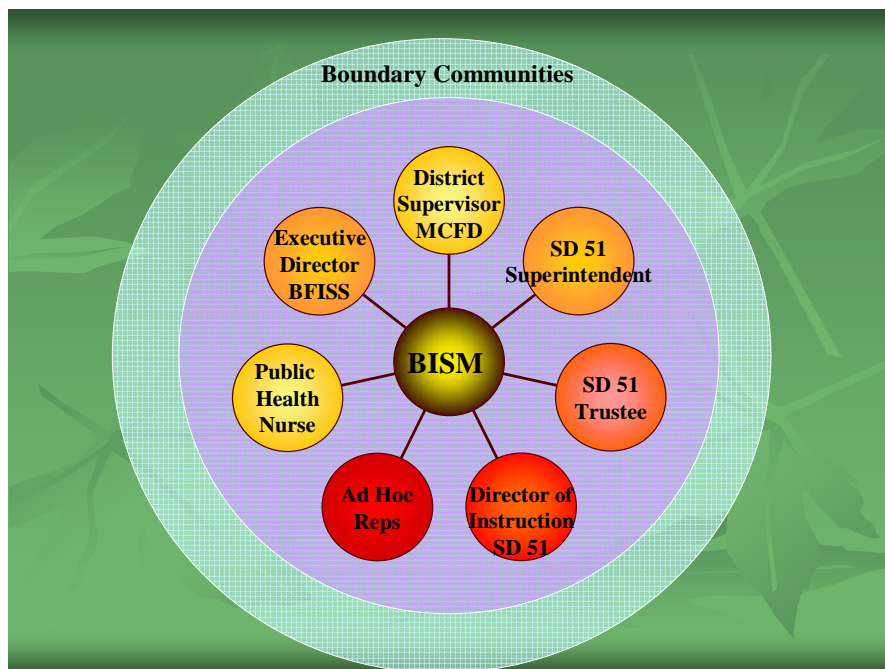


Figure 6. Boundary Integrated Services (BISM) Coalition

Figure 6 shows the community groups represented on BISM. The representation on the BISM committee continues to grow. Since the original committee was struck, new relationships have been established with the city and municipalities, and other community groups. All are welcome at the table.

Those who sit on the sub-committee (BISM) tell a similar story about the importance of relationships in their success:

The people who sit around the table are the people who desire the betterment of the community for children and families. The beauty of the BISM committee is that people who are in powerful decision-making positions in the community sit around that table. We are honest with each other but are very willing to challenge each other. What is special about our committee is that it is about all youth in our community. While we know that the early years are incredibly important, we really are concerned about all children. Within all of our organizations, we have the brainpower; we have the passions of the people that are involved so it's really fertile ground to do community development. (B 3, personal communication, October 2006)

Pride in Achievements

As our research team entered the town of Grand Forks, we were temporarily disoriented and drove through the village twice to find our destination. Our first impression of the village became a lasting one. The day we left, we purposely retraced our steps to check our perceptions and they were confirmed. This town cared and signage everywhere indicated that youth were a top priority. To the left and right were signs that

announced events, welcomed special interest groups, invited drop-ins, championed causes, challenged values and warmed our hearts. Playgrounds beckoned and schools looked friendly. We were introduced to a village that raises its children with care. A Family Centre staff member described the vision:

One of our dreams is to use the idea that this is the best place in British Columbia to raise your children. It has a good educational system, there is a really good childcare system, there are all kinds of services no matter what you need—and then use it as an economic driver for the community—so that people are watching us here because it is a good place to raise a family. One of the real successes here is that we have people sitting on the different boards in the community who come from different sectors. So we have educators who sit on community boards and vice versa; so there is always someone who understands multiple issues on the boards—there is a knowledge base on every board about the importance of education. (B 4, personal communication, October 2006)

Family centres.

In 2003, in the first major stage of implementing their new vision, BISM partners developed school-based Family Centres in four schools in their communities (Beaverdell, Rock Creek, Greenwood, and Midway), and established a hub or centre in Grand Forks at the Glanville Centre. A fifth site at Christina Lake was added in 2004.

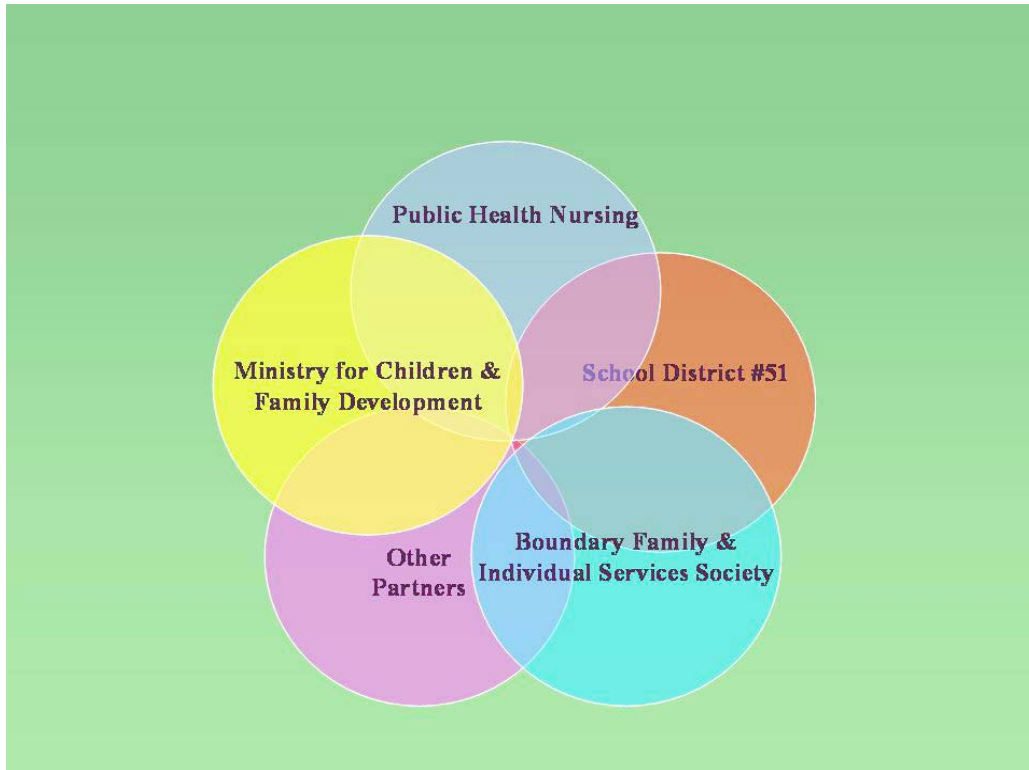


Figure 7. Centralized Services at the Family Centres

One of the things that is really important is that we have branded ourselves as the Boundary Family Centre and that is who we are regardless of which hat each agency is wearing. The people that use our services could[n't] care less [about] what we are called as individual organizations but they do know they go to the Boundary Family Centre for service – in spite of the fact that administratively we have contracts and mandates that are separate. (B 3, personal communication, October 2006)

Initially, the Family Centre model used locally trained facilitators to maintain the family drop-in program in each community. Over time, however, this resulted in inconsistencies in the programs. This reduced the impact of consistent service delivery to

the community as a whole, so the model was modified to employ a coordinator of the Family Centres, which strengthened the relationship between the centres and the elementary school in which it was housed, as well as improving leadership and coordination at each site.

The Family Centres:

- Provide place/programs designed to meet the social determinants of health, for example, by providing food and clothing exchanges for families living in poverty;
- Help reduce isolation and provide a safety zone for high- and low-resourced families;
- Increase opportunities for families to connect to key service providers/resources and access information;
- Acknowledge and respond to community-by-community feedback specifically requesting more access time at each Family Centre (including both structured programming and drop-in);
- Provide neutral space in which to build a sense of community and relationships with other families and children;
- Provide information about topics such as breastfeeding, immunization, dangers during pregnancy; and
- Provide space that encourages relationship building between community and school staff. (Vancouver Foundation Final Report, 2006)

During the visits, many professionals described the advantages of the integrated settings and the ease with which they can link services to families:

When the Glanville Centre was established, a number of the services from downtown moved to Glanville Centre, most of them to do with early learning—early intervention, pregnancy outreach, infant development and the public health nurses. So many programs operate through them that is now so easy to be connected in the community, then if I am dealing with school-aged children I can let their teachers know what is going on in the community as well that might be relevant to the school-aged kids. (B 1, personal communication, October 2006)

“By creating the Family Centres, it’s like we created a whole bunch of baseball fields and now there are games going on all over town” (B 3, personal communication, October 2006).



Figure 8. Family Centre Activities

Activities are managed and scheduled by the Family Centre coordinator at all sites for many services, including baby clinics, family or women's support and counselling services, early childhood development programming, mental health services, abuse-related programs, pregnancy-outreach programs, parenting programs, assessments and screening activities, meetings of related groups, and special events. While professionals are engaged with parents or caregivers, the coordinator often provides stimulating care programs for the children. She compiles monthly statistics of the usage of various programs, updates inventory, delivers supplies and responds to new needs. She is also responsible for the marketing of the centres, continually raising awareness of services and attempting to reach families that are difficult to access.

The Family Centres are also open to community initiatives, as described by a service-provider:

We are working with a mom who has twins, so out of everyone getting together she has decided she wants to start a twinning group that will be meeting in the Family Centre. She has the security code to the building and she is talking about bringing the Public Health Nurse to talk. Families are stakeholders too so they have the opportunity to choose to use the Family Centre for something that maybe they have created themselves, so it becomes less about the organization and more about initiatives that come from the community and the citizens of the community. (B 3, personal communication, October 2006)

While it was clear that the Family Centres are a source of great pride in the community as infrastructure that binds multiple services together and bonds community

members with service-providers, it was clear that many other sources of pride were integral to the whole.

Funding.

While the coalition, like many others, has had to struggle to fund services for families—applying for multiple grants, approaching numerous agencies, defending itself to government bureaucracies and despairing over unmet family needs, it has created a solution to sustain its vision. The idea was generated in a meeting by the question: “How do we ensure the stability of this community to build social capital for our families?”

We approached a group of 65- to 70-year-old leaders in this community and talked about our data—hungry kids and desperate single parents—the result was, over time, the Phoenix Foundation. It has over a million dollars in assets and has the capacity to intervene in areas of need. The city contributed \$100,000; the Vancouver Foundation provided a start-up grant and assisted in developing the constitution. At the time of the visit, three areas in Boundary were establishing offshoots of the Foundation predicated on the principles established by the Phoenix Foundation. The money grows at a rate of 3.5 to 4% in interest; the interest is removed and saved in perpetuity. The original capital can be used as needed in the community. The Foundation is presently in discussion with the city about the city’s contributing \$100,000 annually, which would generate 40K per year to be used by the city or others. The funds have been used for health-screening programs, playgrounds, a nutrition program in all schools and a kitchen for a Family Centre. (B 8, personal communication, October 2006)

While the Phoenix Foundation plays a key role in meeting emerging needs, interviewees regularly commented on the fragility of the system as it struggles to patch together disparate funding sources, such as those received from various government ministries, to cover the operational costs of the Family Centres. While grateful for any financial contributions, core funding would secure the base of the structure while permitting the foundation to focus its attention on additional programming and community/family capacity building.

Supporting social needs through networks of relationships.

A school administrator described the coalition as *The Little Engine That Could* (Piper, 1930). He described the common belief held by the coalition and the people who work on its behalf—one of believing, no matter what the odds, any barrier was surmountable with a bit of hard work. “I think I can-I think I can” became “I thought I could” routinely in his stories. The principal explained:

Children can’t learn without their eyes, their ears and food. We contracted with a former public health nurse to screen our kids. Out of 382 kids, 32 had vision referrals at the end of it One of our Public Health nurses came into a room and a little boy with glasses came running across the room, threw his arms around her, and gave her a big hug. He said, “I didn’t realize other people could see like this.”
(B 6, personal communication, October 2006)

The district conducted a survey, which revealed that over 200 children (12% of the school district population) were attending school with marginal and/or inadequate nutrition levels. As a result, the school district established a program to work with the

Phoenix Foundation, other non-profit organizations and service clubs to eliminate hunger in the schools through nutritious breakfasts in all schools and lunches where necessary.

During the interviews, we documented (in almost every interview) a concern for the needs of every child and every family and a determination to be watchful for signs that help was needed. A Family Centre staff member reported:

Today we had a mom come in and she met with one of the public health nurses; she is way over on the scale of the maternal depression; she can't afford to get the medication but she has little kids at home so the Public Health Nurse came to me and said, "What can we do to help this mom?" So we cooked up a scheme together to give her food vouchers for [a local food chain] and then she can use her food vouchers to purchase the prescription in the [local food chain] premises. So I had a way that I could do that but the Public Health Nurse didn't have access to the food vouchers. It is because we are integrated and so connected that we can support each other and therefore support our families. Because of this, we can better meet the needs of our community. (B 3, personal communication, October 2006)

Many respondents described this capacity for networking as playing a pivotal role in their ability to be effective. They explained:

Having a Family Center so close just makes it wonderful for me. Instead of picking up the phone and calling the Public Health nurse and then calling the physiotherapist, I just can take my coffee cup, wander over, sit down and chat with each one of them about my cases. We talk to each other more and are more aware of what each other does. Three of us work together as professionals—the

speech therapist, Public Health nurse and physiotherapist We have what we call “floor sessions” where all of us are in the room at the same time to meet the special-needs children so that whatever we see, we can refer to the other person immediately and we also go on home visits together now. (B 1, personal communication, October 2006)

Several of the respondents described how they fulfill their responsibilities to their primary employer and, at the same time, juggle those responsibilities with what they see as a high priority that is not necessarily part of their job descriptions—collaborating within the coalition. For some it was described as conflictual, for others it was considered essential.

My primary job as a supervisor is to fulfill my mandate for MCFD—adoptions, foster care, abuse situations and all that goes with it. However, my belief system is that the more I collaborate with other services in the community, like schools, the better job I can do of fulfilling my own job. (B 2, personal communication, October 2006)

Many respondents described the power of the informal networks that play an important role in the coalitions.

Each person at our table brings their own network to the table—our Trustee doesn't just come with the school district hat; she is on Special Olympics and has many other areas of interest. So the community network that sits around the table is bigger than the 6 or 7 individuals, because they are connected to a lot of other parts of the community. The different parts of the network bring different things to the table: it might be financial support, it might be social support, it might be

connections to politics, it might be church support, or it could be business, such as Rotary. What we are talking about here is bringing the influence of the community to the table. All the different parts of the community have their own unique influences and together are very powerful. (B 8, personal communication, October 2006)

School district involvement.

Led by the former superintendent, the school district has always played a significant role in community planning throughout the 17-year history of the Child and Youth Committee. When the vision of the Family Centres was introduced as the school-based infrastructure through which to deliver services, it was inevitable that the school district would become a key player in the planning and implementation of all services. It had the responsibility to manage, in collaboration with other agencies, the facilities that became the delivery structure for services. A school district administrator described the search to find new ways to work together as of paramount importance:

The school district has definitively brought a new view to all of this—it is a broader view. If you take a narrow view of your facilities and what you can or cannot do for your partners, then you can't make things better for kids. We have learned to do things in the new way. We will send our maintenance people to help out in someone else's facility; we will change our security systems in schools so that the community can use them more easily. We partnered with one of the community groups related to technology; we changed our parking rules to suit the community; we provide people with used computers—we might get paid a nominal sum but the point is we are partners and working together. We do things

like that to keep it all going and we don't draw lines and say that is your problem.

We don't put blocks in their way. (B 7, personal communication, October 2006)

One of the school principals described how, although his own role had not changed significantly, the school integration with Family Centres has enhanced his effectiveness. He noted:

As a principal, the big benefit of all of this to me is that I am more aware of what is available to our children and our families—I don't provide it myself but I know what it is and where to go get it when I see a need. (B 9, personal communication, October 2006)

Leadership.

The concept of *shared leadership* was apparent throughout the visit and at many layers in the system. The various principals' leadership was virtually autonomous at the school level with the exception of the Family Centre, where it appeared that the different entities each provided leadership for their teams and merged expertise in a collaborative role. The same kind of collaborative environment was described as being pervasive at both committee levels—CYC (Child and Youth Committee) and BISM (Boundary Integrated Services Model). Many perceived a former superintendent to be the driving force behind the vision for the community. He was described as a tenacious, bright, committed, professional leader who, for 17 years, had steered the vision to its fulfillment—never wavering, never giving up no matter the obstacles that were encountered. He was described as fearless, always changing course to manage the situation. He had the capacity to sustain confidence in the Board of Education and the community, thereby providing the stability necessary for shared leadership. He called his

coalition members “fellow conspirators,” referring to the well-known book *The Aquarian Conspiracy* by Ferguson (1980).

When he retired, people felt concern but it has proven to be groundless. He made considerable effort to provide for succession by coaching and supporting his successor before and after his departure. Coalition members described a smooth transition due, in large part, to the attitude of his replacement, who sees as his responsibility the sustaining of the established culture and evolving developments. Collaborative leadership continues to thrive in the various committees and working groups, according to all respondents. One committee member explained: “The previous superintendent has retired but he continues to be significant in all of this. He has taken a role in the Phoenix Foundation; he is on several other local committees; we are capitalizing on his knowledge base; we are building on his dream; he had the vision” (B 8, personal communication, October 2006).

The use of hard data for sound decision-making.

At my first interview, I was introduced to a wealth of hard data about environmental and social circumstances in the region. The data documented key indicators such as vision, dental and hearing screenings; literacy programs; childcare spaces; Aboriginal population needs; census data; EDI (Early Development Instrument) results; poverty, education levels and income assistance data; socialization issues; incidences of violence and the use of community-sponsored events and facilities. The data are used for many reasons, but primarily to establish the determination of need and the establishment of services in each school, supported by Community Links Funding.

Each school gathers data on these key indicators to determine the number and percentage of children at risk. Then a target topic or goal is established, and a date set for the anticipated achievement of the goal. Next, the strategy, anticipated outcomes and indicators of success are determined. Community Links funding is assigned and results are reviewed on an annual basis.

For example, one school in the report has families with an average income 20 to 50% below the provincial average with 25% of children coming from single-parent families, 26% of children from households on income assistance and 22.6% of the community with less than grade 12 education. In spite of these statistics, the district is able to report that the school enjoys one of the highest achievement rates in the province and minimal risk according to the EDI assessment. Members of the coalition attribute this to numerous interventions implemented over the past 10 years. In another school, using the same process of data collection, it has been documented that the number of students not meeting expectations in BC Performance Standards has been reduced by 15% in both reading and numeracy (from 30%) and the number of speech/language referrals has been reduced by 2% (Community Links Allocation Report, 2004).

The following statement by a principal illustrates the extent of the commitment to using data as a driving force in the school's work. He noted, "Our goal is to have every child leaving grade 3 being socially, emotionally and academically equipped and all those pieces in place. As a staff we sit down and conscientiously make decisions to deploy our resources to that end" (B 9, personal communication, October 2006). Another principal noted:

We were one of the first districts in the province to embrace the EDI (Early Development Instrument) data and have implemented it every year. We have tied it to socio-economic data and programs and we found significant trends. We held clinics in all Family Centres and looked at literacy programs, childcare spaces and all other available data in order to decide how to apply resources properly. And it's working! Our EDI results and our other improved data support this claim. For example, in the Language and Cognitive areas the percentage of children deemed vulnerable dropped significantly between Cycle 1 and 2—from 13.2% to 3.6% in West Boundary and from 10.2% to 6.1% in East Boundary—highest in the region. (B 6, personal communication, October 2006).

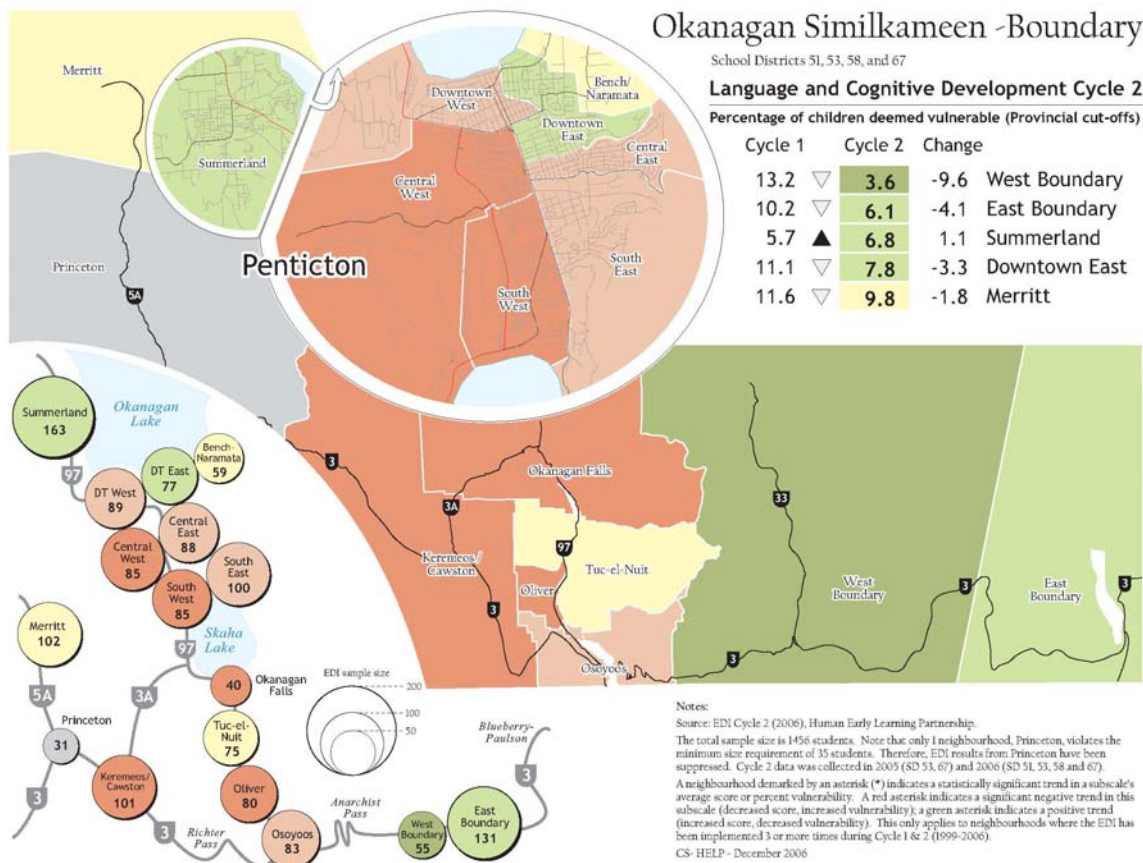


Figure 9. EDI Map of Boundary Region

A principal commented:

We really wanted to be one of the Ministry's first pilot sites [Strong Start drop-in centres] but our EDI results worked against us because they are becoming too good When I talk to teachers who have taught here for 25 years, they tell me that 25 years ago, kids came into the system challenged and they stayed that way all the way through high school; they are telling me that now it is different. Kids are coming in challenged but they don't stay in that bullet-proof environment. With all the supports we have in place we can actually change that direction for the child if we get to them early enough in those primary years—and that is the community wrap-around effect on these kids. A lot of our children are entering grade 4 with a greater chance of school success. (B 9, personal communication, October 2006)

Another school administrator described the situation:

It is like sitting in a think tank. You look at all your data and say what is going right and what is going wrong; where do we need to intervene? One person says, "I have personnel time" and someone else says they have some money. For example, two of the agencies didn't have money to pay for a counsellor so the school district paid for it—that kind of cooperation. When you take the school out of the community, you kill the community. (B 6, personal communication, October 2006)

Challenges and Opportunities

While almost all respondents spoke about progress, pride and multiple achievements that occurred over time, there was a palpable sense of urgency because of

family and youth needs that were unmet, and the knowledge that there were still untried solutions and opportunities to make an even greater difference.

Schools and integration of ECD (Early Child Development).

While national organizations such as the CECD (Council for Early Child Development) advocate schools as Family Centres with co-located services, it also proposes that offerings should include universal access to full-day, all-day care for young children. This is a goal that many in the Boundary coalition support and is perhaps one of the next steps to be pursued. One issue that was discussed in the interviews was the tension between the Early Childhood Educators, the coalition's goals and the schools as community centres. A member of the committee explained:

We have resisted having childcare facilities in our Family Centers at this point; there are licensing problems in terms of adapting the facilities and we also have difficulty attracting the proper ECE credentials. There is tension among some care providers who are barely making a living and may feel that the Family Centers are providing competition, but if you actually examine the facts that is not the case.

(B 4, personal communication, October 2006)

Bringing the ECD community into schools is not always easy because some schools have space but some want to maintain the space for enriched K to 12 activities. Other problems include the training of school personnel in ECD. Licensing guidelines are not intended for school sites. Facility renovation is costly and transportation issues are complex in rural communities. One consideration is that existing ECE operations could be put out of business. Some people believe that it is inevitable that children will be drawn into the Family Centres permanently in order to accommodate early learning needs

and complete the vision. Discussions are being re-initiated to meet all parties' best interests.

Government services.

I was told about the remarkable cooperation of individual managers in government who understood the vision and were able to modify established practices to implement it, beginning with the blizzard and the MLAs (Members of the Legislative Assembly) when the vision was founded. In contrast, interviewees were frustrated with the inflexibility of the top-down, multi-ministry silo approach to funding, which does not facilitate an integrated-services approach. Government managers change regularly and government reorganizes. Funding is inconsistent and new bureaucrats re-enforce old rules that block progress. Local boundaries are changed and the coalition feels as though it is starting over. A Committee member noted:

I have a difficult time about the discussion about government. I don't care who is in power. We have chosen this course in our community. When someone starts talking about "We could influence this government" or "Let's demonstrate," whatever! It doesn't matter. What's right is right. I see a teenager who is thinking about killing himself. He doesn't believe there are five adults that care what is happening to him. It is that basic. So are we going to wait for government to decide to do something better? (B 5, personal communication, October 2006)

Many described the time it took to write and submit often-unsuccessful grant applications to start new projects. At the same time, it seemed worthwhile because the window of opportunity sometimes opened more widely as a result. A particular frustration was mounting government demands on schools for increased accountability. School

administrators—while considering the early learning initiative to be a high priority—encounter increasing pressure just to keep up with regular school business K to 12.

Benefits to children and families.

There is no debate in Boundary over whether their programs are making a difference. An effort has been made to maintain an extensive data collection. I had an opportunity to study the data, which reveal for example that:

- EDI scores have improved so much that the district no longer qualifies for special funding and the scores no longer meet the expectation for a community in difficult socio-economic circumstances;
- Surveys demonstrate that fewer children come to school hungry as a result of the district-wide nutrition program;
- After the community-wide screening for hearing and vision referrals, the numbers of referrals dropped by half the following year;
- Staff development programs and district initiatives have sensitized staff about what to be watchful for and who to report to in terms of social needs;
- The district has established six programs that cater to the unique educational and social needs of Aboriginal children; Aboriginal achievement and graduation rates are among the best in the province; and
- All schools engage in an intensive data gathering process to establish a baseline for key indicators, then plan target goals, strategies, anticipated outcomes and indicators of success. These are compared annually to determine funding allocations.

Even though all coalition members agree that progress is being made, the following comment from a principal reveals that the range of problems in schools presents a constant challenge for school staff. The statement shows that the need to reach families earlier is of paramount importance. He stated:

The parents of our young children are not keeping the best one home. They are in fact sending us the best they have—we are finding the range or the spectrum of challenges that are coming at us varies from incredibly high to unbelievably adapted children ready to take on the world. But that range is spreading every year. We are seeing greater and greater challenged kids and more of them.

However, we feel at the same time, especially in our primary classes, that there is greater and greater support for those kids. We are doing a better job with the resources we have and the community and what goes on in the Family Centers is getting better and better every year. (B 9, personal communication, October 2006)

I left my meeting with him with the perception that as long as one child was hungry, or one youth felt estranged, or one family might not be kept together, the coalition and the community would think it had not yet achieved its purpose. The principal continued:

The beautiful thing about this little community is that for those kids who come into our schools and into our programs, there are people who quietly work in this community to make sure that every child is engaged and every child is taken care of. Who knows where the money came from? No one takes credit but that happens time and time again for kids in need. It is very common at Christmas time for me to get a call: “We are putting together baskets for so and so ... what

would you suggest?” You see it officially in the programs that you are looking at, but in actual fact it is the grassroots to this whole town. It is almost invisible but it is powerful. (B 9, personal communication, October 2006)

The Port Alberni Community: Case Study 2

History and Evolution

Background

Port Alberni has a population of fewer than 20,000 residents. In the late 1950s, it was a booming logging centre and paper-product town. In the past two decades, the town has experienced the demise of much of the pulp and paper industry and, at the same time, has successfully redefined its economic base. Port Alberni and the pastoral Alberni Valley have become gateways to the West Coast of Vancouver Island. With the increased popularity of Pacific Rim National Park, Barkley and Clayoquot Sounds, and the excellent sport fishing available, an increasing number of visitors are using their vacations in Port Alberni to take day trips to a variety of west coast locations.



Figure 10. Alberni Region

Evolution of the Port Alberni coalition

The school district includes Ucluelet and Tofino on the West Coast of Vancouver Island. Port Alberni and the West Coast each have their own intersectoral coalitions. This study includes only Port Alberni. The school population dropped along with the economic circumstances. In the past decade, a number of small schools were closed and one was redesigned to offer co-located services to address the needs of preschool children (the Kiwanis Centre). Although proposals were made to maintain centralized and intersectoral services at another school site, economic issues overcame the plans to maintain the site as a centre for young children and co-located services and the school was subsequently closed. In 1990, the Childcare Planning Committee, which included a number of different community groups, provided leadership to groups in the community wanting to plan for opportunities for young children. It played an important role in determining needs, establishing new centres and initiating advocacy groups. In addition, the CYC (Child and Youth Committee) played an important role in the genesis of services to children and youth. It met monthly and was divided into three age-range cohorts – zero to six subcommittee, six to twelve subcommittee, and youth. Much of the focus was on the school-aged children even though, at times, it seemed as though that group was over-subscribed in terms of services. While the accomplishments of these groups were warmly acknowledged by community members a cohesive plan to move forward in an integrated way was lacking, due in part to a lack of formal coordination. The introduction of the provincial Make Children First initiative 11 years ago modified their initial work, financed it and became the working model for the network today. The new role of coordinator was credited as being a major factor in its success.

We really floundered. We had no paid coordination support and that is what drives it. We have learned that you have to have a paid coordinator. Now with the Make Children First Network we do have a paid coordinator – that’s what makes it work. (PA 2, personal communication, December 2006)

(Note: While the provincial organization decided to change its name from Make Children First to Children First, the Port Alberni Coalition decided to maintain the original name and add the word Network to describe themselves.)

When asked to describe the current coalition, the spontaneous response was “It’s a room full of the most incredible people you would ever want to meet—in a nutshell! And it has taken time to build that. Everybody feels privileged to be a part of it” (PA 3, personal communication, December 2006). The coalition comprises approximately 20 individuals who represent over 12 different agencies. Coalition members meet monthly with an open agenda; different representatives of organizations routinely attend. New members are always welcome. It is common for members to invite interested community members and new organizations independently. Regular attendees include:

North Island College – ECE	Infant Development program
Success by 6	Child & Youth Mental Health
Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance	Supported Child Development
Vancouver Island Health Authority (Audiology, nursing, dental, nutrition, family support)	School District #70 (Early Childhood Liaison, School Trustee, Kindergarten Teacher, Principal)
ECEBC – Port Alberni chapter	Outreach Therapy
Taatneesis Day Care and Preschool	Kiwanis Hilton Centre
City of Port Alberni (City councillor, Parks and Recreation)	Ministry of Children and Family Development

Alberni Valley Community School	Alberni Valley Child Care Society
Hummingbird Child Care Society	Nuuchahlulth Nursing & Infant Development
Pacific Care	Other Community Partners

Figure 11. Regular Members at the Coalition Table

While many members regularly attend all meetings, membership is open to all community groups and to individual community members who have an interest and want to participate or volunteer; some attend only for specific purposes or presentations. A member explained:

Every time that you add a new partner it is a new learning process – to work with the partner to see where they fit, or maybe they already know where they fit with us, but everybody is always welcome and that is what is best. (PA 2, personal communication, December 2006)

A high-performing team.

I attended a coalition meeting for a morning; this experience singled out the Port Alberni coalition as being unique from many others. From the moment people began to drift into the room there was a sense of fellowship, mutual respect and affection that I had previously witnessed in only the most “high-performing teams” and this phenomenon dominated the answers to my questions in the interviews. On the topic of high-performing teams, Katzenbach and Smith (1993) noted:

Behind high-performance teams lies a story of commitment. Like any real team, a high-performance team must have a small number of people with the required skills, purpose, goals, approach and accountability described in our working definition [of teams]. What sets apart high-performance teams, however, is the

degree of commitment; particularly how deeply committed the members are to one another. Such commitments go well beyond civility and teamwork. Each genuinely helps the others to achieve both personal and professional goals. Furthermore, such commitments extend beyond company activities and even beyond the team itself not insignificantly, high-performance teams seem to have a better developed sense of humour and more fun. (p. 65)

Katzenbach and Smith could well have been describing the Port Alberni coalition. The meeting began with a tempting spread of fresh baking and coffee (a task that is ritually undertaken by a renowned retired teacher and hobby chef) while greetings, laughter and hugs filled the room.

An atmosphere of appreciation permeated the opening comments in the meeting, which featured personal sharing and was regarded by all interviewed as a necessary base upon which to build professional discussions. The mood in the room was electrified by the fact that Port Alberni had suffered one of its most damaging hurricane-force storms the night before; concern for the safety of each other's families was clearly paramount. The agenda included the introduction of new members, a review of the purposes of the strategic plan, updates, business follow-up, reports of working groups, planning for upcoming events and meetings and discussion of grant opportunities. What set this meeting apart from many others I attend (outside of the terms of this study) was the richness of the processes used by the co-facilitators to generate ideas, discussions and opinions. Strategies included big-picture time, a fishbowl activity, and a photo share in which members brought a childhood photo and played a guessing game. All members of the group enthusiastically and trustingly placed themselves in the hands of the facilitators

even when the unfolding process was a mystery to them. Joy and celebration were evident throughout the meeting.

The evaluation of the meeting, in answer to the question “What went well?”, named the active processes that engaged participants in meaningful discussion, planning and decision making as a powerful way to plan cooperatively. Group processes were also identified as an engaging way to enhance group and individual understanding. Members handled differences of opinion well. As one person described it:

It is a safe place to do this kind of work. You know you can go there and disagree and you are not seen as the bad guy. We have what we call the devil’s pitchfork and we are allowed to say at the meetings, “I am just holding up the devil’s fork.” We have learned how important it is to consider all the different viewpoints. (PA 2, personal communication, December 2006)

Employer support for the coalition.

Another feature that members of the coalition believed to be unique was the way employers have demonstrated support for the vision and work of the coalition, particularly the support needed for the *Here We Come* fairs. A committee member noted:

Sometimes we were having difficulty getting all service providers to the table (like the optician, for instance). When VIHA (Vancouver Island Health Authority) became aware of that, they actually changed their people’s working hours so that they could be available to come to our meetings and our events. A lot of people, rather than starting at 9:00 in the morning would start at 11:00; then they would have an extended day ... that means they are giving us volunteer time, basically. I think that the first year it was over 600 volunteer hours and paid time. Once the

administrators saw how important it was they made changes to work schedules so that people weren't having to volunteer their hours all the time. (PA 8, personal communication, December 2006)

The "network function" and funding.

The Port Alberni coalition calls itself the Make Children First Network. The word *network* is defined as "a group of people who exchange information, contacts, or experience for professional or social purposes" (Oxford, 1995). Their implementation of this concept is sophisticated, unique and a reflection of the degree of trust and commitment among members. They think, act and plan as a collective. All members come to the table with needs, issues and plans. Views are aired and discussed at length, using group processes to illuminate topics in an objective way; the group goes to great lengths to ensure that everyone is heard; finally, consensus decisions are made based on one of their governing principles. A member explained:

We look at the impact of everything we are doing on everyone else.

There was a concern in our ECD community that if we offered services free, enrolment might drop in our daycares and preschools. There was a really interesting conversation that we had about this issue because it brought us an awareness that whatever we do will impact someone else or has the potential to impact someone else. So if we are a coalition, are we doing things together to benefit our community? We always need to ask that question. You might have the right to do it, we have the autonomy to do it, but we need to do it so it doesn't negatively affect other people. (PA 5, personal communication, December 2006)

Even more remarkable is that the network applies this philosophy not only to its own region but also to external partners.

Everyone in our coalition sits in an equal chair. All coalitions work very hard to have fairness and equity represented at the table, and it wasn't there in the beginning. The coalition looks at anything coming into the community and analyzes how it is going to affect everybody instead of grabbing a pot of money and steamrolling over everybody else. Our coalition thinks beyond our own community. Thoughtful consideration is given to the other towns in our region and the other initiatives under way in our region in an effort to be supportive and inclusive. This *big picture* thinking is what we need in this province. (PA 7, personal communication, December 2006)

I observed this process in action, related to the budget-setting process—one of the most difficult decision-making processes for any committee. Each person brought a budget wish list. A process was designed that started with two people negotiating priorities between their two budgets; next they had to join another pair and negotiate priorities again. This exercise was repeated until the entire group was back together, having had many opportunities to debate needs and priorities. Throughout the process there was much laughter, passion and polite argument but the result was a consensus budget and a coalition of contented individuals. It was a remarkable process and provided, once again, the image of Katzenbach and Smith's description of the deep interpersonal commitment and trust of the high-performing team.

The coalition sees its responsibility not as a funding agency, but rather as a network that establishes connections in the community, taps the knowledge, resources

and needs in the community, then comes together to determine how the resources can be applied. When one agency at the table has a plan or a need in their organization, each party at the table considers it and suggests what they could do to support the partner whether in time, communication strategies, or resources—demonstrating a remarkable interdependence. A committee member provided an example:

Sometimes at our meetings, we ask for help. For instance, a lady at a recent meeting who was working with special-needs kids was worried that she wasn't reaching some of the kids. Suddenly all of us said, "Well look, next time you are having your group together send us some invitations and we know different kids we could invite." She wanted parents to come for parenting groups prior to kindergarten so we said, "Well give us the invitations and we will give them out at our kindergarten registration times." That was spur of the moment, but suddenly everybody at the table was helping them. (PA 8, personal communication, December 2006)

The network realized that outreach possibilities could enhance membership and influence.

We used to be focused on who's here at the table and who isn't here at the table but now we are coming to the realization that this group can be everywhere. Some of us can go to other people's tables and therefore further influence our work and theirs. That is a new realization for us. (PA 7, personal communication, December 2006)

The network sees itself as a catalyst. Last year its total budget was approximately \$45,000. most of which was applied to the facilitator's salary; the other major

expenditure was on a community calendar. The funding comes in the form of a contract with MCFD (Ministry of Children and Family Development). The network, therefore, has neither the capacity nor the desire to be a funding agency. Rather it sees itself as a communicator or connector, as described:

For example, a way that we built capacity for the ECE group was to help them pull together as a group and then form representation that could come to our table with expenses for substitutes by us as a meeting expense, so that they could come during the day. They will go back and share the information broadly with the people in their particular group. So for us, it is figuring out what we want and then figuring out creative ways to get there We had a parent focus group where we had what we called the treasure chest and we would pull out names of activities, names of service groups and ask the parent focus group, "Have you seen it? Have you heard about it? Do you know about it?" It was really positive the way the activity of the coalition supporting other agencies kept coming up as an awareness on the part of parents, even though they weren't aware of the direct involvement of the coalition—the catalyst nature of our coalition is what I am talking about. (PA 9, personal communication, December 2006)

The reference to parent focus groups is a good example of how the coalition has worked at implementing an outreach plan. I was told how many coalitions in the province work at getting parent representatives at the table; however, the Port Alberni group feels that parents are the constituent group and therefore cannot be represented by individuals at the table. As a result, they organized training in focus groups for a number of

facilitators and conducted focus groups in the community to determine how satisfied parents were with services and resources. The outcome was a better plan.

Leadership.

The leadership is technically provided by a dynamic half-time facilitator who is particularly skilled in the use of group-process skills.

Duties and responsibilities:

1. Promote community collaboration.
 - Establish and maintain regular communication with related committees, strengthening and broadening relationships with all sectors in the community;
 - Develop a work plan based on community input, direction from Island and provincial ECD Committees, and knowledge-based research;
 - Facilitate the implementation of the plan using community development strategies;
 - Build evaluation into the plan incorporating both short- and long-term outcomes; and
 - Provide evaluation feedback to the Make Children First Network to improve the planning cycle.

2. Build community commitment to support early child development.
 - Develop and incorporate a marketing strategy for the work of the Make Children First Network;
 - Work with community partners to raise community awareness regarding the importance of early child development in building community strengths; and
 - Advocate for early childhood issues in the interests of young children.

3. Participate in research.

- Identify existing resources and how they are accessed;
- Examine community research information (EDI, socio-economic, local knowledge, parent perspectives); and
- Develop the capacity to support the continued production and use of maps. These maps will include EDI results, federal, provincial and regional data, as well as local community asset maps.

4. Collaborate with other community ECD Initiatives on Vancouver Island.

- Share learnings and experiences.
- Share resources developed.

(PA 9, Personal Communication, December 2006)

This formal leadership model camouflages layers of leadership that are a critical component of the success of the coalition. Three prominent members at the coalition table are retired, highly skilled and committed individuals with career histories in the school system as teacher, school board chair, and principal. Members acknowledge that from their experience they provide a degree of wisdom on which the group relies. The facilitator relies on a small group of experienced members as a type of advisory board in-between the monthly meetings, as well as the group who helps her plan the meetings or provides advice as difficult issues arise. The careful planning was evident throughout the visit, particularly in the way the coalition is planning for succession. Because there is a possibility that the original facilitator may move on, the coalition has just introduced a co-facilitation model so that in such an event they will have a trained person on site to

assume a facilitation role. This careful foresight was evident in all the planning that I witnessed.

The facilitator's major responsibility, besides facilitating the monthly meetings, is to maintain close contact with the community. The facilitator noted:

I didn't see myself as an implementation manager. Really, what is important is my link with the community so we changed it to community facilitator. I have always been concerned about succession and I think that is a very important issue when it comes to talking about community coalitions because it needs to be owned by the community I describe myself as a conduit. I am a conduit for information, making sure that everyone is on the same page. I am a conduit for the agenda describing the direction that we are taking. My job is to channel the group in the right direction rather than design it. I don't participate much in the information-generating about where we are going. It is not my piece of work; this all has to be reflected in the participants in the room. (PA 9, personal communication, December 2006)

Other coalition members described her role the same way. "One of the major goals of our group coordinator is to make sure that all people are involved through processes" (PA 5, personal communication, December 2006).

School District Involvement and Support for the Coalition

Active school-district involvement in the coalition began only four years ago. The coalition approached the school district to ask for a partnership because they had discovered that in the period from 18 months old to kindergarten, they had lost track of children and they were concerned about that gap. At the same time, the district's interest

had been piqued by the Early Development Instrument (EDI) results, which identified clusters of vulnerable children throughout the community. The school superintendent began to attend coalition meetings as a priority because he felt he needed to show support by his personal presence. He was aware that he had the authority to make commitments about the use of facilities and other resources, and the ability to communicate the coalition's needs to the school board. At the time, the Ministry of Education had not announced its intention to incorporate the early learning agenda into the K to 12 mandate.

The school district decided to appoint and fund a part-time person to develop a program for preschoolers focused on literacy and numeracy. Initially the coordinator (Early Childhood Support and Preschool Intervention Support Teacher) worked only with three-year-olds' events, and then it was expanded to focus on 3 to 5-year-olds' events (as opposed to the 0 to 6 mandate of the coalition). Before the Ministry of Education introduced *Ready, Set Learn*, the Port Alberni school district was offering an innovative program called *Here We Come*; it has been very successful. They sent invitations to all three-year-olds inviting them to attend literacy and numeracy play events designed to be activities that parents can continue at home. Families are invited to attend once when the children are three, twice in the year they turn four and attend a kindergarten orientation when they turn five—for a total of four encounters with families before the children go to school. Of approximately 200 children who have been invited, about 80% attend the events, which are held on different school sites, 12 to 15 per site. Some service providers attend; the district is pleased with its collaborative inclusion in the coalition. The process was described as follows:

Whenever the school district has something come up that might be related to preschoolers, we have four people in the network: me, a kindergarten teacher, an administrator and a Community Schools coordinator (which is really great) to give us feedback and to present our issues or proposals to them. Anything that involves the kids coming to school, I get myself involved in. It is the fun part of the job It is very easy as a school district to get together and come together with MCF [Make Children First] to plan events because we are all in this together working with the same kids. I know in other districts they are having a hard time with this because the service providers don't come together regularly. So when they do have an idea and try to bring people together, they don't have the trust and communications strategies and the understanding of common goals. That makes it hard for them to get things off the ground whereas for us, it has been underway for so long that we just walk in the door and are communicating and understanding each other. Everyone sees the importance of early childhood at our table. (PA 8, personal communication, December 2006)

Relations were not always so easy between the coalition and the school district. Initially, when the coalition found out that funding was going to school districts for early learning projects (parent drop-in centres in schools), members of the coalition were "furious" (PA 3, personal communication, December 2006). Health and social services agencies had experienced many cutbacks, caseloads had tripled, services had been reduced and considerable change had been imposed on them. There was little energy left to initiate new projects. Tension built between service agencies and the school district until, in what I learned was characteristic of the coalition, they called all parties together and through a

creative process laid all issues on the table in a non-territorial way to establish collaborative plans through creative compromise. A participant noted:

It helped a great deal that our school district person has such strong ties with the ECD community. We had a great fear that if the school district had too much power the kids would be sitting in desks instead of being active in all the wonderful things that little kids do but the school district heard us and We have wonderful kindergarten teachers. Some kindergarten teachers and preschools have had partnerships from way back when. (PA 4, personal communication, December 2006)

This issue—the potential conflict between school district involvement and the ECD community—was an issue in Port Alberni as well as one that was raised in conversations in other districts. One explanation of the tension follows:

ECD educators say they want to stay in the field but, the truth is, they can't afford to financially. We are not only having a difficult time maintaining people in the field; we are also not attracting anybody to take early childhood anymore. They are leaving the field and going on to child and youth care or teaching. (PA 7, personal communication, December 2006)

The coalition has made significant efforts to bring kindergarten teachers and ECE professionals together:

We started with our ECD people meeting the kindergarten teachers asking ourselves “Why aren't we communicating more? How can we build that bridge now?” We started small because we have only six kindergarten teachers and we didn't want to overwhelm them with our childcare and our ECD people, so we

just started with childcare and kindergarten teachers so that the kindergarten teachers wouldn't be overwhelmed. It turned out to be a wonderful meeting. The major goal of these meetings (ECD and kindergarten teachers) was to open communications; after all, we are all looking after the same children. We have worked with these children at a very young age. We know the issues and challenges they have and yet, they walk into the kindergarten on the first day and the kindergarten teacher doesn't know anything about them. We think we should be able to help and support the kindergarten teacher. (PA 7, personal communication, December 2006)

Four school district staff members attend coalition meetings—an administrator, a kindergarten teacher, the support teacher and a community school coordinator, partially funded by the school district. All parties expressed satisfaction with the evolving relationship between the school district and the coalition. “We are now very happy with the school district representation and support they give us” (PA 5, personal communication, December 2006).

Services and programs offered by different organizations include:

<i>Lead Organization (s)</i>	<i>Service/Program</i>	<i>Brief Description</i>	<i>Other Community Partners</i>
Alberni Valley Community School Society	Parent Drop-ins	Guest speakers and literacy activities with 0-6 population.	
	Wee Readers	Seniors reading with elementary ages during lunch.	
	Preschool Backpacks	Back packs lent to community school program participants. (French and English packs)	

<p>Kiwanis Hilton Centre</p>	<p>Keys to Literacy</p> <p>Back Pack Program</p> <p>Toy Lending Library</p>	<p>Keys to Literacy Steering Committee – founders of the Keys to Literacy program – since expanded provincially by Pacific Care. Provides key chain and rhymes to newborns and toddlers.</p> <p>Back Pack program – distributed through daycares, family support workers.</p> <p>Toy lending library (with significant collection of early literacy material) run by volunteers out of Hilton Centre.</p>	<p>Make Children First Network</p> <p>Local Service Groups</p> <p>Pacific Care</p>
<p>Pacific Care</p>	<p>Keys to Literacy</p>	<p>Provincial program that includes train-the-trainer workshops for early childhood care and education practitioners.</p> <p>Literacy Outreach at the Bread of Life (Soup kitchen).</p>	<p>The Make Children First Network</p>
<p>Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) and Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL)</p>	<p>Books & Keys for Babies Program</p>	<p>Started in 2002 and recently integrated with VIRL provincial program. Distributed to 99% of newborns by public health nurse and Aboriginal community health nurses. Includes book, CD, info, key ring/rhyme.</p> <p>Ongoing literacy promotion at child health clinics including distribution of age appropriate rhymes for key chain: 6, 12 and 18 months of age.</p>	<p>Make Children First Network</p> <p>Kiwanis Hilton Centre</p> <p>NTC Nursing Program</p>

<p>VIHA (Vancouver Island Health Authority)</p>	<p>Healthy Beginnings Parent Groups</p> <p>Preschool Speech Services</p>	<p>Variety of infant and toddler parenting groups – includes guest speakers re: literacy and most have a “mother goose” component.</p> <p>Speech language pathologists available for speech therapy and community promotion of early speech and language information.</p> <p>Hanen- You Make the Difference program newly launched.</p>	<p>Early Intervention Team</p>
<p>School District #70 Alberni</p>	<p>Here We Come event for 3 year olds and Coming Closer events for 4 year olds.</p>	<p>Events in each elementary school (10 schools) for 3 year olds (Here We Come) and 4 year olds (Coming Closer).</p> <p>Speech & early literacy resource people and activities. Book given to each child.</p>	<p>Make Children First Network</p> <p>Pacific Care</p> <p>Early Childhood Educators of BC</p> <p>VIHA</p>

Figure 12. Types of Programs Supported by the Port Alberni Coalition

Sample Activities and Projects from 2005/2006.

- Used a collaborative decision-making process to allocate 2005 funds;
- Received and allocated Community Capacity Funds from Success by 6;
- Initiated a series of networking opportunities for early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers;
- Produced a free Family Calendar for 2006; in production for 2007;
- Completed the third round of Parent Focus Groups. A total of six diverse community parent groups participated along with an online and paper survey for fathers;

- Co-sponsored an evening event with the Alberni Valley Chamber of Commerce titled, “Children—an opportunity for business” targeting the business community. Speakers included Charlie Coffey, Clyde Hertzman, Kid Friendly Inc. and others;
- Presented a monthly television spot on local cable channel initially hosted by Make Children First, advertising local resources and assets for young children;
- Distributed a monthly e-newsletter for service providers to increase dissemination of knowledge about current research, issues and local action in the area of early childhood;
- Conducted a community-wide media campaign using bookmarks, posters and magnets with five early childhood messages;
- Co-hosted a Play & Learn Free Family Fair (May 6, 2006) with the Child Care Community in the Alberni Valley – attended by over 320 children and 250 adults;
- Continued to support School District 70 in the planning and implementation of the Here We Come events for three-year-olds. The goals for Here We Come include universal opportunity for three-year developmental screening, parent connection with elementary schools, parent connection with community resources, and an increased awareness of child/parent opportunities in play, parenting, literacy/numeracy, cognitive development, and the importance of quality child care/preschool; and
- Completed the fourth round of EDI with School District 70.

Challenges and Opportunities

It is to the credit of the coalition that it was difficult to identify any roadblocks to success that were not already part of the strategic plan with action items attached.

Competing Interests—coalition, ECD and school district.

The historical rift between schools and ECD practitioners has already been described. The coalition originally funded substitute costs for two staff to sit at the coalition table to ensure communication; subsequently the school district assumed this responsibility. While initially there was tension over what were perceived as territorial issues with the school district, the many honest conversations, the strong district representation at the coalition table and the goodwill between individuals has resulted in a positive relationship.

Expanding the Network.

The membership of the coalition included service agencies, ECD and the school district. The leadership stabilized. The mission, mandate and strategic plans were developed and implemented. It became apparent to the coalition that expanding the membership to include the business community was the next logical step described as follows:

We had a big business evening where Charlie Coffey came to speak and it was so exciting watching the chairman of our Chamber of Commerce say after the meeting “Now I get it.” Even though we had been working with him for six months, he finally really got it when he heard Charlie Coffey speak about the importance of ECD for the future, the economy. Now he has a total commitment asking, “What can we do next? How can we continue working together?” This is huge evidence that it [the connection] is working. Now they are asking us to present at business meetings; for instance I am presenting at the Women’s Business group. (PA 9, personal communication, December 2006)

Since the Make Children First Network (coalition) joined the Chamber of Commerce, the Chamber has decided to co-sponsor a child and a “family friendly business” award. The coalition is establishing the criteria for it while the Chamber is doing the promotional work. The criteria included having family friendly business practices, demonstrating support for ECD in the community, staffing practices that acknowledge children and families in the establishment, such as having toys for children to play with, checkout counters without adult-only material, and family parking places outside.

While numerous respondents identified the absence of First Nations representation at the table on a regular basis, efforts are being made to find ways to work more closely with them while respecting that they have their own agendas that may be a higher priority. Planning for a three-day cultural event with a focus on early child development is underway to create a springboard for future collaboration.

Funding

Many respondents expressed frustration over the government “silos,” that is, (a) the multiplicity of top-down expectations that interfere with a carefully planned grassroots agenda; (b) the time spent applying for grants; (c) the “one-time only” nature of many grants; and therefore (d) the lack of sustainability and the danger of competing interests for the small amount of funding available. The problems were described as:

Often with these kinds of initiatives, you are offered funding that drives your planning. How we want to work is that we figure out what our community needs and the direction that we want to go. Based on what we know and what parents say and what the research says, then we will use funding to move it forward rather than the other way around You don't just want to jump on the money train and

see later where it is going or figure out how you fit into the boxes so that you can get the money—no. We are going to figure out what we want to do and then be proactive and creative to find ways to make it happen. (PA 9, personal communication, December 2006)

The strategic plan has solidified direction for the coalition and therefore reduced the temptation to respond to external pressures. As another solution, the coalition is examining the possibility of establishing a cooperative approach to fund applications. They are looking at the possibility of bringing multiple agencies and organizations together in the community to prepare joint applications for grants from service groups, banking institutions or other funding agencies. Once successful, they will divide the funds in the collaborative way they have so carefully developed. This means less time developing grant applications, a collaborative way to develop cohesive plans for the community, and the beginning of a long-term plan to work towards sustainability.

Evidence of Success

Most of those interviewed believed that the work of the coalition would make a difference, but most agree that it is too soon to expect to document quantitative evidence of positive change. Almost everyone referred to the EDI (Early Development Instrument) as significant in planning, and said the work of the school district on EDI heightened the ECD thrust in the community.

EDI is the reason we have amazing participation from the school district. Before EDI came on the scene there was a deficit of school-district support. We even had to pay for room rental and never had anyone from the school district join us. EDI presented us with reliable numbers and a different way of looking at young

children. When EDI came along, the school district suddenly realized the importance of the possible role of getting to children at a younger age and then showered our group with opportunities and support. (PA 9, personal communication, December 2006)

School district personnel believe that they are already seeing and hearing about differences in the children who started in the *Here We Come* program and are now in primary grades. This success is partly due to providing special-needs children with early referrals and interventions. The following EDI map, which showed some decrease in vulnerabilities, heartened the coalition who felt their work was, in part, an explanation for the positive trend. (Note that one of the areas where vulnerabilities went up was Tofino which is not a part of the Alberni coalition.)

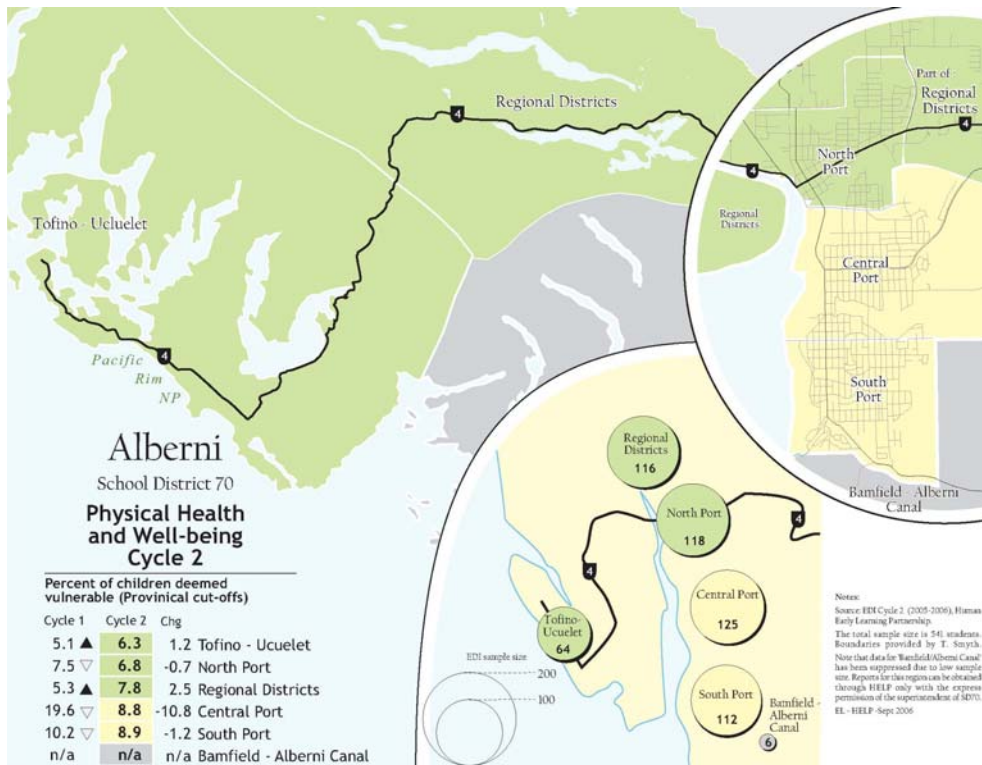


Figure 13. EDI Map of Port Alberni

I asked a number of the confident respondents to provide me with evidence that their work was making a difference to young children. One respondent said:

Well, we have been running these programs for three-year-olds for several years. These children are now in kindergarten; we know specifically of individual families and children who have benefited because we have provided them with specific support. We could also provide that information to both the kindergarten teachers and the principal when the child entered school so they knew about the family's issues early. The hope was when we started this that we would know earlier and earlier about children's needs instead of screening them in May or June before they enter kindergarten We have met them much earlier in their lives and are able to provide interventions and outreach therapy. The kindergarten teachers have seen a benefit when they hear from the preschool teachers the strategies that work with individual children before they even meet them in kindergarten. They have a better idea of how to proceed. We are just starting to see the benefits of that—a smoother transition. (PA 8, personal communication, December 2006)

Strategic Planning: A Strategic Coalition.

During my visit to Port Alberni, I watched a three-hour process of developing a strategic plan for the coalition. What follows is a draft of the plan. Action and activities are linked to outcomes that lead towards the vision and their Mission Statement.

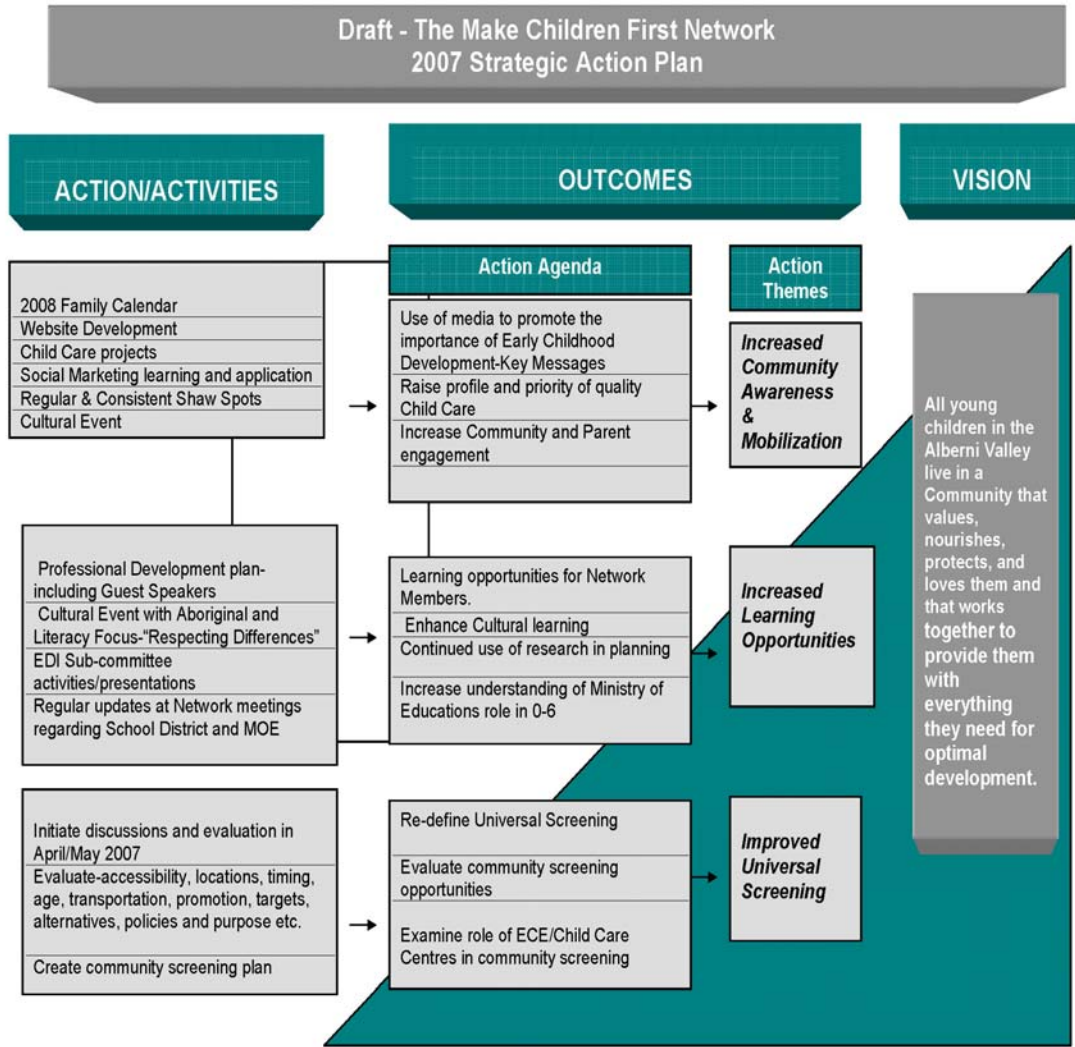


Figure 14. Port Alberni 2007 Strategic Action Plan (Page 1)

(Figure continued on next page)

This strategic plan is an excellent example of the strength of the planning processes and integration demonstrated by members of this coalition. It was developed over several key meetings. Note the clarity of the connection between the action/activities and the outcomes that are linked to the three priority themes of:

1. Increased Community Awareness;

2. Increased Learning Opportunities; and
3. Improved Universal Screening.

These themes are then connected to the overall coalition vision. That a group of 10 to 15 community agencies designed, agreed to and will implement this vision collaboratively is remarkable, in my opinion.

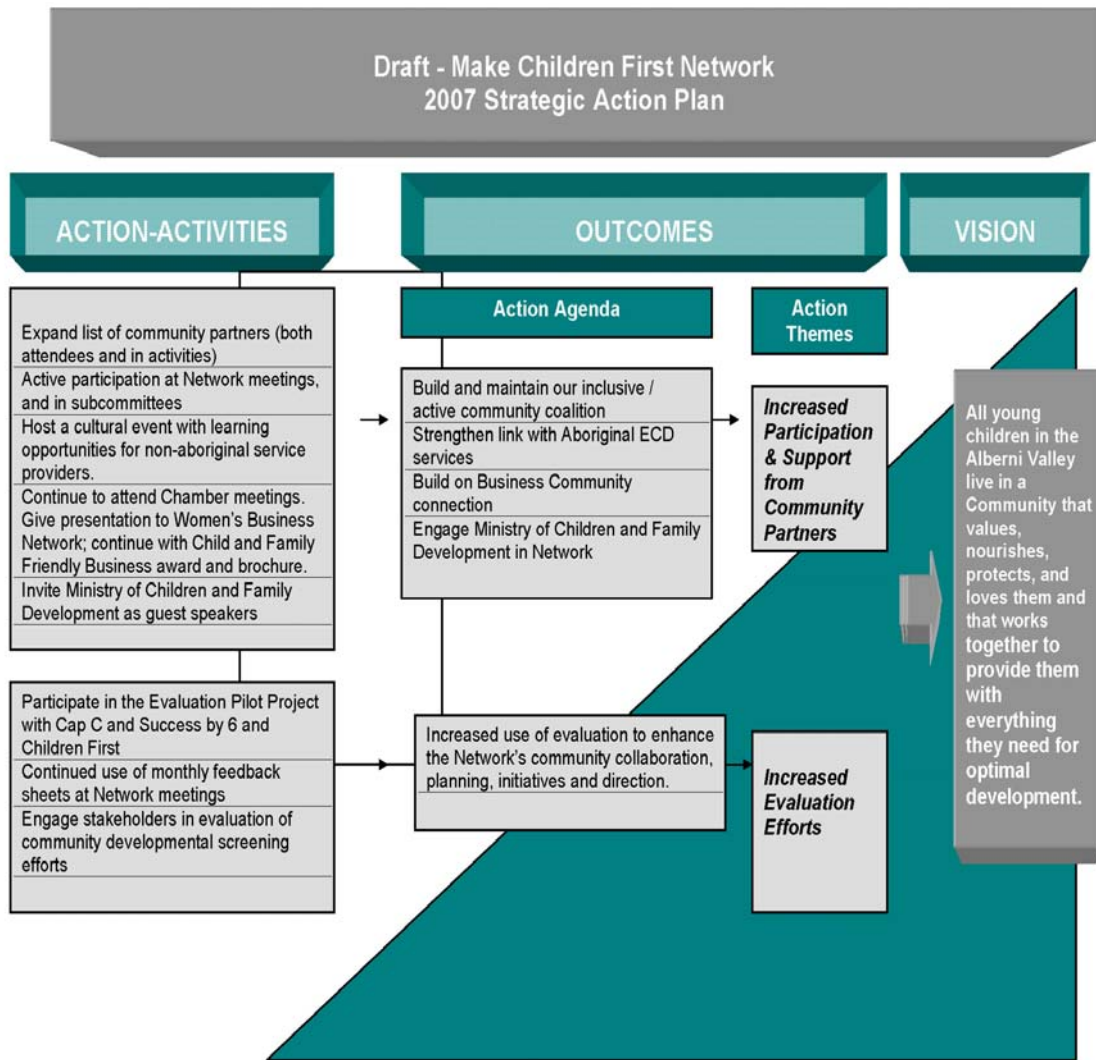


Figure 15. Port Alberni 2007 Strategic Action Plan (Page 2)

This plan is consistent with what I witnessed in Port Alberni.

- It builds on recent momentum;
- It provides specific detail about how action will be initiated;
- It addresses the issues that have been identified as problematic;
- It represents the collective effort of all groups in the planning process; and
- It describes the anticipated results once the plan is implemented.

I did not receive the strategic plan until contact was made several months after my visit. I was impressed with how clearly it reflected the processes that I had observed and the consensus that had developed as a result. I was impressed but not surprised.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) described the value of documenting the work of such high-performing teams:

It is not obvious how people can be managed or even led into caring about one another's personal success or growth. Certainly, such bonds do not arise from team-building exercises or training programs. No rules, best practices, or secret formulas exist that ensure high-performance outcomes. Nonetheless, high performance teams, however scarce they might be, provide terrific models for any potential team to study. (p.66)

The Port Alberni Coalition (Make Children First Network) provides us with a thought-provoking model to study.

The Sunshine Coast Community: Case Study 3

History and Evolution

Background

The Sunshine Coast of British Columbia is located 30 kilometres northwest of Vancouver and stretches 96 kilometres along the eastern shores of Georgia Strait. It is reached by a 40-minute ferry ride across Howe Sound from Horseshoe Bay. The population is approximately 27,000 people. The towns along the coast that are included in the school district are Egmont, Earls Cove, Pender Harbour, Halfmoon Bay, Sechelt, Roberts Creek, Gibsons, Langdale and Port Mellon. Many of the towns see themselves as regional entities and have some of their own governing structures.

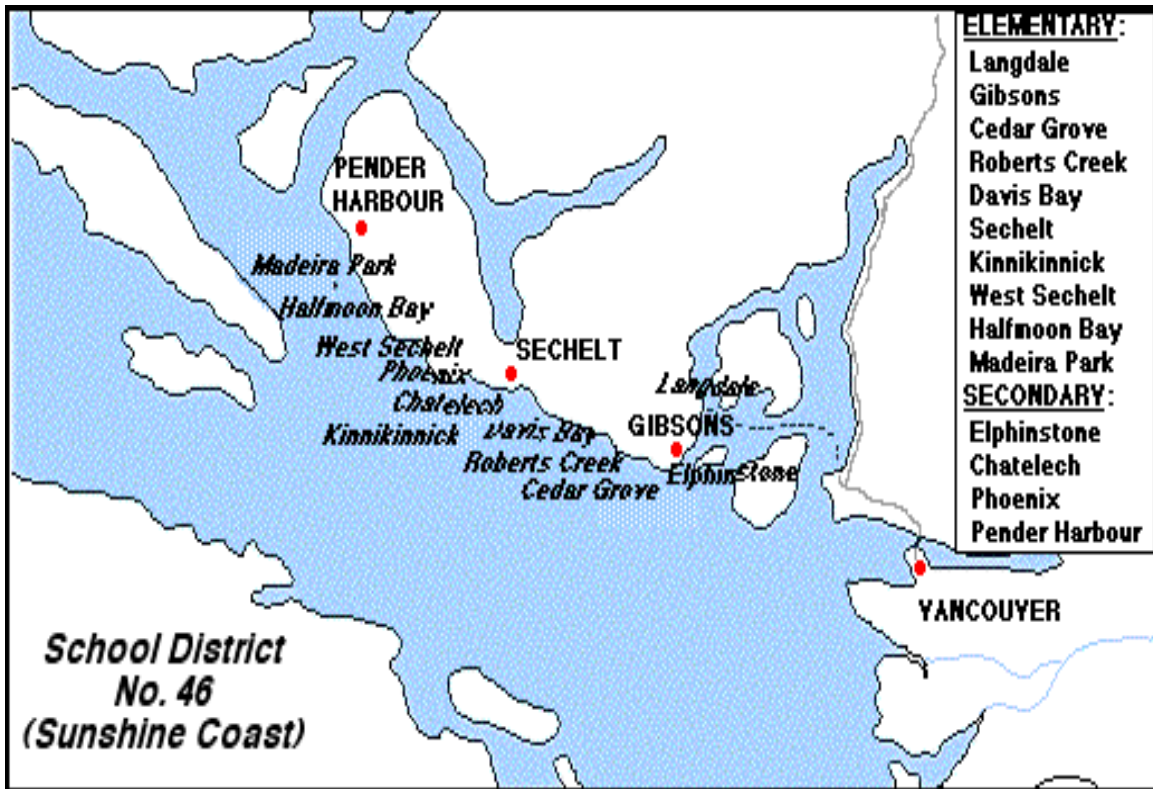


Figure 16. Map of Sunshine Coast: Schools

Local issues include a growing population of seniors, increasing poverty, a lack of affordable housing and public transportation to outlying towns on a dangerous highway, considerable distances between towns, affordable spaces for programs, and a shortage of ECE professionals and medical professionals in the region, particularly specialists.

The school system has approximately 4,000 students enrolled in ten elementary and four secondary schools. The Board believes that students should attend neighbourhood schools—an important factor in its ability to deliver service to early learners. Many schools have received “community school” designations: Chatelech, Halfmoon Bay, Pender Harbour, Roberts Creek, Sechelt, Madeira Park, Elphinstone and Gibsons which serve to link them to other community services.

The school district works closely with the Sechelt Indian Band to provide programs for First Nations students. Two collaborative structures provide specific support for Aboriginal students: (a) the District Aboriginal Education Support Program, and (b) the Sechelt Indian Band Education Department (language, culture, cultural advising and support programs). Parent Advisory Councils are established at all schools.

Evolution of the Sunshine Coast Coalition

The coalition is called the Sunshine Coast Early Childhood Development Planning Table. The coalition is an "umbrella" for the historical work and present work, as well as the various manifestations of groups in the community that have organized about early childhood issues in the past. Five years ago a number of smaller groups would meet to talk about common concerns or goals. These meetings were often initiated by Community Services. Some of those single purpose groups still exist and send a representative to the new Planning Table.

When the opportunity to apply for *Success by 6* funding arose and the local credit union branches on the coast were supportive, the loosely associated groups decided to work more closely together to meet the *Success by 6* criteria. This was the initial collaboration. After a short time, it was realized that the coalition would want to work on more projects and goals than just those within the *Success by 6* mandate—and that considering themselves an umbrella would be a valuable vehicle for many projects related to early childhood. They decided to call themselves The Planning Table (to encompass a spectrum of activities and to remain respectful of the work and groups of the past and those who wanted to stay single-purpose, yet associate by sending a representative to the coalition meetings).

The Planning Table has focused recently on preparing a Strategic Plan Review. The Childcare Committee has considered the idea of disbanding and all members joining the ECD Planning Table as the vehicle for accomplishing their tasks. Therefore five or six new members have joined the Planning Table meetings and a new balance of interests is developing at the Table in terms of the priorities of the group. The community's active ECD (Early Child Development Program) includes programs such as Parent/Tots, Family Places, Bellies and Babies, Childcare and Resource Referral Programs, Nobody's Perfect Parenting, Success by 6 Initiatives and the federal UEY (Understanding the Early Years).

The school district became actively involved in coalition work with the introduction of the EDI (Early Development Instrument) assessment tool and the staff became involved in community interpretation of the results. The coalition expanded to include the MCFD (Ministry of Family and Child Development), Ministry of Health, Speech Pathology, Infant Development, the Credit Union and Success by 6, Community

Services, the Regional District, the Sechelt Indian Band, UEY, and the school district including the three community schools, the school readiness representative and a district representative—a membership of approximately 15 regularly attending individuals.

Planning the child development “palace.”

In its first year, the coalition enthusiastically entered a strategic planning process to provide guidance for the long term. One of the first tasks was to determine broad priorities for the Early Development Planning Table.

The objectives of setting Planning Table priorities were:

- To identify areas of strength, opportunity or need where an increase in effort — including collaboration, coordination or investment—would make a significant contribution to programs or well-being; and
- To determine any shift in research or other effort as needed, the new or improved activities required, and how the targeting of effort could be achieved.

Three guidelines were developed to establish criteria:

1. The scope for Planning Table investment should have a measurable and significant positive impact, by:
 - Achieving critical mass through specific support and/or coordination and collaboration at the community level; and
 - Addressing uniquely “Sunshine Coast” and “Child and Family” needs arising from geography, climate, resources, economy, and way of life and/or culture.
2. The scope for the Planning Table to build the capacity to achieve the goal quickly, taking into account:

- Existing expertise, experience and technological capacities, or whether such capacities can be acquired;
 - The availability, quality and scale of research infrastructure;
 - The strategic priorities of other organizations and the benefit of collaboration; and
 - The magnitude of the investment (effort, personnel, and finances) required to make an impact.
3. The scope for the Planning Table and the community to capture the benefits:
- Achieve socially relevant results during the cycle of the priorities' regime; and.
 - Enhance the innovation capacity of the community by the broadening of the knowledge base, and encouraging skills and understanding of emerging needs and/or topics.

The coalition built a cohesive plan that identified (a) the priorities based on the above criteria; (b) the strategies including the places, spaces and services for each; (c) whether the strategies were short or long term; and (d) achievement criteria.

Goals that were high priority and part of the agenda were summarized as:

- (a) Creating additional childcare spaces;
- (b) Maintaining the Sechelt toy-lending program;
- (c) Building awareness of children and family needs, services and programs;
- (d) Creating additional services and resources for fathers;
- (e) Reducing child poverty;
- (f) Creating a child and family friendly environment in Sechelt/Pender; and

(g) Building/strengthening and protecting resources to support families.

While progress has been made on some of the goals, the coalition has experienced challenges that have disheartened some.

Facing challenges in the new coalition.

In the four years since the larger committee was struck, the group has struggled with several important issues that were common to the development of other coalition identities in the early years of their evolution.

Paid or unpaid support and coordination.

How does a diverse group (that has not worked closely together before) develop a common identity, mission and plan, but maintain different responsibilities to its own employer? In the first years of the coalition's development, the group felt that it made good progress in taking major planning steps. Discussions were intense, common goals emerged, and members of the coalition shared the commitment to solve both the known problems and new ones introduced by the EDI results.

Essential to this initial momentum was a paid position (sponsored by a non-profit Community Services group) that was lost when the person moved away and there was no funding to replace her. This person was responsible for gathering evidence of community needs, mapping assets, and developing a strategic plan with the help of the coalition. She played a vital role in managing the business of the coalition such as keeping minutes, organizing meetings, networking with various agencies, and documenting progress. A member described the effects of her departure:

Our coalition was really moving forward the first couple of years getting the tasks done that we said needed to be done, but since she's gone we have gone through a

slow period; we are stalled. All of the members of the coalition have full-time jobs, so we need a part-time person to pick up the action plan and move it. (SC 5, personal communication, September 2006)

At the time of my visit, many members of the coalition expressed disappointment at what they perceived to be a loss of momentum due, in large part, to the departure of this key person and subsequent loss of funding for the position. While other members of the coalition had tried to provide some of these management services, it quickly became apparent that they were unable to do so effectively because of their own heavy workloads. The problem was described in detail:

We have these new blueprints for a palace but we only have enough resources to go camping. I think our committee feels this way with all this research we did, with all these really clear objectives ... lots of really great ideas developed—like getting more dads involved, where playgrounds were badly needed—but at that point after our great blueprint was developed, there was not a lot of money for services to implement it. Our committee right now is still defining itself. Our next committee meeting is going to focus on Terms of Reference and our Mission Statement because I think we are moving beyond information sharing and connecting. We really want to be partners in the true sense of the word but we have to be realistic about what we can do with the resources we have. We need to be careful not to set our sights so high that we get frustrated. Last year we thought it would be a great idea to have business at the table and non-traditional partners, but now we are realizing is that it will only happen one connection at a time. So we are going to start inviting them to events that we have in the

community and acknowledge anyone that has made an effort. (SC 4, personal communication, September 2006)

Committee structure, size and leadership.

Over the past few years, the coalition has experimented with organizing early learning opportunities and activities in several ways. The main committee, with its membership of 15, is an awkward size for developing working plans for projects, although very important for establishing mission, vision, sense of purpose and direction.

As a result, two other structures have been tried with differing degrees of success. A smaller working group of approximately five meets irregularly to take on the planning of smaller projects on an ad hoc basis. Because of the complexity of planning for multiple towns spread along the coast – it takes 1.5 hours to travel to a central meeting from Pender Harbour – regional committees have been established to deal with needs specific to their smaller communities. The committees have met with varying degrees of success. At the time of writing this report (six months later), I made contact with the coalition to check on the status of the coalition's work. No coordination is provided to the committee, the working group is meeting infrequently, and while some regional teams are making progress with local governance agencies, others appear to be stalled.

Well, it is really obvious we don't have time but we all see the importance of this work. We all want to be doing this work ... I have 23 programs I supervise and 35 staff and I am trying to raise three children of my own and I make \$22 an hour and I have been making 22 dollars an hour for 10 years. That impacts what we can do to because we are very, very stretched. (SC 4, personal communication, December 2006)

Since the loss of the paid coordinator, leadership has been shared among those at the table, but it was obvious that those I interviewed were already overloaded with their own jobs. They provided leadership as best they could, while having to make their primary responsibilities the highest priority. In spite of the loss of formal leadership, many feel they are still able to make an impact.

About leadership, I would say that many individuals provide leadership. They could be doing many other things but choose to be here taking a leading role in this. Local governments are starting to show an interest and inviting us to make presentations to them about the importance of ECD, so I think they are starting to take our leadership. They are taking us more seriously now. (SC 4, personal communication, September 2006)

Shifting turf and territory.

Shifting turf and territory has been a difficult issue for this coalition. The community coalition, until the involvement of the school district, was a loosely defined group of health, social services and ECD professionals who met regularly for information sharing and mutual support. Each had clearly defined responsibilities and successful programs from their different perspectives; where possible and appropriate, they shared resources and sponsored community events. The EDI, related school-district involvement, and change in Ministerial responsibilities (the assignment of Early Learning to the Ministry of Education) caused a reconsideration of responsibilities at both the local and provincial levels. Members of the committee who discussed this were quick to point out that they admired the individuals involved in the coalition. They respected their

leadership, understood the challenges facing them, and laid no personal blame for the confusion caused by external forces. They queried:

How did it happen that dollars went to the Ministry of Education for EDC? How did it happen that money geared towards early childhood development ended up going to the Ministry of Education when you already have people in the community working in that area, who have expertise in that area and have had that expertise for years and have been dying to initiate these programs? It is like those three Ministries are on different planets and never communicate with each other. (SC 3, personal communication, September 2006)

Unexpected community tragedy.

In the eight months that I studied this community, a series of unanticipated tragedies profoundly affected the spirit of the community. The recently retired superintendent, a highly respected community leader and educator, passed away. Several high school students died in accidents, and five school district staff passed away while in “active service”. In addition, the new superintendent decided to retire, meaning more change for all. The result has been a heavy demand on local agencies and leaders who, in a small community, shoulder much of the support for a grieving community. In a small area such as the Sunshine Coast, people know each other well. It is my belief that much of the progress of the coalition has been arrested because these other demands and grief has had a dispiriting effect. At the very least, it has had an effect that should be acknowledged in any consideration of community development.

The School District's Role in the Coalition.

It was clear in the interviews with school district personnel that they feel passionately about engaging in early child development in order to serve children when they arrive at school. Moreover, it was impressive to witness the sense of urgency that was felt in the discussions. I never once heard criticism of what had happened previously. Rather, they realized that once the EDI results confirmed the clusters of vulnerabilities in certain neighbourhoods, those in decision-making positions (with or without funding) felt duty-bound to implement programs that would make a difference as soon as possible.

The whole concept is that if kids start two years behind, they stay two years behind. We don't want that to happen. We want to catch them before they are two years behind. We want to remediate when they are very young and hopefully they will not ever get to the place of not having success. There is huge cost effectiveness for everyone administratively. (SC 1, personal communication, September 2006)

While other district leaders were initiating partnerships with existing community agencies working with young children, the superintendent of schools was using his school district authority to implement a school-based literacy agenda for preschoolers. At his direction, it was determined that the district would focus only on early learning as it related to school readiness. "We are only interested in education; we are not interested in health. The health of the kids doesn't matter [to us]; the only thing that matters to us is the education. That's our turf" (SC 1, personal communication, September 2006).

The superintendent was not a sitting member at the coalition table. He identified staff members who had a deep understanding of the early learning issues and a strong

commitment to the task and assigned them to the coalition. He believed that leadership comes from individuals with such knowledge, insight and vision. He became aware of a program in Washington State that held promise for engaging preschool parents in early learning activities in schools, so he sent a study team there to adapt it to the Sunshine Coast community; he was not willing to wait for the coalition evolution to implement the school-based programs. This caused some tension within the coalition.

Key school district-sponsored projects.



Figure 17. The Sunshine Coast Early Learning Programs

Successes and Achievements

1. The SPARK (Supporting Parents about Readiness for Kindergarten) program:

SPARK is an acronym for the program adapted from Kennewick, Washington and is completely funded and managed by the school district. The program targets parents of children under age five; some prenatal parents come to the classes, which are intended to teach parents about various aspects of early child development so that they can help their children's development at home.

One of the greatest successes is the way parents buy into the program. They are really keen to talk about hot topics related to their children. We market the program by all kinds of ways. We advertise in papers, the other agencies on the coalition distribute advertisements for us. We are trying to go as big as we can. We put pamphlets in the IGA, in the grocery stores, in doctor's offices, in pharmacies. (SC 6, personal communication, September 2006)

The program is delivered to different age levels (from birth to five) three times a year. Some parents begin the sessions before the baby is born. They attend in subsequent years for further developmental sessions, thus learning as the baby grows. Each session is focused on developmental topics such as research reviews, brain development, sensory motor skills, math, language and vocabulary, and social and emotional development. Special toys that are considered tools are included in the activities. They enhance certain aspects of child development. Parents are taught how to spend special time with their children using the tools, as well as brainstorming everyday things in the home that can be used creatively.

Free childcare is offered during the sessions, which are held in different school locations at various times of the day and early evening. Approximately 180 babies are born each year in the community and the program enrolls approximately 40 of those babies in their first year. The instructor visits new moms in the hospital to invite them to join the program in an effort to raise that percentage. In the first year, over 100 parents took the courses (birth to five). This past year, over 300 attended with a waiting list for those who could not be accommodated. Careful evaluations are compiled.

2. The school readiness program.

This program is funded by the school district through community school funding. It has been developed for parents who attend with their children and it targets three to five-year-olds. This 17-week program is offered in neighbourhood schools once a week for two-hour sessions. It focuses on emerging literacy development using topics such as the natural use of environmental print such as signs, posters and menus as literacy prompts for young children. Four centres are set up in the classroom with activities and a write-up on why the activities in the centre are important to a child's development. The parents and their children circulate through the centres and are coached on how and why to engage in activities with their children. Activities are such that parents can reconstruct them easily at home.

Part of the event is to take the parents and children on walkabouts of the school and engage them in other areas such as the gym, with the additional goal of gradually increasing family comfort level in the school setting. Every child is assessed with a screening tool called Ready! for Kindergarten. It reviews preliteracy and numeracy factors, such as alphabet naming (lower and upper case), alphabet sounds (lower case),

phonological awareness (ending and beginning sounds), printing their name (their pencil grip and letter formation is screened), rote counting, one-to-one counting, numeral recognition, instant group recognition, patterning, language use and articulation.

The instructor uses alternate assessments such as the Early Screening Inventory if necessary. Parent conferences are held so that each family gets private time. Referrals to other community agencies are made when appropriate. An instructor noted:

One of the big successes is the way we can identify children who may need some sort of screening or some sort of assistance. Sometimes it is really obvious to me and in my conference with parents I will suggest that they seek out a person who can provide that screen service. I will give them the name but if I am not absolutely certain I will wait for the Early Learning Fair when we are all there and I will just gently suggest to the parent that they talk to that person in another booth so we refer children to each other. Everybody, all the services, are at the pre-kindergarten fair so that is a central activity. (SC 6, personal communication, September 2006)

The instructor believes that many special needs are being identified and interventions put in place earlier than they were before. While it is still too early to provide hard data about the differences in these children at the kindergarten level, the instructor sees obvious developmental changes in individuals because of the program. She notes improved relationships between parents and children, and increasing comfort with schools and school professionals. Approximately 80% of preschoolers and their parents in neighbourhood and school catchment areas attend.

I think that one of the things that is really important is that every time the parents come we send them away with three-months' worth of activities—whether it be

arts and crafts or ways to use the toy tools—they go away with ideas of profitable ways to spend time with their children. It is the same in our school readiness program. We send them away with a lot of ideas. They discover they don't have to buy expensive things or feel overwhelmed, because we give them practical ways to go home and get involved. (SC 6, personal communication, September 2006)

3. *PALS (Parents as Literacy Partners) program.*

The PALS program targets parents and children at the kindergarten level (and some preschool children). It is sponsored by the school district, which provides two staff with release time to prepare materials, offer the program and train other teachers in the district. The instructor noted:

Part of the reason we have been able to make it work is that I have this one day a week that I don't have my own class so I am able to spend some extra time that is not always after school getting the material gathered, organized and photo copied. Once teachers see how organized we have it and how simple it is to do it, it shouldn't be as daunting for them. (SC 7, personal communication, September 2006)

The program is offered every six weeks. It comprises nine sessions and focuses on the importance of parents' engaging with their children in literacy activities. Ten to 15 family members attend on average and sometimes older siblings in the school are brought along to enhance the concept of multi-age groupings in order to learn how to work with the younger ones at home.

Travelling kits are being put together to rotate among other kindergarten teachers due to the high demand. Approximately 70 to 80 % of parents of kindergarten students attend. The superintendent attended the graduation program and was inspired to increase funding for its expansion.

The committee plans to increase the number of nights they have offerings and extend PALS to the next grade levels, especially the grade 1- 2 classrooms. This extension would allow the inclusion of some of the content areas such as science and social studies into the kits so parents may work with their children on curricular content. She added:

We need to give ourselves a pat on the back too – we are dedicated and we go out there and transmit that message to other teachers and parents too making sure that they get reminded of this importance in as many ways as possible. We acknowledge to parents that we know they have busy lives too and that we really value the time that they come to learn with their kids. The hardest part is not being able to reach some parents who we think really could benefit from their children with this. We have to accept we are not the only program out there and that parents have busy lives. But it is hard. (SC 7, personal communication, September 2006)

4. The Cedar Grove social development program.

Inspired by the success the district experienced at the secondary level when an alternate program was created to get students off the street, the superintendent conceived an alternate program at the kindergarten level to intervene on behalf of young children who arrive at school already demonstrating social and/or emotional challenges. The

primary social development program works with seven children. The program is set up in the school for students who are not doing well in kindergarten. Kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 2 students are eligible.

These are kids that make you want to pull your hair out when you are a primary teacher because they take your complete focus. We know the research that if we can get to these kids early and give them the tools and the strategies they need in a small supportive environment, it will in fact make a difference when they go back into the regular classroom. So there are seven little boys—when they are ready to start practising their new skills, they will be going back into regular classrooms in our school for a few hours a day with the eventual goal of them going back to their home school. They started on a partial day and moved to full time four days a week. Recess and lunch are teaching times and the students work with one classroom teacher and two special education assistants. They eat with the staff and when they go outside the staff go with them—that’s the time for social development activities. It is a very exciting and positive program. There is no negative stigma to it, like most special education programs. It has been accepted in a very positive manner by the school and by the parents. We are integrating totally into the school assemblies and so on. It is just another class in our school. (SC 2, personal communication, September 2006)

A source of territorial conflict.

The school district interviews indicated that the four programs are managed and funded by the school district, not because of any division between the coalition and the school district, but for the goals of:

- Getting parents and children into schools;
- Encouraging parents and children to participate with school professionals earlier;
- Breaking down the traditional barriers for parents and building comfort levels;
- Supporting preschool parents with early child development education;
- Making referrals to other agencies; and
- Conferencing with parents earlier.

These goals were a new mandate of the school system and not necessarily goals with which the coalition might have agreed. The district felt some urgency and got the money from its own resources to make early learning programs a priority. Other coalition members from other agencies saw it differently:

And then there is the territorial issue. I mean it is a good thing we are being very honest with each other. Even though we are struggling with it, we are very honest about how we feel about crossing territories. There was this presentation where the school district staff who had just flown to Washington and found this great program [adapted to become SPARK]. These great people were doing this great job in the presentation and they were so enthusiastic about what they were doing. They had these toy kits and bags that they were about to hand out Our staff was shrivelling up. We are professionals too and we work with these kids; we understand their needs and we know how to do it too. So this is a road block. We have a good respectful working relationship but they have the notion that they are the experts in this area, and that is not necessarily true. That can hinder collaboration. (SC 4, personal communication, September 2006)

Another coalition member who expressed reservations about the SPARK program was resentful of the funding the school district was applying. Yet at that time, the school district was receiving no special grants, rather they were establishing it as a school priority from the regular budget.

We never had money for toys and all those wonderful things that they are using. I am happy to see it happening but we have some very skilled people here who could deliver that program exceptionally well. We have offered our partnership to the district but they haven't bitten. We sent some handouts and we hope that they shared those with families. We have an excellent vision as to what we would do with that money, if we had some money to do it, but we only had enough time and resources for families that were being referred to us as being in difficulty. However, we have enough work to do with our other tasks. (SC 3, personal communication, September 2006)

The same person continued, "It is almost like it is early school development rather than early child development." Several other coalition members commented in a similar vein, never questioning the value of the program but challenging the ownership of it. They disputed the type of facility in which it should be offered and which agency should sponsor it, or noted the lack of collaboration in its implementation.

The Aboriginal ECD program.

While several communities have struggled with how to improve services to Aboriginal communities, the Sunshine Coast coalition is making impressive progress. An ECD program is located on the band property. The coalition has recognized that one of the hurdles in reaching Aboriginal children is in expecting their families to leave the

reserve to attend programs in schools and the community where they feel uncomfortable. Coalition members, therefore, are making extraordinary efforts to support the ECD professional at her own location. When few Aboriginal families attended the annual kindergarten fair, a decision was made to host a fair at the band school.

Another example is the family fun fair that is coming up (birth to six). Not only have all the coalition members responded favourably, but they responded by saying “Have you thought about this? Can we help here? Can we do this?” The coalition members want the involvement of the Aboriginal families but some of the families don’t like going to a community fair where they don’t know anybody. We are going to host our own and have the community come to us. Even the optometrist is coming, so our families are going to meet these people. He is going to show them how he does the testing for little kids. We have a hard time persuading parents to get the vision testing done, so this is a real breakthrough. I am hoping that if the families meet him and the kids get to play his fun games with him using his tools that they will say, “Hey this isn’t so bad—let’s get involved.” (SC 5, personal communication, September 2006)

The Aboriginal band ECD program had also started a First Nations (FN) supportive child development and outreach program. When it was mentioned at the coalition table, one of the members became so enthusiastic that she offered to train and mentor the FN worker in her own time. The coalition’s speech language pathologist developed a new kit with the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society.

She wanted a place to try it out and she came here because I met her through the coalition too. Now she comes right into our Aboriginal Centre and does all of the screening right here on site, which is wonderful for our families. So we get to know each other through these partnerships. (SC 5, personal communication, September 2006)

It was uplifting to discuss these developments with the Band ECD teacher. One of the most fascinating developments was the story she recounted about wanting a PALS (Parents as Literacy Partners Program) in her own Band school. The school district was pleased to cooperate because they were not getting many Aboriginal families in the school program. A very special result was that when it was advertised, for the first time, groups of non-Aboriginal families attended because they had been on the waiting list or because the Aboriginal school was closer. The Aboriginal families were proud and pleased to be their hosts. It was seen as a real breakthrough!

The linkages continue to grow:

We got 40,000 dollars from the Victoria Foundation for our supportive child development program and because of that, we got another 20,000 dollars from MCFD. Our people are really supportive of me bringing any program that will help the children into our Aboriginal community. Now I am working on an infant development program and I know that when I get that funding that I will be contacting a fellow coalition member to mentor the person we hire for this position because those relationships have been built. (SC 5, personal communication, September 2006)

Audiology screening has been difficult for Aboriginal people who have had to go out of town to access screening—an expensive travel proposition, so they do not go. When it was brought up at the coalition table, the speech pathologist arranged for an audiologist to come into town to the health centre and, as a result, seven Aboriginal students were successfully screened.

Kindergarten fair.

The coalition hosts an annual kindergarten fair for preschool children where booths are set up for the different organizations and agencies. It has been a great success in helping parents and children to connect with professionals in a positive way. It also provides professionals who are already connected to a family with a way to introduce them to other service professionals. The atmosphere is buoyant; children get excited about joining in the activities and feel warmly welcomed into the community's service agencies and schools.

Raising community awareness.

In an effort to raise community awareness of ECD issues, the coalition sponsored a “family friendly” business project to encourage employers to consider how to make families more comfortable and safe in the business place. They also initiated a series of educational articles in the local paper, described as follows:

2006 was the year of happy, healthy kids in our community and in March we ran a series of articles for a month in the newspaper. These articles were based on child development phases and stages, and on having child friendly environments in the community. Another article was about the myths of childhood and the realities of childhood. Related to success is the acknowledgement, recognition

and the reinforcement of the different kinds of services that can be offered in the community. Like the bus driver that helps the stroller get on the bus, the family friendly businesses, the public awareness education such as the articles we did in the newspapers were really helpful and ... having the school district there – I feel very fortunate to have leadership from the school district These are the kinds of things that have been coming out of this community getting together. I am excited to see where we are going next, but I am also cautious about the lack of human resources we have to do this. We have always gathered as service providers but we are moving past information sharing. This is the first time we have had the school district and MCFD and the head of the health group sitting consistently with us and this makes a very positive difference. (SC 4, personal communication, September 2006)

Linkages between agencies.

The linkages that develop between individuals and their subsequent ability to break down barriers came up many times in the interviews.

My role on the coalition? I have lots of other connections so I bring my multi-connections to the table. For example, I am involved with the regional transportation board and they were asking what challenges we face on the Sunshine Coast. I brought the topic to the coalition meeting and we did a submission. I am also on the Chamber of Commerce, so I was able to help them understand the importance of family friendly businesses. It is important to rank the issues in the community. For instance, if a mom with a stroller is having a hard time making her way down the sidewalk because of the condition of the

sidewalk, probably the seniors are having a difficult time with the sidewalk too. So instead of being competing interests in the community we look for ways to link the needs in the community which makes the agenda more powerful. (SC 5, personal communication, September 2006)

Evidence of Benefits to Children and Families

Because the fully integrated coalition has been functioning for less than four years, it is unreasonable to anticipate hard data that can prove the programs are beneficial. My examination of the school district's literacy programs and the high rates of attendance of preschool families suggest to me that vulnerabilities should begin to decrease in the EDI (Early Development Instrument) results in the next cycle. The district's EDI results were stable this year, which is a positive outcome given the increase in poverty in the area. The district relies heavily on EDI results for its planning although the new programs are too recently implemented to be expected to show results.

They [the EDI results] give us more ammunition. Teachers in the classroom are already noticing vulnerabilities. EDI was a way to bring the community together. We immediately looked at how we could take the results of Clyde's work and apply it. (SC 2, personal communication, September 2006)

They [local government] are taking us more seriously now. We have been able to show them our maps, our population, and our EDI data. We have a beautiful part to play as a result. We participate in discussions about whether we should be closing buildings or not. We are able to show the impact that these decisions are making. There should be lots of kudos to Clyde Hertzman and the staff at HELP because people are taking us more seriously because of this data and the quality of

research. The impact of EDI is that we are not just planning in isolation anymore.

We have qualitative and quantitative evidence of the success of our parent programs. (SC 2, personal communication, September 2006)

Those interviewed identified a number of qualitative measures they believed were changing the community because of their work, including:

- Breaking down of barriers between families and schools;
- Improved linkages between services and community groups;
- Improved screening and assessment of young children;
- Heightened awareness of ECD issues in the community; and
- Increased support for preschool parents through schools.

One respondent described the situation in this way:

One of the biggest benefits is that we are breaking down barriers that many families may have experienced in their own school careers. These barriers sometimes cause families to want to stay as far away as possible from schools in the early years, especially First Nations. It is deeply ingrained for them.

Whatever we can do to welcome parents into the school setting as early as possible is essential. We need to deliver the message, “We are in this together!”

There is no blame or shame about what parents should or shouldn’t be doing. We need to get away from that and we have to work together as a team. The earlier we can connect and create those positive experiences the better. We have to look at the social and economic dimensions of our families. Not all of us have had the same opportunities growing up. We also know that it tends to be cyclical. If you don’t have those strong experiences as a parent when you’re young, then it is

more difficult for you to nurture your children in the right way that makes a positive difference. I know we're helping them [families]! (SC 2, personal communication, September 2006)

The Qualicum Community: Case Study 4

History and Evolution

The Qualicum case study procedures differ from the first three case studies of Port Alberni, Boundary and Sunshine Coast. At the time of my original proposal, I had wanted to study as many as ten school districts and their communities all of which were engaged in promising coalition work. This would have been an impossible task so I chose to narrow my study to four communities and chose one of the four on which to conduct an in-depth study.

For the first three communities, I studied the role and structure of the coalition and the involvement of the school district. The focus was on the impact of the involvement of the school district and the participation of the school staff. This was accomplished in one-week visits, multiple interviews and an examination of documents.

In the case of the Qualicum community, I followed the same pattern but visited the district numerous times over the course of 10 months. I extended the study of the coalition activity to include the programs offered to young children and the degree of client participation and satisfaction. The result is a broader study of the community, the school district's participation and, in particular, Building Learning Together (BLT).

Background

The Oceanside communities of Parksville and Qualicum Beach are home to approximately 40,000 residents. It is fast becoming one of Canada's most desirable places to live, whether raising a family or looking for the perfect spot to retire. Oceanside (as it is commonly known and as I will refer to it throughout this paper) includes a number of surrounding communities such as Errington, Bowser, Coombs, Hilliers, Lasqueti Island and Whiskey Creek. These areas are more rural and include farms. The school district serves a population of approximately 12,000 and a diverse group of students. The economy of the area was once dominated by fishing and logging in the winters and by beach cabin visitors in the summer. Now it is known as one of Canada's prime retirement and holiday spots.



Figure 18. The Qualicum (Oceanside) Region

Evolution of the Qualicum Coalition

The Qualicum coalition was driven by the views of a previous superintendent who, seven years ago, came to believe that literacy issues in the schools and community merited the assignment of a half-time position dedicated to supporting and providing leadership to others, including preschool children. This decision was made before receiving the data provided by the EDI (Early Development Instrument) assessment process and the Ministry of Education's new mandate for early learning. Considerable resistance to the decision was felt in the school system. Many teachers thought it took away resources from a system that already had poor resources; however, the superintendent persevered and after three attempts to get school board approval, the mandate was passed. Two individuals initially filled half-time positions of coordinator—one to work with older students and the other with preschool and primary students.

While health and social services agencies had maintained effective communication for many years, the smaller coalition decided to bring together multiple agencies in the community to discuss their needs and priorities from a community perspective. As a result, they were invited to a discussion on building a community vision for literacy. The invitation was all-inclusive—retired seniors, new moms, business people, preschoolers or any other interested parties who wanted to attend. This first stage was vital to the evolution of Building Learning Together (BLT). Many groups came to the discussion hoping that funding for individual programs would be included in the discussion, only to discover there was no budget. A retired volunteer described the work of the larger group in this way:

One of the things we worked hard at to keep in mind was the story of *Alice in Wonderland* and how Alice met the caterpillar and there was a fork in the road and Alice said, “Which way should I go?” The caterpillar said “Well where do you want to get to?” Alice said, “I don’t know.” The caterpillar said, “Then it doesn’t matter which way you turn.” So from the beginning it was clear to us that we needed to know which way we were going. We needed to have a clear direction, a common philosophy, [and] a vision so all of those earlier meetings were designed to put that together.

For the first year, large groups of community members gathered monthly to debate and bring new ideas, articles and friends who wanted to establish a community vision with a community thrust at different age levels—illiterate adults, disenfranchised youth, struggling children in school and preschoolers. A decision was made to divide into subcommittees, at least for planning and discussion focused on different age groups. From the preschool group emerged what is now called Building Learning Together (BLT), referred to in this study as *the coalition*—a program that was designed to support families and had a focus on preschoolers and literacy. As momentum built in this committee, the designated leader was assigned a full-time position partially funded by MCFD (Ministry of Children and Families) to manage the many projects that began to emerge.

For many in the coalition it became apparent that most wanted to work in the ECD area. It became a process of letting go, considering change, moving forward in a different way and that was very difficult for all that didn’t share that view. So eventually, as it became clear as to where people’s passions were we divided into

sub committees. For example those who were passionate about adult literacy had their own committee to start looking at how to move forward in that direction.

(Q 5, personal communication, January 2007)

Mission and Vision Statement.

The following statements were the result of the committee work:

Mission statement: To enhance children's development by supporting strong family relationships and community capacity through effective learning opportunities.

Vision statement: Oceanside—a community of families who have achieved a level of literacy and an understanding of early childhood development which allows them to function comfortably and safely at home, at work and at play.

While BLT (Building Learning Together) began to develop its own identity, vision, and programs, those involved realized that keeping the larger coalition together was critically important to avoid losing the community vision. While the focus of this study is the work of BLT and preschool children, I was present at many gatherings of the larger group and was impressed by the support for the work at various age levels and the efforts to make linkages between the needs of the different groups to maintain that community vision.

We have a pretty good coalition but there are always people who come into the meeting who are there only to take the information back to their groups. Or they come to us for advice because they are passionate about what they do but they are mostly interested in the “worker bee” aspect of it, not in the philosophical effort to move the coalition work forward. What I think the ideal coalition work would be is when every member of the community is working in the best way they can

to support a unified direction for the community—all in the spirit of families supporting families. I don't think we are totally there yet. If this were true, you would have to be a constantly changing coalition, not just the same 15 or the same 20 people. You would have different people coming through the door as the needs in the community shifted. On the other hand, I have learned that just having our coalition function the way it has, which is taking information and ideas away from the table and taking them out into the community, brings an awful lot of investment, interest and resources back to serve us. What I struggle with is how you define coalition because in my view it is a mixture of many different tasks and many different skills. As long as you can live with the ambiguity of that, then the coalition is always growing and changing in some way and that results in a pretty good coalition ... so I guess I am saying that I struggle with it. (Q 5, personal communication, January 2007)

In interviews with coalition members, this ambiguous view permeated the discussion about the nature of the coalition. People recognized that members of the coalition had to be adaptive and adjust to the prevailing community view. Stories were told about those who left the coalition because they could not accept the direction the philosophy was taking. At the same time, a magnanimous attitude kept the doors open for them to return. Efforts to stay in touch with them and seek input from them continued, which demonstrated respect for all views but acknowledged the need to make decisions and move forward.

No matter how passionate and excited you feel about something there is an equal and opposite reaction that is bound to take place in the form of resistance. Our

coordinator never tries to persuade or convince people; rather she believes you work from the positive, gather people on board who want to move forward with you, and you just gently move ahead. People will then either move away or they will become convinced because people they respect are now on board. So it is not changing people by trying to convince them—it is moving forward with the people who are on board. She also says that this would not have moved forward if we didn't have people in powerful places to support it as we moved forward. In our case, that certainly was the School Board and the Superintendent. (Q 7, personal communication, January 2007)

Leadership and the Coalition

It is difficult to examine the evolution of Qualicum's coalition without discussing leadership. In a discussion with one of the leaders, I was told that this project (BLT) is to bring in one person at a time—whether it be one family, one new coalition member, one volunteer, one business, one teacher, one parent or one project. That is the strategy to reach the community. She commented:

Part of the struggle around leadership is although we have people really capable of taking on leadership in the coalition, and although they indicate that they are willing to take on leadership, the struggle is that their plates are so full. But I still hold to the philosophy that leadership can come from any individual in the coalition including volunteers, and if I stick to that position then it allows all kinds of things to happen that wouldn't have necessarily taken place. So for example when the Words on Wheels bus coordinator gets sick we can't stop the bus. But some of our community partners understand the process so well and have

worked alongside her so closely, that they can step in and do the job for that particular day and that is leadership—it might be parents who have been working on the bus and they can step in. (Q 5, personal communication, January 2007)

The concept of shared leadership was obvious as I watched the BLT (focused only on the preschool agenda) team at work. Many team members exhibited a keen sense of responsibility in implementing the vision. It was apparent that without any of them, the well-oiled machine would falter before picking up speed again as someone else stepped in to help. Each leader took full responsibility for all aspects of his or her job, engaging with others on the team in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect. One team member described the phenomenon as “coming from the heart:”

Some things you can't define at the coalition table. For instance, when the bus goes out, the people on the bus know and understand what their job is and how to do it because they have a passion for the purpose; but we didn't write that down and define it at the coalition table, so there is a piece of this that you can't get from the coalition table. It comes from people's hearts. (Q 5, personal communication, January 2007)

Although an informal team, team members exhibit all the characteristics of the high-performing team formerly described by Katzenbach and Smith (1993). At the same time, it was clear that they were fuelled by the compelling vision of their team leader.

[Our leader] is a dynamo. She is not forceful; she is a catalyst. She is the kind of person who doesn't say that we are going to do X [the proposal]. She says, “Should we do X? Is there a need to do X? How do you feel about it?” She is very inclusive and she knows where she is going. She is not overbearing; she is a

joy to work with. She is one of the most phenomenal people I have ever met. She deals with conflict; she is a conflict resolutions person. She wants the conflict on the table and she draws it out, but the way she does it defuses the conflict.

Sometimes people raise conflict and say, “This is ridiculous or I don’t agree with what you are doing.” She does respond, she acknowledges their viewpoints, she accepts their viewpoint; she questions why they feel the way they do and wants to understand their point of view. She is totally non-confrontational. She wants everyone to say their piece. She doesn’t shy away from conflict and will even meet with the parties privately to see if they can work out some understandings together because her agenda is to make this happen in a positive, collaborative way and not let individuals or their viewpoints stop progress. (Q 1, personal communication, January 2007)

Another team member described her as a visionary, and revealed that it took some time to understand what she was trying to accomplish. However, as time passed and accomplishments became obvious, the vision was apparent. In every interview, her leadership was identified as pivotal. She was described as inspirational, fiercely loyal, compelling, passionate, energizing, enriching, reverberating—to the point where I began to be concerned about what would happen to the coalition if anything happened to her or she left her position. In the latter half of the interviews, I asked people to speculate on this possibility. While everyone expressed alarm as they considered the possibility, the consensus was that, given the seven years of leadership she had provided and the nature of the shared leadership, the coalition’s work would continue.

I think it's true that there has to be one single person for many years until you are well into your project and people understand philosophical shifts as to how the project works. Then they can step into that role. I feel confident that it would carry on because there is enough community ownership and momentum behind it that has become a foundation for families in the community. (Q 5, personal communication, January 2007)

The coordinator expressed the view that, although she is technically responsible for the leadership of the coalition, she has many other people who take responsibility for different aspects of it. She described herself as continually challenging those at the table that they are the ones with the power in the coalition to make changes. She says they do not need to come back to her for continued direction. Her style is empowering.

Descriptions of her style reminded me of Fullan's (2001) *Leading in a Culture of Change*. He described a framework for leadership that is based on "a leader that lives and breathes hope, enthusiasm and energy; and demonstrates through daily performance five capacities: the capacity to understand change, build relationships, create knowledge and share it, make coherent intangible concepts and embody moral purpose" (p. 4). This statement echoed the collective picture that was described to me by most members of the coalition.

Job description of the community literacy coordinator.

The formal job description is as follows:

- The Community Literacy Coordinator works closely with the District Literacy Project team, the Building Learning Together (BLT) project, community agencies and school staff to provide services to children aged 0 to 6 and their families.

- The Community Literacy Coordinator works with these staff and agencies to develop and deliver coordinated programs for the development and enhancement of literacy skills of pre-school, Kindergarten, and Primary children.
- The Community Literacy Coordinator develops a rapport with a variety of socio-economic groups.
- The Community Literacy Coordinator researches and identifies funding sources for these initiatives, and writes grant proposals and applications to government and other funding agencies.

The two layers of leadership (formal and shared) rely on the leadership provided at the district level. During the first three case studies, I became increasingly interested in the role of the superintendent in promoting early learning initiatives. This was, in part, because of my own interest in the topic but also because of my experience as a superintendent. During the Qualicum interviews, I asked questions about leadership, its evolution and its nature. I also asked which layers in the community and school district were the driving forces behind leadership. In Qualicum, the responses were very clear. In 15 interviews, 12 individuals identified the previous superintendent as the inspiration for the initiation of the direction. The same 12 indicated that without the support of the present superintendent, it would be difficult to maintain momentum. I pursued the conversations further by asking what the current superintendent provided in her leadership capacity. The responses included her strong support of the school board, wise guidance, presence at key events related to Building Learning Together, and her commitment to young children as indicated by her public presentations and her faith in the people responsible for the program. I had the opportunity to witness all of this in my

visits to the district. One of the respondents made this comment: “[The previous superintendent] was a really shy person but he gathered people around him that he knew could do the job and just supported them.” References to the trust of the senior leaders were made about both superintendents:

Our senior people were very respectful of the process, of letting the community guide the process. There was never any of that power struggle for ownership of the project and that was critically key. Our senior administrators had that visionary understanding and trust that the community would find their way if we gave them leadership. I know in other communities that hasn’t been true; it has been more difficult for them because it has been far more prescriptive and direction coming from above and being imposed. (Q 5, personal communication, January 2007)

No matter how much praise there was for the visible leaders almost all respondents described the importance of the formal and figurehead leadership and stated support by senior officials and the elected school board.

“We would not have moved forward without people in powerful places to support us; in our case that certainly was the school board and superintendent” (Q 7, personal communication, January 2007).

No discussion of leadership and the school system is complete without a review of the role of the school administrator. School administrators appear to be uninvolved in the heart of the coalition. They have no regular representation at the table; none was assigned to be interviewed and I did not meet any in the course of my visits. I inquired about their absence from the process, and received several explanations related to the fact

that most of the programs take place away from schools. One respondent told me that the schools were full and there was no space for early learning activities. Another respondent reported that the coalition had made a conscious choice in the beginning to establish programs at non-school sites because parents are often anxious about entering school buildings and it was necessary to provide them with spaces that would encourage attendance. A third respondent reported that the schools were doing a good job of providing service to primary children, and that the principals were supportive of the direction but had enough pressure from their official duties that the coalition work would be an additional burden. A fourth respondent pointed out that some of the Mother Goose programs and Top Cop programs were situated in schools and that some principals were very involved in their own schools. In the interviews, however, some respondents indicated frustration. One described it this way:

As for roadblocks, I would like to see the leaders in our schools get a lot more involved in BLT. I don't mean that they have to pick up and take over leadership of it but I would like to see them paying a lot more attention to the emails, announcements and the activities; responding when there is a request put out. I don't think that our administrators really get the significance of what is happening. Education is about community building. The education of children in our schools is about all the people in the school community supporting their learning. I am not talking about all principals. We have principals in our district that are doing amazing things within their schools because they get this but we have to struggle too hard to bring school leaders on board. (Q 3, personal communication, January 2007)

I believe that this issue needs to be further examined. The transition between family and school has always been a challenge for the school system, for many reasons. I believe the culture of the Qualicum community is shifting to embrace early learning as a high priority. The Ministry of Education is changing the mandate of the school system to include early learning. It has been well documented that principals can be either gate-openers or gate-closers in the introduction of change in schools and are a powerful influence in the communities in which they live and work. I believe, therefore, that while the principals are reported to be on side overall, the thrust developed so far in the community could be propelled forward by the active participation of the school principals.

Building Learning Together (BLT) Program Offerings

Consistent with the philosophy of “one child at a time, one family at a time, one business at a time,” the program offerings have evolved one “program at a time.” The decision was made early in the program evolution to design programs as satellite offerings spread throughout the community, on sites other than schools and in response to identified needs and available resources. At the heart of the services is a strong reliance on the services of volunteers, particularly seniors. The coordinator is renowned for her visits to the Newcomers Club gatherings—an event routinely held in the community to welcome new residents, mostly seniors who retire to the Oceanside community. “I joined the Newcomers group in Qualicum and [the coordinator] came to the meeting and was looking for volunteers. On that day she signed up about 15 of our members who are either drivers or participants in the program” (Q 2, personal communication, January 2007).

We interviewed a dozen of the volunteers who contribute as many as three days a week and asked why this investment was so important to them.

So what do I get out of it? Well, two days a week I am engaged. It is a basic human dynamic. I am engaged in a significant way with children and it is a significant engagement. It's about being; it's about being in the moment. It's about being present in this life. For some of us, maybe it completes our reason for being here I feel a sense on behalf of all of us of accomplishment that we are making a difference, that all the time and efforts, the planning, the bearing fruit that lives are being directly affected by it—it is rewarding and satisfying. (Q 19, personal communication, January 2007)

A number of seniors said that their own grandchildren were a long way away and mentioned the social aspect of participating:

- “I really enjoy it, having been an educator myself; I enjoy the participation in singing with Mother Goose—I play the mouth organ. I don't have my grandkids close at hand and I really enjoy the children” (Q 16, personal communication, January 2007).
- “I do it for the kids. My grand kids are a long way away. I like working with little children. They are so honest and spontaneous and pure” (Q 17, personal communication, January 2007).
- “We as males on the bus provide a different influence, like grandfathers” (Q 16, personal communication, January 2007).

A retired space engineer described it simply as: “It is an enjoyable activity. I don't need to create activity; I am fairly busy in my retirement. There is a good warm

feeling that I am helping people who may need some help—personal gratification. Also I have really mentally stimulating conversations with people—a social side for me” (Q 18, personal communication, January 2007).

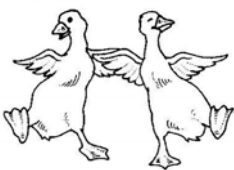
Retirees provide many different services: creating and stuffing book bags, driving, reading and coaching children in schools, playing musical instruments, baking, serving on advisory committees, and designing and building structures. Many contribute their career skills and hobbies in any way they are needed.

Building Learning Together (BLT) projects:

The following programs were offered in the 2006/2007 school year by *Building Learning Together*:



Bedtime Baggies: This imaginative multi-sensory tool was sponsored by Literacy BC and the Vancouver Sun and is delivered as 200 “bed-time baggies”. It encourages parents to work with their children to help them with skills like sequencing, organizing information, learning new vocabulary, developing attention span and expressing themselves.



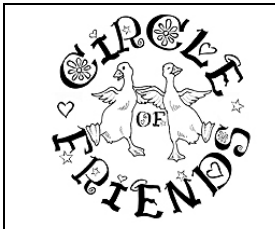
BLT Backpacks: Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children, Shell Canada, Thrifty Foods and SD 69 collaborated to buy 120 additional backpacks and educational books and toys to go in them as well as a directory for all community services and agencies. Over 300 BLT backpacks for children now circulate in the community.



Books for Babes: To date, over 1,114 cloth “baby’s first book” gift bags, made and organized by senior residents of Trillium Lodge and supported by Rotary, have been delivered by Public Health Nurses to families on baby’s first home visit. Inside, parents find baby’s first book and many valuable community contacts. This is offered in partnership with Vancouver Island Regional Libraries.



Children’s Services Directory: A second, updated edition was printed in Summer 2006, profiling 22 Oceanside non-profit and government agencies offering services for children 0-6 and their families.



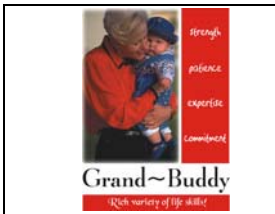
Circle of Friends Conferences: This event was most recently held February 17-18, 2006 and has been a regular event, initially designed as a local training venue, it has become a popular provincial event attracting hundreds of participants. Numerous workshops and seminars led by professionals in the field of early education helped broaden our understanding of how parents and educators can work together to support children aged 0-6 in their journey toward successful learning. Parents and educators come from all over BC to participate.



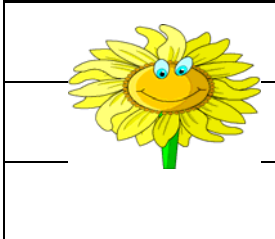
Community Mapping Station, BLT Database, UBC HELP Project: BLT actively participates in UBC’s Human Early Learning Partnership mapping project (HELP), aimed at improving early learning opportunities for children 0-6. BLT databases were significantly expanded. Data are collected on all Building Learning Together initiatives. BLT now hosts a mapping station computer and printer for the HELP project. BLT is working with HELP on a research proposal for the Challenge Research Program (Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network).



Cook up a Bedtime Story: Parents and children enjoy facilitated playtime in the evening followed by stories and songs in Munchkinland Discovery Centre; then move to a nearby portable for a food demonstration and a snack and a visit from Mother Goose with her nursery rhymes. Kids can wear pyjamas and dads are encouraged to attend.



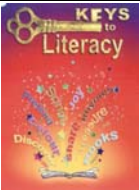
Grand-Buddy Program: Over 200 community Grand-Buddies support all early literacy initiatives provided by the Building Learning Together steering committee, for example: Words On Wheels bus drivers and on-board helpers, grand-buddy readers in the schools, painters and carpenters working on Munchkinland Discovery Centre, senior / youth mentors, and more.



Growing Dreams – The district was inundated with so many requests for visits from other communities that the Ministry of Education provided a grant to the district to fund presentations to other BC school districts and communities who visit by sharing the BLT process and steps to success.



Hug-a-Book: Sponsored by White Spot, parents read to their children every day, mark off a calendar and receive a redeemable coupon.



Keys to Literacy: PacificCARE’s Keys to Literacy Project ran throughout the school year. The Keys resource package has positive parenting tips, early literacy facts, developmental speech and language information and simple recipes. Monthly two-hour sessions invite community partners such as speech, behaviour and occupational therapists and librarians to share an interactive evening of theory, practice and hands-on ideas.



Mother Goose & Friends: Ten to 14 Mother Goose & Friends sites run successfully each fall and spring throughout the community. Attendance has topped 3,500 visits with families enjoying the magic of stories, songs and rhymes! Sites include a baby site, Saturday site at the Parksville library, and an evening site. Fruit snacks are provided by a local grocer, baking by seniors’ lodges and special needs students at the high school.



Mother Goose Goes to School: Offered in eight elementary schools, preschoolers become familiar with the school and its library while participating in the Mother Goose & Friends Program. Children are issued school library cards.



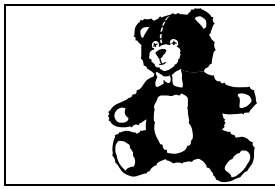
Munchkinland Discovery Centre: A portable classroom was transformed into a stimulating educational play centre, including interactive play/learning areas: Stuffed Buddy Hospital, Sunflower Grocery, Dine-O-Diner, Hobbit House, a First Nations community, and other attractions. Child-size model miniature buildings include a home, fire station, gas station, train station and farm. High school wood-working classes and SOS (Society of Organized Service), a non-profit community services organization, completed the full-sized interactive booths. Munchkinland opened in January 2006. It is designed to strengthen community capacity by providing multiple educational opportunities to parents.



Ready Set Learn: Provincial funding provides an opportunity for all district elementary schools to welcome families and their three-year-olds to an open house and information event. This event helps to make early connections with families and their young children.



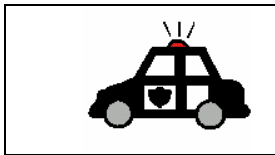
Roots of Empathy: In Fall 2006, the program was offered in 14 kindergarten and grade 1 classrooms in SD 69. Trained instructors visit classrooms three times a month to offer this important anti-bullying program, along with the baby who is being studied and the parent.



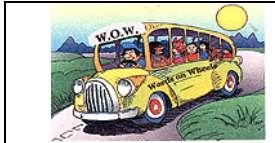
Spinoza Bears: These comforting bears from the TB Vets Charitable Foundation and the Royal Canadian Legion are used by six local service agencies in their work with children living with illness, disability or trauma. Therapeutic audiotapes in the bears’ tummies enhance interactive reading activities. In addition, regular tapes can be substituted for any child to listen to talking books.



Teaching From The Heart: This is a facilitated small-group workshop led by early learning experts to build on the strength of the parent-child relationship offered in Munchkinland and designed to develop an understanding of developmental milestones and individual learning styles through play experiences as a vehicle for learning.



Top Cop Reading Program: The program involves the local librarian and member of the police force who visit 18 classrooms. Community Policing inspired the program and continues to deliver this innovative encouragement for reading with an incentive program in partnership with Vancouver Island Regional Libraries and Chapters Books.



Words On Wheels (W.O.W.) bus: It was another exceptional year for the WOW bus with over 2,900 visits at 163 stops at Bowser, Errington, SOS/Health Unit, and other local sites – community agencies continued to provide support, information and referrals for our families.

Figure 19. Building Learning Together Projects

First Impression

On being introduced to the wide variety of programs and advertisements, I felt overwhelmed. As indicated in the summary in the preceding chart, each program has a visual signature identity. Pamphlets and flyers can be spotted throughout the community and are visible because of the brightly coloured graphics, BLT identity and creative characters and cartoon figures. As the interviews proceeded, it became clear that I was the only one who was overwhelmed. Respondents referred quite casually to the programs

and the importance of what they were doing. It soon became clear that multiple linkages occurred between what initially seemed to be discrete programs. These linkages were:

- Individuals worked between or coordinated several of the programs;
- Central BLT staff coordinated numerous aspects of different programs;
- The coalition (BLT Steering Committee) designed and oversaw the development of each of them;
- Each program component referred to the others with linkages for parental understanding;
- The same volunteers serviced several of them; and
- Imagination, creativity, a zest for life, a focus on children and Mother Goose danced through them all.

What captured my imagination was an old but important understanding from my thirty-five year career as a school administrator in which I had evaluated scores of teachers and accredited some of the province's best schools. During my career, I have had the opportunity to implement, witness and study many projects involving educational and systemic, organizational change. I understood what kind of people lead it and how they create the high-performing team, described by Katzenbach and Smith (1993). They were people who were intensely committed to each other and even more intensely committed to children, especially those who struggled to learn. They believed in possibilities and hope for every child and the rights of parents to play a primary role in the education of their children. They believed in school as an active, fun-loving place of exploration and celebration, stimulating the power of the imagination and expression through multi-media. They believed in the power of one. The result of their work was

evident in the joy of the children and their belief in themselves, their growing knowledge of their individual rights and responsibilities and their love of learning. Katzenbach and Smith understood the importance of a collective vision and mission to guide their planning. Magical places were created by adults who cared about children.

In the Oceanside community, my imagination was captured by the way people and services combined as Katzenbach and Smith had described. Hays (2004) noted that the challenge of case study research was the researcher's ability to provide a rich description of the site: "a unique sense, a visual image, and a personality of place" (p. 233). This description should acquaint the reader with the main players as well as provide an understanding of the researcher's experience in such settings. The challenge for me was to bring Oceanside to life so that others could understand and use it in a way that would work in their own context. At this point, I recognized how great the challenge was in this particular case study. There was no roadmap for the Oceanside journey. It evolved organically from the collective vision of many individuals who were inspired by a belief in families as central to a child's hope for the future. Literacy and relationships were the vehicles for the journey. Passengers were invited on board one at a time as they expressed interest or were needed. Detours were taken and schedules and destinations changed. The resulting experiences for young children and their families were outstanding. During my visits, I spent several days with my research team visiting two of the sites, observing and interviewing those who were willing.

Meeting Mother Goose.

We met Mother Goose inadvertently as we waited in the Building Learning Together (BLT) office for the day to start. Many references were made to the Mother

Goose presence but nothing had prepared us for the first encounter. A rather harried apparition whipped past us at the entryway—about size 18 orange feet with many toes, a white furry suit and a massive head under her arm complete with a large orange bill—I thought we’d mistakenly arrived in Disneyland. We next saw her at the back of the bus, hugging little ones, telling them stories, playing finger games and singing nursery rhymes. The topknot of feathers danced on her head as she mimicked the book characters and her bill flopped over her eyes. Parents happily joined in the fun. Later we discovered it takes four Mother Geese to accommodate all the celebrity events in town. This Official Mother Goose commented on the role:

I was a former Child and Youth Care worker and moved to this area, not quite sure what I was going to do when I got here, and I started bringing my children to the WOW bus. They were 2, 5 and 7 at the time. They loved it and I loved the opportunity to meet adults in the community, just to be able to know some faces. The coordinator was wonderful and after one-and-a-half years, she asked me if I wanted to be the Goose. I didn’t think I would be working with pre-schoolers but the value of singing and playing with children has just been so amazing As Mother Goose, I am seeing parents coming in crying because they are having such a bad day. Parenting can be very tough and sometimes children take the brunt of it. We are preventing a lot of that from happening. They know they can come to the bus and get support and their kids can have a good time. By the time they leave, they are hugging their kids and they are feeling better about themselves. Just hearing from another adult that today is a bad day and it is okay to have a bad day ... tomorrow will be better and you *are* a good mom They are getting a lot

of exposure to books, singing, rhymes and social activities. We are in a very small space in the back of the bus so they are learning a lot of manners and respecting people around them. We do movement activities to stimulate the brain. We teach brain-gym exercises. We are continually taking workshops ourselves as Mother Geese so that we are up-to-date on the latest that we can present to the kids and their parents. (Q 14, personal communication, January 2007)



Figure 20. Mother Goose on the Bus

The coordinator on the bus described the value of their services:

Mother Goose is the gift. These women are amazing. Each of them costumes differently; as far as the kids are concerned, they are Mother Goose and they sleep in that costume. It has a huge influence on the children. What they model, what they encourage, what they cause to unfold in the children, what they do in the back of the bus is a huge job. It is two hours of perpetual motion and encompassing children from infant up to perhaps eight- or nine-years-old. So if they are doing a literacy activity, how do they engage the nine-year-old and the young one who is having this experience for the first time, and still make it interesting? Mother Goose models simple possibilities that parents can keep in their back pocket to use with their children to build on their relationship—a song, a rhyme, and stuff out of the junk drawer. The message from Mother Goose is “Keep it simple. These things in your daily life with your kids are powerful tools; they are relationship-building tools.” So the broad definition of literacy comes back to relationships. (Q 22, personal communication, January 2007)

This concept of the connection between literacy, laughter, love and relationships was pervasive throughout our travels with the children and their families or caregivers. Birdwatchers can spot Mother Goose in parades, library get-togethers, Top Cop visits, special town events, Mother Goose Goes to School readings and anywhere else children might be. She also can be counted on to be ever-present on the WOW (Words on Wheels) bus, at all its stops.

Riding with Mother Goose (and others) on the WOW bus.

When the BLT (Building Learning Together) coalition members first began considering the literacy needs of young children in their community, the issue of access was foremost in their minds. The concept of a mobile library, like the bookmobiles of the 1950s, seemed like a logical solution. Coincidentally, one of the senior volunteers was a former architect who, when approached, agreed to renovate an old school bus as the solution. He described the multiple challenges, particularly the small size of the bus and the need to accommodate so many elements in it. Many children and parents rode in it at the same time, playing and visiting. Computers were needed and the storage and book displays took up space. Space was needed to accommodate play, learning, relaxing, conversation, snacks and food storage. An electrical heating system was important for winter. “We had to use every cubic inch of the bus!” (Q 21, personal communication, January 2007).

The plan resulted in three sections on the bus:

- (1) A driver’s space in the front including a food bin for needy families;
- (2) A central space on the bus for the coordinator, three or four volunteers, multiple visiting parents, a coffee pot and snack space, storage cupboards, counters, displays for community announcements re available employment and referral agencies and space for computers; and
- (3) The rear of the bus, partially enclosed with small benches and carpets for the Mother Goose nest, all her gosling children, book displays, hanging stuffed toys for cuddling and room for parents to join in.

The salary for the coordinator of the bus volunteers and drivers for thirty hours a week (as well as the coordinator of Munchkinland) comes from service groups, Queen Alexandra hospital, grants, community services and Success by 6 and local partners such as SOS (Society of Organized Services). The school district maintains the bus, while community agencies provided the new motor. High school students do some of the cleaning of the materials. It is truly a community project. Three of our research team travelled on the bus that day, observing, interviewing and talking with families. We quickly learned that literacy was only one aspect of the magic of the bus.

Quotes from participants tell the stories best:

Socialization benefits.

I like the bus because there are a lot of children and I can socialize, get used to sharing and participate with other kids. There is a lot of parental support. It is nice when you are having a rough morning; you can come in here and have some company. (Q 12, personal communication, January 2007)

There are many reasons but one of them is the social availability of the bus to allow the children to interact with other little ones. Secondly, it is the opportunity for mothers to interact with other parents and mothers, and even the fathers come along. (Q 16, personal communication, January 2007)

These are rural communities that we are visiting and we provide important social contact for some of these parents, especially single parents. This is a routine in many parents' week that both children and parents look forward to. In some of these communities, your nearest neighbour can be three kilometres away. (Q 19, personal communication, January 2007)

There are multi social levels on the bus: people are chit chatting, kids are learning social skills, and parents are asking questions. Then the really neat thing happens: parents are building up relationships with each other or me, saying I need help, and then resources are found. (Q 22, personal communication, January 2007)



Figure 21. Mascots Visit BLT Events and the Bus Regularly

Social capital benefits.

McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2007) summarize the work of others: *social capital* is the premise that social networks have value, that it is the collective value of who people know and the inclination that arises from social networks to do things for each other. It is not just about warm feelings that arise from interactions but the trust, reciprocity, information and cooperation that arises through the social network. “Social

capital creates value for the people who are connected and—at least sometimes—for bystanders as well” (p.132). Some examples from participants:

- What is most important is the consistency and the compassion of what parents receive on the bus. It is incredible. There is a schedule. The bus shows up in the community on a regular basis. Often these are communities where people can't afford insurance to drive a vehicle. They can come on board and our coordinator is an art therapist with a counselling background. She listens to them if they are having a bad day and [in the meantime] they know that their children are being well taken care of in the back of the bus with songs and rhymes and Mother Goose. (Q 13, personal communication, January 2007)
- I remember one mother when she first came in she looked like she was 15 years old. She had two youngsters along with her and it was like she was saying, “Hey I have this family and it is overwhelming!” But through the program her confidence was gained because she came every week. We see this with other families. A growth occurs through the fact that they learn; they are more relaxed, they seek advice from other people on the bus; the resources that are on the bus have an impact on what they do on a daily basis with their families. Hopefully in the end it comes to something that is self-sustaining. (Q 15, personal communication, January 2007)

On the surface, the Oceanside area appears to be a reasonably affluent community. One of the things that surprised our research team and, indeed, had surprised

the bus workers initially was the degree of hunger in many families. The following stories are examples that were mentioned in almost every interview on the bus:

I observe parents, often single moms, who are less fortunate than you and I. They not only take advantage of the social contact on the bus but they will help themselves to the free food that is offered on the bus and I really like that. They don't feel embarrassed but you know that they need it. There is something very touching about seeing them have access to things like food that we take for granted. There is no uneasiness. If you can use it, help yourself, and there is no form to fill out. (Q 19, personal communication, January 2007)

Sometimes there are extenuating needs. Once a fellow came on the bus and he didn't make it past the first seat because that is where the food and the clothes were; he filled the bags and backed out of the bus; he just kept saying thank you, thank you, thank you—he must have said it 30 times. It was like a lifeline had been thrown out to him His immediate needs were addressed and his prayers answered to be able to feed his family that day. (Q 20, personal communication, January 2007)

Sometimes the needs of people arriving on the bus are not obvious at first and cannot be anticipated:

There was one instance where a fellow came on the bus. He said, "I am so glad you are here. I usually can't come because my child is in kindergarten." [We had stayed late that day.] He said he wanted some books that he could read to his child. As the books were being suggested and picked out and questions asked, it became obvious they weren't for the child. They were for him—he was illiterate.

He had gone to courses at the college but found it overwhelming. You could sense his frustration. He wanted to do something around literacy with his child, but he had his own handicap. He came back in other instances too. (Q 19, personal communication, January 2007)

This concept of social capital might best be defined by this story:

I remember a parent who wouldn't leave the steps of the bus either and it was her children who eventually pulled her in. She was angry, disenfranchised, a bit of a fringe person, didn't know if it was safe enough for her to be who she is. Week after week, I brought coffee to the front of the bus to her and chatted when I could, and eventually I enveloped her and got her to join us and she started to take risks. This woman told us later that she has made some huge life changes with her children. Without the bus, she thinks she would have had to give them up. She wrote it down [in an evaluation] that she would have given them up for adoption without the bus. She is now accepting outside resources. She is now able to say, "I can receive help and I am okay with that." She is letting people in. (Q 22, personal communication, January 2007)

In spite of the heart-wrenching stories about experiences of difficult family situations, many pointed out to us that the community that attends regularly is, in fact, very diverse.

People don't come on the bus because they have a need. Originally they come on the bus because they want to do something with their children—professors, doctors, lawyers—but once they get on the bus, there is this incredible normalization and joining of all levels—people who are in financial and

emotional need mixing with those who have few needs at all. Some are well heeled and drive up in a Lexus, yet they all stand in the center of the bus in the same conversation because parenting is tough. We all have similar needs no matter what our economic group. This bus is transformational. I have seen lives change in a very short period of time. (Q 22, personal communication, January 2007)

Talking with the Bus Drivers.

The conversation about the bus would not be complete without a discussion with the bus drivers who, along with the coordinator, play a pivotal role. All but one of them is retired. They initially train for the bus, qualify to drive, then assume the daily task of picking up the bus from the secured lot and driving it on its scheduled route (three days a week to about six stops). They plug it in to a volunteer electrical site (beside a gas station the day we accompanied it) and make certain all safety issues are addressed. I imagined the driver leaving for coffee or a stroll until departure time (and so did some of the drivers in the beginning) but it was not to be. The role that emerged has been a highlight for most of the eight we interviewed. We asked why. The responses follow:

It is mutually beneficial. Obviously, the parents and children benefit, but the drivers benefit too. In the beginning, they used to just set the bus up and get the generator going and then I would go off somewhere and read the paper. But the coordinator one day asked me if I would hang around. That made the difference when I got involved in the actual operation—engaging with the parents, the kids and the grandparents as a person. There are about five or six destinations that we take the bus. I am often at the same two or three sites over and over so I see a lot

of the same faces coming back and get to know the families. Many moms bring friends so word spreads by referral so we routinely see new faces. (Q 19, personal communication, January 2007)

A different bus driver responded:

It's true every now and again there will be one [little one] running around. As the bus driver, we take control, get them in the driver's seat and amuse them there. Sometimes we make a little breakthrough. One little guy said before he left, "I like you" and that makes it all worthwhile. No kidding! I had a 9-month-old in my arms just recently—a beautiful little baby. (Q 16, personal communication, January 2007)



Figure 22. Bus Driver and Visitor

A parent talked about the bus drivers and their contribution:

Another great thing about the bus is the “grand-buddies.” The bus drivers are usually men and the grand-buddies are usually women. They are retired and bring so much knowledge into the bus. A couple of our drivers are retired rocket scientists and many other professions. Some of the kids come up to the front with the bus drivers. Grand-buddies share their life-stories with the kids. The families are meeting so many new people in our community through this, and learning so much. (Q 14, personal communication, January 2007)

The one bus driver who is not retired but owns an established local business described his reason for participation in this way:

I like to make contributions to the community; I donate a lot financially but this frontline...being involved with the people who both operate it and use it. It reminds me that there is more to life than trying to make a dollar. It is almost therapeutic for me. (Q 19, personal communication, January 2007)

While the coordinator directed us to the interviews with the bus drivers as a high priority, they, in turn, praised her skills as being the heart and soul of all that happens on the bus. It was apparent that the personality and interpersonal strengths of the coordinator were important factors in the success of a venture such as this. One driver described the many references to her significance in this way:

The first person they meet is the coordinator and she exemplifies the type of person that can put people at ease right away. She is usually in the center of the bus where she meets with the parents. In casual discussion, she establishes what

their needs are and sometimes refers them to other agencies. She talks to them about their own issues, whether they are a new mother, or someone who is having discipline problems with a child. The sincerity [of the atmosphere] that starts with [the coordinator] overflows to happen with the other mothers too, and a support group develops that they can look forward to. (Q 16, personal communication, January 2007)

Typically and humbly, the coordinator deferred the compliment.

It is such a privilege to work with the people who give up their time to work with these children and value the program with me. They bring their passion to it and their energy. You are all the backbone of the bus. It couldn't work without Mother Goose, all the grand-buddies and the volunteer parents. You could remove me because the parents are so strong. (Q 22, personal communication, January 2007)

Learning on the bus.

When the bus program was first conceived, the specific intent was to make literacy activities for early learners more accessible to hard-to-reach families; to assist community partners in providing outreach satellite locations; to engage non-traditional partners and the business community and to create a safe environment where relationships could develop and shared learning could occur. It was unimaginable at the time that the social benefits would be so significant. As staff witnessed the escalating popularity of the bus and the interest shown by families in the literacy experiences, they were able to pronounce the bus a resounding success in every way. Mother Goose is the star attraction with her songs, stories and hand games. The bus carries “magic bags” that

are thematically organized on topics like colours or animals that prompt children to match, organize or catalogue items. Parents and grandparents join in, some actually learning how to play for the first time in a long time. Of course, books such as the lending library and the stories with Mother Goose are the highlight. Parents respond:

How has this changed our lives? My husband or I read to her every night 20 minutes to ½ hour. We read to her often during the day and play games with her, either reading or singing. We practise drawing letters and numbers on her whiteboard. We sing the 1, 2, 3's and do a lot of counting. Any chance we get, we count whether it is stairs or.... It brings a new conversation into the home. She talks to her dad about what she had done at the bus. I can talk to my husband too about the things we have learned. (Q 12, personal communication, January 2007)

Well, you know, I could not sing the English songs but we sing the English songs now, so it helps me with my language and it helps her learn the proper words as well. She behaves better at home now because when she is grumpy, we sing songs that we learned from Mother Goose. (Q 11, personal communication, January 2007).

“For some children, this is the only introduction to literacy that they will get prior to school” (Q 14, personal communication, January 2007).

Discovering Munchkinland Discovery Centre.

Once the richness of the WOW bus experience had become apparent, the coalition decided to establish a stationary centre that would achieve many of the same goals as the bus. The coalition worked to establish an integrated family services model that would co-locate programs and services from VIHA (Vancouver Island Health Authority), SD 69

(Qualicum), CCRR (Child Care Resource and Referral), and MCFD through purposeful play in an educational family centre for parents, caregivers and children—described by coalition members as the most ambitious early learning initiative of all. While other school districts were exploring the possibilities of similar centres in empty classrooms, Oceanside was restricted in pursuing this avenue because of a relatively stable school population. Not to be deterred, the coalition again turned to their volunteer architect with the proposal of using an empty portable at the BLT (Building Learning Together) office site, which also happens to be in the heart of Parksville.

The architect designed a scale model of a town on the table in the middle of the classroom portable. It was big enough to be detailed, so that when the children were playing with this model they would have a sense of the scale of the fire hall, the police station, a barn and so on. Around the edges of the portable, he designed imaginative play centres that included a diner, a hospital, a grocery store, a First Nations canoe centre, a market, sand play, painting opportunities and other interactive activities, all on a scale that would suit a young child.

Designed by the volunteer architect, the model miniature buildings were laser cut and assembled by high school woodworking classes and interested seniors. The Society of Organized Services provided the space for the Construction Zone (as it was called) for Munchkinland.

The stated purpose of the centre is to (a) strengthen and empower families through child development; (b) develop social networks for families; (c) facilitate children's readiness to learn; (d) mobilize community partnerships; and (e) develop community ownership.

Munchkinland opened last year (2006) and in the first three months, hosted over 4,000 adults and children. On any given day, 15 to 100 people visit depending on who is using the site; on one occasion the count was 180. One day a week, it is open for public drop-in. Two days a week, it is available for pre-registered groups of children aged 0 to 6, licensed and non-licensed daycare groups, preschool educators and their students, after-school programs, home-schooled children and elementary schools. It is staffed by qualified early childhood educators, teachers and early intervention specialists. The salary of the adults is covered by a variety of organizations and grants, similar to the support for the bus.

Two other projects are part of the offering:

Teaching from the Heart is a series of educational workshops and hands-on interactive play led by skilled community and early child development specialists with a focus on play as a vehicle for children's learning. Offered as a small group experience for parents and children, it includes purposeful playtime with questions and answers, songs and rhymes and story time.

Cooking up a Story (in partnership with *Healthy Beginnings*) is facilitated playtime followed by stories and songs. It then moves to a nearby community kitchen for a short food demonstration, recipe sharing and snack with Mother Goose. Kids can come in pyjamas and dads are especially encouraged to attend.

Daycare providers are enthusiastic users of the services at Munchkinland:


A lot of the resources that are here at Munchkinland would not be available in my daycare home. By bringing my daycare group to Munchkinland, they get the opportunity to use all the different tools in their work and they learn from using

them. The social part is really important because they are playing with a larger number of kids. When we come to Munchkinland, we get information about all the different community activities going on for each particular week and we get to network with other caregivers and share information. Childcare in the home can be very isolating ... so when we come here to Munchkinland we get an opportunity to share problems and issues and discuss common solutions with other caregivers. (Q 9, personal communication, January 2007)

While daycare providers express the gratitude for an enriched program, parents with special needs children appreciate the opportunity for a gentle introduction for their children into a challenging world.

We get so many things out of coming here to Munchkinland. The people who work here give us tips on how to work more effectively with our children. I have a little boy with a cochlear implant and although it is noisy here for him, he gets a lot out of being here with so many other children. In this new experience with his implant, the CCRR (Childcare Resource and Referral) person is almost always here and she is so wonderful about providing us with information related to childcare resources. The home daycares are so solitary. Having an adult conversation! There are all kinds of learning activities here. Just look around the room—counting, sequencing, recognizing money, cause and effect, and hands-on learning. We get to participate in the skill learning with the children through interactive activities. I love coming here and the kids love coming here. We are very lucky as a community to have this drop-in center here for us. (Q 10, personal communication, January 2007)

Community Linkages



Building Learning Together — Steering Committee

<p>Agencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Literacy Parksville / Qualicum • Associated Family and Community Support Services • Canadian Federation of University Women: P/Q Branch • Society of Organized Services • Family Resource Association • Salvation Army • Springboard Family Centre • Oceanside Volunteer Association • Community Restorative Justice • Parent Support Services • RDN: Recreation & Parks Department • PacificCARE • The Career Centre <p>Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alcohol and Drug Programs • Vancouver Island Health Authority • Healthy Beginnings • Mental Health <p>Government</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry for Children and Family Development • Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security • Human Resources Development Canada • Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services <p>Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School District No. 69 (Qualicum) • District Parent Advisory Council • Parksville and Qualicum Libraries • Malaspina University-College • Retired Teachers <p>First Nations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qualicum First Nations • Nanoose First Nations 	<p>Police</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Policing • RCMP <p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids Klub • Retirees of our community • 2010 Legacies Now: Literacy Now • Success By 6
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Figure 23. Building Learning Together (BLT) Partners

Among the benefits already cited for the Oceanside initiative are the linkages that have been built into the services and programs. The previous figure is illustrative of the many deep connections between partners in the community. The WOW bus is coordinated by an individual who makes it part of her job to be closely tied to all community agencies and frequently refers parents to them as needs arise. The bus carries

a wealth of current information about community agencies, services and employment opportunities. Munchkinland provides services in partnership with the Vancouver Island Health Authority, SOS (Society of Organized Services) child, youth and family services, and various professionals through the workshop and parent education programs. It also provides the time and facility space for Family Resource services, speech, physical and occupational therapists, and daycares. The central office space provided at the BLT school district property (which also includes the Munchkinland site and WOW bus parking) allows constant informal interaction between the many parties serving families and young children. The community-wide coalition and the early learning BLT coalition provide monthly meeting opportunities for all agencies to discuss priorities.

The professional groups have found their own way to strengthen connections. For example, Health's speech and language pathologists have usually been isolated in the community because of their "pullout" model (separating the child from the parent during therapy). It was neither family centered nor meeting the needs of families, so the professionals began a grassroots movement with the different Ministries to place them all in the same building, thereby aligning with the evolving BLT coalition view on integrating services. Families could then visit, be referred to one service, and then be directed to another service across the hall, thus improving access for rural families who cannot travel frequently, as well as removing barriers. The professionals refer families to the BLT programs. They often work with, and visit some of their clients in the Mother Goose programs, Munchkinland and others. This play activity during therapy softens the experience of dealing with challenged families. One of the speech therapists commented on the fact that about one in four preschool children has special needs. He will be

meeting a group of them at Munchkinland for two years before they go to school to help them with language development. He described how important it is to link all the daycares with BLT because of the professional development available to make their programs stronger and more consistent.

It's very exciting to do things like this ... sometimes five of us are involved with the same family and we are all here in the building together. Each week we sit together and plan around families. Sometimes we integrate goals, visit the home together and, in this way, cut to the chase on meeting the parents' needs. (Q 23, personal communication, January 2007)

The professionals expressed the belief that they are finding the children earlier (well before they are 4 years old), often referred by the infant development program, and can therefore apply interventions at a much earlier age. While most referrals are formal (by other professionals), at times they are informal (from the BLT program). Even Mother Goose has made referrals when she believes it appropriate, to check on a child who might seem language delayed. The therapist might then drop in at the next Mother Goose program to observe or conduct an informal assessment.

We are still missing kids so we're not perfect yet, but we are really improving as a community. We are so fortunate that this conversation started in our community years ago because we are making a difference. Having someone spearhead it, like our BLT coordinator, has really helped us break down geographical and resource barriers with government. We are succeeding in building the bridge between schools and the preschool years. But it takes a long time to make change. (Q 23, personal communication, January 2007)

He continued:

What we are not yet addressing is the needs of children with serious challenges. The wait-list for speech therapy and communication disorders is eight months. So are we better to be joining in at Munchkinland to support developmental delays for many children and their parents who can learn too, or making the autistic child the priority? We shouldn't have to make those choices. It breaks your heart to know we can't reach them all early.

Even though progress is being made, the resources are not yet available to everyone. The clear message given to government was that it should listen to communities and respond to the need for help immediately.

Coalition Funding.

Members of the coalition are funded by the organization with which they work; Project Literacy has contributed significant amounts of time for the administrative time to support the project. The Building Learning Together (BLT) group has enhanced the collaborative nature of its work by co-locating some offices in school district buildings. For instance, the CCRR (Childcare Resource and Referral) office is located with school staff. The staff person is able to maintain connection with the coordinator and other staff members as well as with the preschool programs that operate in the same building. This organization explains the fact that there is little tension between the ECD community and school district activity in early learning, as is the case in many other districts. Many efforts have been made to include them as key partners in all parts of the project. Funding has been a source of frustration for the coalition because it relies heavily on grants.

The things that get in the way are the grant writing we have to do to get funding from different funders, and the different levels of understanding out there, about what is needed for children and families. [We have] funders that try to direct the use of the monies in communities instead of respecting that communities know what they need. [We also have] politicians and bureaucrats that get in the way of people who are doing good work. (Q 5, personal communication, January 2007)

The funding sources are often short term and the application process has to be repeated annually. Some funding from government and organizations such as Success by 6 come with expectations that do not match the goals of the programs. This top-down approach to funding is inconsistent with the grassroots movements that are emerging all over BC. Such organizations are honestly attempting to set a high standard and accountability processes by dispersing funds this way, but for a community like Oceanside that is so advanced in its planning and implementation, a more flexible approach would be welcomed. Independence from central sources has its benefits, nevertheless.

Although the Ministry's [Ministry of Children and Families] senior people have been very supportive of our project there is no one Ministry that owns our project; so people in our community don't see the Ministries as playing a significant role.

This belongs to our community. (Q 5, personal communication, January 2007)

The coordinator has established a network of over 80 community partners that contribute in varying degrees. Some are substantial contributors, such as Thrifty's, which provides food regularly for the WOW bus and for needy families. Others contribute prizes or rewards for the literacy program, books for book bags, volunteers to support the programs and expertise as needed in the construction of Munchkinland. Some are

substantial financial donors, such as the local Royal Bank. Some donations are spontaneous when the community becomes aware of a need for the program. When the WOW bus broke down and a new motor was needed, a newspaper article alerted the community that the bus would not be at its regularly scheduled stops until further notice. Without hesitation, local auto shops were calling to volunteer services and equipment while others called to offer financial assistance. The bus was back on the road in days. The BLT group is effusive in its acknowledgement of community support in publications, celebrations and expressions of public gratitude.

The business community was first involved because we went to them and we helped them to come to understand the importance of ECD but they are now remaining involved because it is a community belief now that this is very important. (Q 4, personal communication, January 2007)

The attitude towards funding that enters the community through any of the key agencies is highly evolved. The first task of the coalition is to discuss how that funding can be applied. I attribute this unusual capacity to two factors: (a) that so much time was taken in the first few years of the coalition's development to develop an understanding of values, goals, mission and purpose; and (b) the active role of community members in the discussions from the birth of the coalition. The trust base between members is strong. To be able to set aside individual funding priorities to implement a community vision is a challenging task for a diverse group of people with competing agendas. One member described the beginning of the Mother Goose program:

I think it is important to talk about how these programs like Mother Goose got started. It wasn't that someone sent out an announcement saying there will be

Mother Goose at the church on such a day and time. The idea was brought to the coalition table as an idea along with many other ideas. The group at the table discussed the pros and cons of the program and its implementation, and chose to offer that program. Now that's a real grassroots approach to implementing community needs! You have to start at the community with questions rather than answers. This is a huge foundation for our success It had to become a community vision in order to be successful. (Q 7, personal communication, January 2007)

“Our government agencies in town were not on board initially but they had to come on board because the community thrust was so strong they couldn't disregard it” (Q 7, personal communication, January 2007).

Moving Towards Evidence

Like the other three communities, Oceanside has participated in the EDI (Early Development Instrument) data collection for two cycles of two years. The results are inconclusive and it is generally agreed that it is too soon to expect the results of the BLT program to affect the EDI data. When I asked for any other hard data that would demonstrate positive change, however, I was presented with a cardboard box of four binders and a clipboard, all carefully itemized and organized. The BLT (Building Learning Together) coalition has been keeping records of attendance at every program. When children register for the program, parents complete a registration form that identifies their preschool or daycare if applicable; their names, gender and birthday; first or second languages; parents' names and contact numbers in case of emergency; address, phone and postal code. The form includes an explanation as to why the data are kept, an

insurance waiver, and a photo consent and release agreement. Most of the information is optional, honouring the intent of the Freedom of Information and Privacy legislation.

The data are collected daily by the adults at every program who sign in all guests. The data are recorded and maintained centrally on a computer, and in the binders annually. Data are recorded at all BLT sites and include:

- Names of individual children and the programs they attended, including the information from their initial registration form;
- Names of adult visitors, dates of visit and contact information;
- Location of sites for all programs;
- First and second languages;
- Donation totals and donors;
- Results of evaluations at sites;
- Facilitators' attendance; and
- Other.

Use of Data

This extensive data collection can be manipulated on the computer to present (either graphically or numerically) a wide range of information about the attendees in the programs:

- The percentage of children and adults who attend;
- The caregiver who brings the child (mother, father, grandparent, daycare provider);
- Children's ages by percentage;
- Approximate average attendance; and
- Other.

For example, if the coalition wanted to examine the Mother Goose program, they have at their fingertips the following information for the six-month period starting in January 2004: In 74 sessions, those who attended were 440 mothers, 30 fathers, 18 grandparents, and 23 caregivers. One hundred and thirty of the children attending were babies and 514 were preschoolers. Four workers managed the program over that period.

The data are used to assist with evaluation, planning and funding of the programs. For example, once the data revealed that many fewer fathers were attending programs than mothers, an effort was made to offer some programs at different times of the day and specifically invite fathers. The number of fathers increased as a result.

Similarly, the data on individual children reveal which programs they have attended and how frequently. Some children have consistently attended only one program but frequently; others attend a mixture of programs on an annual basis.

Because the bus has been operating for only two years and Munchkinland for one year, it is too soon to begin to measure differences in children's development based on program attendance. The community is ready to consider how to create this evidence, however, given the amount of data already collected. It would be possible to establish base-line data on young children, track the children through preschool and school, and then compare them with children who had not had similar experiences. This is possible because of the amount of data collected so far and the frequent attendance of a large proportion of the population.

In recognition of this fact, through HELP (the Human Early Learning Partnership) the school district was awarded a three-year grant from the Canadian Language and Literacy Network. It received approximately \$50,000 per year to create a pilot project in

which barcode technology will be used so that participating children (families) will be assigned cards to swipe and collect the data at each site. The card will function like a frequent flyer program with literacy rewards to encourage children to participate. The objectives of the pilot project are:

- Identifying who the children are and where they live in our communities;
- Engaging them in the use of interagency services that support the five key developmental domains—social competence, emotional maturity, physical health and well-being, language and cognitive development, communication skills and general knowledge;
- Tracking their use of those services through innovative bar code technology;
- Assessing their view of the quality of the services to enhance the services;
- Providing access to services and resources in the most strategic sites in the community in order to reach the most vulnerable children;
- Expanding the awareness of families and communities of the range of services available and their impact on language and literacy development; and
- Linking the child's PHN (Personal Health Number) to the recorded data (with the signed consent of their parents) so that, in future, UBC researchers will be able to link the Qualicum data (anonymously) with other data to enhance services to young children.

The community is poised to create a model for Canada to locate and track the experiences of preschool children. The goal is to establish trajectories and therefore offer higher quality preschool experiences in our communities.

The Past, the Future and Sustainability

As previously indicated, the BLT coalition spent much of the first year defining itself, its Mission and Vision, and building trust and understanding between members. It was only in this past year (2006) as the coalition was preparing to assist other districts that it became apparent they needed to define themselves based on their experiences, learning and achievements. As a result, 10 Guiding Principles were established. They have been adopted by the coalition as a summary of their knowledge to date and a basis for planning. Each principle elaborates on the group's belief statements.

Building Learning Together (BLT): 10 Principles

1. *Children*: Children are active, engaged explorers, creative thinkers, rich in resources, strong and competent;
2. *Families*: Families are significant essential partners and active contributors to their children's lives;
3. *The Environment*: The environment is a motivating and animating force that creates a space for relationships, options, emotional and cognitive learning in order to produce a sense of well-being and security;
4. *The Community*: A system of child-focused neighbourhoods that form a network of shared, collective relationships and responsibilities—a place to dream, develop and participate;
5. *Learning*: Learning happens in all kind of ways, all the time, all our lives;
6. *Universal Access*: Universal access to services means that all families have access to the same advantages, regardless of their circumstances;

7. *Normalization*: Goals and objectives may be realized when participation is embraced as “normal and expected” and encouraged by all families, caregivers, children and community members;
8. *Strength-based*: The “strength-based” view of the family is a commitment to the positive potential of people;
9. *Linking Generations*: The intergenerational focus brings generations together in purposeful, mutually beneficial ways, promoting greater understanding and respect between generations; and
10. *Intersectoral Collaboration*: Integrating community resources creates a synergy that benefits the whole child and the whole community.

Planning and development will be based on these 10 principles.

Oceanside’s deep commitment to the BLT program development and the growing evidence of success has led to a recognition that the community cannot rely on precarious grant offerings (with increasing competition for grants) or uncertain government funding. Plans are underway for a variety of initiatives to sustain present programs and plan for increasing expansion. They include:

- Discussions with a financial agency about developing a children’s foundation based on community, corporate and individual investments;
- The sale of the architectural plans for Munchkinland and the WOW bus to other school districts or the actual construction and sale of them;
- Discussions with corporate partners to develop the land around Munchkinland by creating a small-scale children’s learning and play centre, including a life-size airplane and car track that can be opened to tourists in the summer, for profit.

The BLT coalition is methodically working towards becoming self-sustaining. To create sustainability, the coalition recognized that the needs of families and young children would have to become an increasingly high priority in the minds of all residents. As a part of this profile raising, BLT embarked on its first major community-wide event, the *We Believe in Kids* Festival in mid April 2007. Community partners hosted a variety of family friendly activities for children.

A bank closed its doors for half a day to clients and opened it to children. Tellers hosted games through the wickets and the bank manager surrounded herself with four tables loaded with arts and crafts materials. She helped children make celebratory hats that could be seen all over town the rest of the day. Other businesses contributed fully costumed mascots who were part of a musician-led “Pied Piper” tour of schools and the town. Schools welcomed them into assemblies with some of the school staff dressed in nursery rhyme costumes to support the celebration. The mascots danced around the stage with the musician while school-aged children joined in the old, familiar nursery rhymes.

Preschoolers had passports that were stamped at each site in the community where businesses and community groups, such as the fire hall, offered special events, games, songs, stories and snacks. The evening event featured a well-known child entertainer who spoke on *Child Honouring*. Schoolchildren contributed art for a silent auction in the evening. Local businesses provided door prizes such as an airplane sightseeing tour, Ipods, concert tickets and a family evening with a professional astronomer and his telescope. Community agencies sponsored display and demonstration tables. Hundreds of community members carried balloons and wore hand-made hats as they trekked through

the community. Those who were not sure what it was all about asked others, and consciousness was raised. It will now become an annual community event.

Change is not easy but I sensed recognition of that in Oceanside. The BLT coalition has persevered through many obstacles. One of the staff members described it this way:

We know that about change. We know that we can't get stopped or stalled when the criticisms emerge. We have to keep moving through that pain. Change has to be sustained; that is what our two Superintendents are committed to. It takes time to sustain change. We have to stay the course. Literacy is critical. We can't flip flop from one agenda to the other. (Q 4, personal communication, January 2007)

Another coalition member described the reason for their success from a philosophical viewpoint that I witnessed to be true when I was with them:

One of our underlying philosophies is that whatever we give to families will be passed on in some way. We believe that it is not the brochures that make a difference, not the programs; it is the individual contact between people that is the root of our success ... a high degree of mutual respect in all our interactions ... paying forward. (Q 5, personal communication, January 2007)

A third coalition member described one moment:

How do you measure this? Recently I walked into one of the Mother Goose programs, sat down at the back of the room, and I was just in awe. I almost had tears come into the corners of my eyes at the beauty of what has happened between people; then on the other hand sitting in a government office and trying to describe to somebody that beauty and trying to say, "How could you deprive

our community of this?” If only people from the Ministry or from the universities who sit in their boardrooms or endless meetings discussing things, if only they would come and sit at the back of the room even or better yet participate, they would understand the magic of what’s going on here. (Q 7, personal communication, January 2007)

The Oceanside coalition is certain that they are making a difference in the future and in other communities too:

I think then that this project could have a future and could spread and expand out into other communities. Each community has its own kids. All kids have the same problems and successes and if we can help here in Qualicum, then there is no reason why it can’t help in other places too. (Q 18, personal communication, January 2007)

Cross-sectional Analysis of the Four Case Studies

Mason (2002) proposed two ways to attempt cross-sectional analyses, treating the categorically indexed data as either (a) variables or as (b) retrievals, which are then treated as *unfinished resources* rather than *end products*. I chose to view the data as unfinished resources, viewing them thematically across the data set, and then asked questions to direct me towards “analytic and explanatory logics” (p. 157). Mason cautioned the researcher to follow three rules in using the *unfinished resource* option:

1. Do not treat the categorically indexed data as more concrete or tidy than they really are, rather as loose and flexible groupings;
2. Do not attempt to index what cannot be categorized cross-sectionally, such as complex social processes or very particular issues; and

3. Do not forget the context or interaction that produced the sections of data.

With these rules in mind, I created a chart of six categories that emerged from viewing the original categories cross-sectionally through a thematic lens.

Cross-sectional Categories

In each of the six categories, similarities and differences will be explained as well as contexts that affected the experiences of each community. I will describe those factors that appeared to have the most impact, comparatively. I will take into consideration the relative ages of the coalition, the local circumstances, the unpredictable roadblocks that arose, the timing of the entrance of the school district into the coalition, the internal issues, and the intangible and sometimes immeasurable social processes that occurred.

<i>Community</i>	<i>Cross Sectional Categories</i>	<i>Not Able to Categorize</i>
<p><i>Boundary</i> <i>(Grand Forks)</i></p> <p>School district involvement – 17 years Family Centres in schools – 6 years</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Coalition 2. Vision and Implementation 3. Collaborative Community and School District Leadership 4. Speed bumps and Sustainability 5. Integrated Services Family Centres 6. EDI Impact/Other Data 	<p>The Impact of Synergy</p>
<p><i>Port Alberni</i></p> <p>School district involvement – 11 years</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Coalition 2. Vision and Strategic Planning 3. Networked Decision Making as Leadership 4. Speed bumps and Problem Solving 	<p>The Impact of Trust</p>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Interconnectedness 6. EDI Impact 	
<i>Sunshine Coast</i> School district involvement – 3 years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Coalition 2. Planning 3. Shifting Leadership 4. Speed bumps and Leadership 5. Cooperation 6. EDI Impact 	The Impact of Grief
<i>Qualicum</i> <i>(Oceanside)</i> School district involvement – 7 years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Coalition 2. Vision and Philosophy 3. School District and Multilayered Community Leadership 4. Speed bumps and Sustainability 5. Satellite Programs and Interdependence 6. EDI Uncertainty/Other Data 	The Impact of Vision and Passion

Figure 24. Cross-sectional Analysis of the Four Case Studies

Before beginning the exploration, it is important to note an issue that arose during the data-collection process. At the outset of the study, all four districts were proceeding with their unfolding plans. I had specifically chosen districts at different stages of development in order to document the different stages of emerging coalitions. The Sunshine Coast was the youngest coalition with school district participation—only three years into the process. In the course of the year of the study, as indicated previously, a number of deaths occurred in the school district community. This had an understandable impact on the momentum of the coalition—a number of coalition members were responsible for supporting others as a part of their professional responsibilities. I chose to

include the community in the study, because I believe its inclusion acknowledges the interconnectedness of the social agencies and the impact of social issues and relationships in both positive and negative ways. In the course of the member-checking process, I was pleased to hear that momentum was once again underway, programs were successful and plans were being made for renewed leadership the following year. Because of these unusual circumstances, I will make minimum comparative comments in the analysis and explanations.

1. The coalition: Evolution and membership.

Each of the four districts was chosen because of (a) the perceived strength of their coalition; (b) the involvement of the school district in the coalition; and (c) the resulting early learning program implementation. The relative ages of the coalitions had an effect on the maturity of the interagency and professional relationships in the coalition, as well as the sophistication of their decision-making processes. While the Sunshine Coast was still working out issues of territory, the other three communities had reached understanding about how and when decision-making would be shared, independent or collaborative. Membership in all four coalitions was inclusive—any interested community organizations were welcome. The Port Alberni coalition, which viewed itself as a network rather than an official group, welcomed any individuals from the community whether official representatives or not, while the others had more structured representation.

All the coalitions had evolved from smaller groups that usually originated with child and youth groups funded by the Ministry of Children and Families, Health or organizations such as Success by 6 or Children First. The children and youth focus

developed into several different groups—ECD, 6 to 12, and youth—to meet the needs of the different age groups. Over time, other groups and agencies joined as funding changed and community priorities shifted. New memberships included recreation, CCRR (Childcare, Resource and Referral), libraries, police, the business community, preschools, Aboriginal groups, family resource centres and others unique to individual communities. Coalition sizes ranged from memberships of 10 to 20, and shifted as issues, interests and priorities changed.

Each of the four communities had developed various forms of sub-committee. The Port Alberni coalition created a small informal “advisory group” that assisted the facilitator with planning in between formal monthly meetings. The Sunshine Coast coalition established regional committees to deal with the interests of the diverse communities along its coastline. Boundary’s coalition established an additional smaller coalition committee BISM (Boundary Integrated Services Model) to manage its family centres. Qualicum established the BLT (Building Learning Together) coalition to focus on the ECD agenda.

In Port Alberni and the Sunshine Coast, the announcement of the EDI (Early Development Instrument) results had the direct effect of the local school districts’ becoming active participants in the coalition. In the case of Qualicum and Boundary, the school districts were already involved in coalition work but respondents agreed that the EDI data had accelerated activity and interest in their communities.

2. Vision and planning.

All four districts had spent considerable time planning. Qualicum spent most of the first year after the employment of the coordinator working with all constituent groups

to define a vision, mission and committee structure for literacy initiatives. This resulted in the decision to move forward with a major focus and subcommittee on ECD preschool literacy activity. The Port Alberni community developed an annual strategic action plan for services to young children that guide their activities, expenditures and evaluation processes. The Boundary coalition (BISM) based its annual plan on extensive data on environmental and social circumstances and related school-based Family Centres. The Sunshine Coast, in its first year, established a comprehensive plan for its community that stalled with the loss of coalition leadership, then subsequent tragedy. Regardless, the careful planning that resulted in building common understanding and a shared vision were key features of the successful implementation of change in all four communities.

3. *Leadership: Many forms.*

It was no surprise that leadership played a pivotal role in the development of early learning activity in communities. Several of my research questions were directed at exploring how momentum started, who played a leadership role and how school districts were involved. Leadership emerged and took different forms in each community. In Port Alberni, the coalition hired a facilitator whose salary was paid by the revenue from Children First grants. Her responsibilities included the facilitation of meetings, preparation of budgets, the management of communications, and general coordination of coalition activities. It was clear, however, that leadership was shared unofficially among a core group of experienced volunteers and paid representatives of agencies. They consulted informally with her between meetings to help with decision-making—an interesting and very successful arrangement. In addition, all major decisions were made at the coalition table, whenever possible by consensus. The coalition adhered to the

principle that they were each responsible for the others; no decision would be made that adversely affected others.

In Boundary, the official leadership for many years was provided by the superintendent of schools who chaired the coalition. It should be noted, however, that the committee consisted of a number of community leaders and activists who played an equally active, if no less formal, role in the process of moving forward. Further leadership was provided by a coordinator of the Family Centres. Many community leaders provided strong leadership in their own organizations.

In the Sunshine Coast, like Port Alberni, a paid staff member led the team through a year of intensive planning. When she left the community and funds were no longer available, leadership floundered with no one agency having the time or funds to assume the coordination and management functions. Leadership shifted informally when the school district superintendent (who was not part of the coalition but who sent representatives) decided the school district would take on preschool literacy initiatives without consulting the other agencies.

In Qualicum, the school district hired a part-time employee to coordinate literacy activities. This decision is credited with providing the momentum that resulted in extensive early learning activity in the community over the past seven years. Although the coordinator is seen as the official leader, credit is given equally to the superintendent of schools and the school board for sustaining leadership. Individual leadership is provided by many at different levels of the projects—the bus coordinator, the Munchkinland coordinator, the Mother Geese, the architect, and many others.

4. *Speed bumps and sustainability.*

I use the words *speed bumps* purposely. All four districts were in an action mode that did not accept roadblocks. I witnessed what seemed like insurmountable barriers. At the same time, I saw stories, plans and problem solving that found ways round the barriers. All districts were struggling with the perception of loss to childcare and benefits to education through the government-funding shift. All were engaged in various forms of communication with local ECD representatives to try to maintain positive relationships. The Port Alberni coalition staged a campaign in the community to express public support for childcare workers. The Qualicum team embraced each other, celebrated their co-workers and spoke together at the HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership) symposium as a team with their CCRR (Childcare Resource and Referral) staff playing an active role. This occurred at the same event when the Minister responsible spoke; related demonstrations were taking place in the city.

Difficulty in engaging Aboriginal children and families was a continual issue for all communities except Boundary, where Aboriginal children were part of the Family Centres in schools by virtue of enrolment. The Sunshine Coast found a unique solution by offering literacy programs on the reserve instead of in local schools. Qualicum sent the popular WOW bus to their reserve and funded Mother Goose there too. Locating services on reserve seems to be an effective solution for them. Funding was originally an issue in all four districts, but Boundary solved many problems by creating their own foundation. Qualicum was exploring similar options with banks. Port Alberni used their network approach to secure funding in joint applications and decide how to apply it in a cooperative way.

5. *Linkages and connectedness.*

“It’s all about relationships!” I heard these words many times in every community during my interview questions on success and leadership. The Port Alberni coalition has established rituals in coalition meetings that include home-baking, nurturing processes designed to build trust, and process activities that establish bonds between individuals and amongst the group. All these factors are as important as the community decision-making that is encapsulated in the game-like strategies. In the Sunshine Coast, in spite of some tension about territorial issues in programs, members of the coalition express admiration and respect for each other personally and professionally. In Boundary, three of the coalition members met in elementary school. Now they sit in powerful community advocacy positions where they (along with others who have deep-rooted historical connections) have been influential in bringing community-integrated services together in school Family Centres. In Qualicum, the BLT team (coalition) is deeply connected to each other through their satellite programs spread through the community, shared office space and shared passion—frequently, publicly and creatively expressed on behalf of children.

6. *The EDI (Early Development Instrument) and other data.*

As in all BC school districts, the four case-study communities had been actively engaged in the EDI measurement. Three of the districts relied heavily on it for program guidance and believed it reflected progress. One district, Qualicum, considered the EDI data in design and placement of programs but was not sure whether it reflected an accurate picture of local children. Both Qualicum and Boundary had been engaged in collecting their own data of various sorts. Qualicum collected data on attendance and

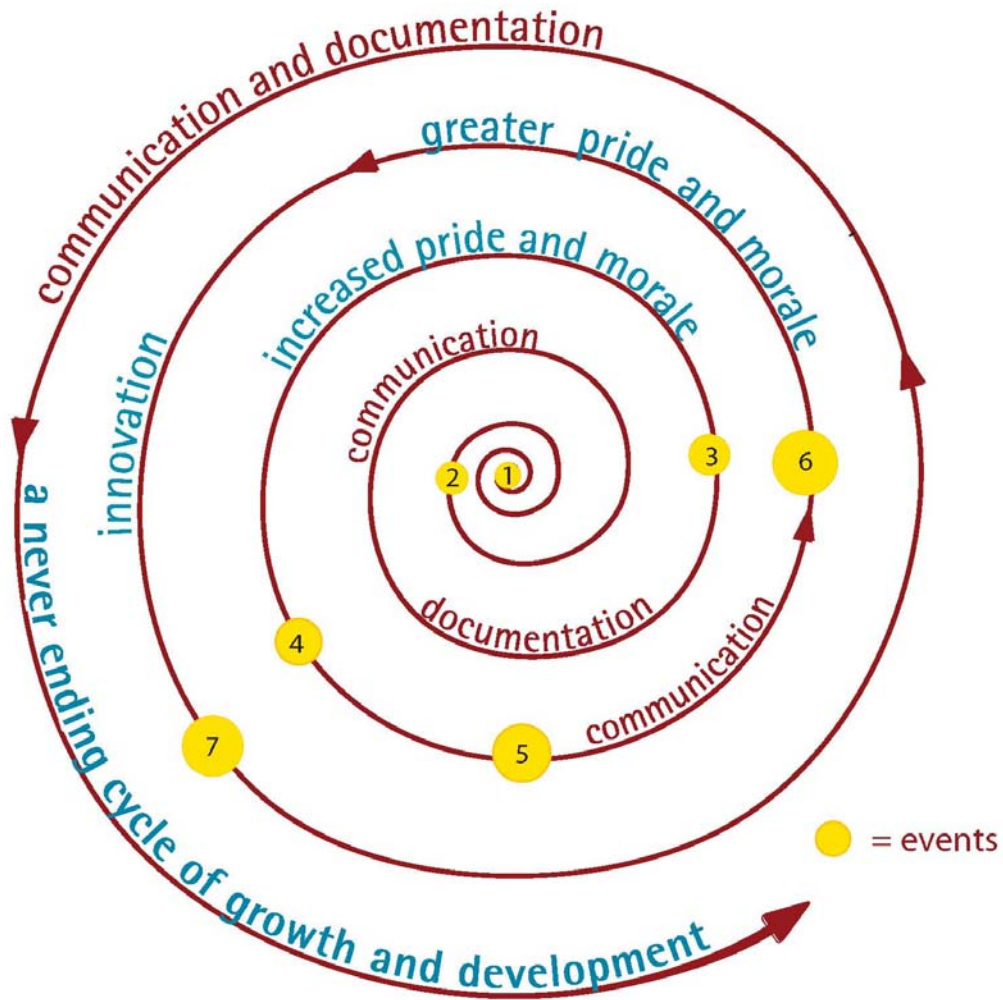
attitudes towards their programs and used it to make adjustments and improvements. In addition, the school district embarked on a pilot project to use swipe-card technology to enhance its capacity to track the use of integrated services by young children and their families. Boundary collected sophisticated and dense environmental, socio-economic, health and communication data for its entire community and relied on the data for almost all community decision-making.

As Mason (2002) suggested in Rule 2, I separated concepts that could not be easily categorized. I will not reiterate what is much better described in the text of Chapter 4 through stories and quotations; rather I refer the reader to the appropriate text for consideration of the intangible nature of its impact.

1. The Impact of Synergy – Boundary, page 1
2. The Impact of Trust – Port Alberni, page 27
3. The Impact of Grief – Sunshine Coast, page 54
4. The Impact of Vision and Passion – Qualicum, page 82

I believe that these and other intangible but deep human emotions drive change and innovation as teams of deeply committed people work together on shared agendas for children. I designed the following image of an organizational cycle of success in an effort to describe it so others could understand it and strategically use it to promote any organizational agenda.

Models of Collaboration: Moving Forward



1. Joining the Coalition 2. Establishing Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan 3. Building New Partnerships 4. Implementing a program
5. Collecting Data and Perceptions 6. Publicizing Successes 7. Celebrating Successes and Each other

A CYCLE OF SUCCESS Janet N. Mort 2007

Figure 25. Moving Forward: A Cycle of Success

Moving the Early Learning Agenda Forward with *A Cycle of Success*

1. *Joining the coalition.*

The cycle begins with an event. In this case, each of the school districts joins the coalition as active working members, contributing resources and engaging in creating linkages and partnerships.

2. *Establishing vision, mission and strategic plan.*

The coalition genuinely struggles to define this new partnership, establish a sense of purpose and collective possibilities, identify assets that can be shared and, most importantly, reach consensus on their vision for the future of early learning in their community and an action plan to take them there. This is the most difficult stage for traditional partners in a coalition, such as health and social services, who have worked in traditional territorial roles that are still governed by separate agencies. In the case of the four case studies, this stage took several years to achieve.

3. *Building new partnerships.*

Once the core coalition has established this sense of purpose, it documents its progress, vision and mission and communicates its mandate to other vested community groups through a variety of local communication networks, with an open invitation to participate. Other potential partnerships such as libraries, senior volunteers and recreation begin to see that their own work could be enhanced through collaboration.

4. *Implementing a program.*

Once the groundwork is complete, program implementation can begin, no matter how small or cautious. Program goals are clearly stated; potential clients are targeted; marketing the program through the combined effort of all agencies ensures that hard-to-

reach families are encouraged to attend; and a concerted effort is made to reduce barriers to access.

5. Collecting data and perceptions.

From the outset, data are collected on attendance, the client base, program success and the evidence of benefits to children and families. The data are carefully analyzed among coalition partners to enhance the program, apply new resources and move forward with new programs to enhance offerings.

6. Publicizing successes.

There are multiple reasons for emphasizing this stage, one that is often neglected. Potential coalition members may be attracted to the program; new clients will learn about a new resource; coalition members and employees feel a sense of pride and satisfaction; public awareness of early learning issues rises; investors feel a sense of renewed confidence that funds are well spent; politicians enjoy the photo opportunities and take messages back to the legislature.

7. Celebrating successes and each other.

At the heart of every successful organization are valued, happy employees who believe that they are making an important contribution in the workplace. Making the effort to (a) know each other at a personal level; (b) value the contribution of each individual; and (c) celebrate the collective successes of the coalition is the key to making it through the difficult times and implementing the early learning agenda.

In each of the four districts, I witnessed this honouring. I witnessed the coalitions moving through these stages at different rates and in different ways. I consistently witnessed how this cycle of events, interspersed with designed documentation and

communication strategies, led to powerful feelings of pride and increased morale, which further fuelled energy and determination. As the cycle continues, the growing pride and morale becomes self-confidence that results in innovation and a willingness to take risks. A powerful engine of community mobilization begins, one that could affect the lives of vulnerable young children and their families forever.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) describe the type of leaders that might use this cycle of success:

Leaders know well that innovation and change all involve experimentation, risk, and failure. They proceed anyway. One way of dealing with the potential risks and failures of experimentation is to approach change through incremental steps and small wins. Little victories, when piled on top of each other build confidence that even the biggest challenges can be met. In doing so, they strengthen commitment to the long-term future. (p.67)

My Journey as Researcher

Stake (1995) proposed that the researcher plays many roles in case study methodology: teacher, advocate, evaluator, biographer and interpreter. Of all the roles, the roles of interpreter and the gatherer of interpretations are central, based on the assumption that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. I found this theory to be true in my multiple case-study journeys. In two of the cases, I was told by respondents that they were uncertain about what they were doing and uncertain about whether they were making a difference. They eagerly awaited the member-checking stage to see how I would interpret their work back to them.

Others respondents expressed concern in the interview that they were only able to provide me with limited answers and unclear explanations of how the picture was painted. I explained numerous times that I perceived the experience to be akin to a jigsaw puzzle. Each of them had a piece of the puzzle and it was my job to put the pieces in the right places so that we could see the whole picture. Respondents seemed comforted by this.

This process links with Stake's rationalist-constructivist view that in case-study research, the aim is to construct a clearer reality of the interpretations of the external world; then a more sophisticated, collective view of it that would stand up to scrutiny. On the theory of relativity, Stake noted that it is important for the researcher "to believe in relativity, contextuality and constructivism without believing that all views are equal" (p. 113); each researcher contributes uniquely to the study of a case; each reader derives unique meaning.

I made deliberate choices about the role I would play in presenting myself in the studies. I was introduced and acknowledged as an educational expert and many references were made to my administrative experience in the school system; this was inevitable, as I am well known in many areas of the province. When appropriate, I acknowledged in the interviews that I understood what the interviewee was telling me by paraphrasing what s/he had said as a way to verify my understanding; this seemed to be appreciated by respondents. Sometimes if they were experiencing a problem in their job, I took the time to share similar experiences that might be helpful. I was very personal, engaged in laughter when appropriate and, at times, tears of empathy as well.

Many respondents shared intimate stories with me that were clearly confidential and I have maintained that confidence; I was fiercely protective of individual privacy. I chose to be neither evaluative nor critical throughout the experiences. In fact, although I diarized my experiences for later analysis, I consciously avoided drawing summative conclusions about any of the sites until all four case studies were completed. I made this effort so as not to prejudice my view of my visit to the next site. This became important as I turned to the analysis stage; it would not have worked, however, without the masses of data collection, taped interviews and extensive notes upon which I was able to rely later.

The design of my research: The role of trusting relationships.

The design of my research, because of its reliance on the trust I was building in the communities, had to be carefully thought through and constructed to reflect an honouring of this trust. My key contacts made it clear to me that I would be engaging in an environment where social issues among families were sensitive and private. In three of the communities, I visited for a week, using individual interviews, document collections and analysis, as major methods of research. In the fourth district (Qualicum) where I added programs to my investigation, I included program observations and focus groups or individual interviews with parents to my methods.

I actively sought out effective ways to build trust without violating ethics guidelines by:

- Telephoning them in advance to make site arrangements provided an opportunity for informal voice contact first;

- Dressing appropriately, well-suited to the environment and individuals with whom we were meeting;
- Offering them a choice of interviewer (I had two males on my research team which provided gender choice; it seemed to matter to some.);
- Offering to include their friend as an observer in what was originally planned to be an individual interview;
- Asking them to tell me a bit about themselves and their context prior to starting the questions and asking about their family;
- Changing the sequence of the questions to match their responses;
- Providing coffee and a snack during the interview; and
- Gracefully inquiring about their comfort level with the questions and encouraging them not to respond if they seemed uncertain.

Most were willing to be recorded, but I took extensive notes as well, marking my notes numerically (from the audio tape recorder marker) where I felt a particular quote was useful or enlightening for the construction of the answers to my puzzle. After each interview and focus group, I made notes about nonverbal responses that I observed in my reflective journal.

My research assistant team and triangulation.

On each of the visits, a member of my research team accompanied me. Fortunately my husband, who is a retired school counsellor, was an ethically approved research assistant. He accompanied me on most trips and was of great value for debriefing at the end of the day. My second research assistant was also a former counsellor, school principal and long-time friend and colleague. Their collective insights

into human nature and social processes were invaluable. When the in-depth study of the Qualicum district was underway, I took both research assistants. This was near the end of my study and my particular focus was on parent interviews and focus groups. My aim was to gauge the parental degree of satisfaction as well as to see if their perceptions of the programs matched those of the staff. Because I had spent so much time with staff (over a dozen visits) and was developing some strong opinions, I asked my research team to conduct all the interviews with the parents, the bus drivers, the volunteers and managers of the programs. They did some together and others separately over a three-day period, while I engaged in analysis of documents and data on site. At the end of each day, we debriefed. They taped the interviews when the respondent consented.

The decision to use the research assistants in this way resulted in strong investigator triangulation of the information and perceptions I had originally gathered from staff. In some cases, however, I had to return to staff interviews or find new interview sources or data where the original data were inconsistent; this is known as methodological triangulation.

Finally, I returned the sections pertinent to each community to the key contact for member checking and made suggested changes, all of which were factual in nature. Data source triangulation was a daily experience in the interviews and focus groups. I marked with a check in my notes all information that had been validated by numerous respondents or collected data; where there were only isolated checks, I reviewed the question in ensuing phone calls or interviews to my satisfaction. The clarifications were always helpful in providing me with further insight. When I reached the final stage of the analysis and constructed figures that explained my perceptions, I used theory

triangulation by reviewing the figures with numerous senior academics to gauge their reaction. In all of these triangulation processes, I was not specifically seeking confirmation of my own interpretation, rather seeking additional interpretations that would enrich my own. I applied member checking on site through paraphrasing and checking my understating of complex descriptions. I phoned respondents during the analysis phase, and I sent the pertinent pieces to key community contacts for confirmation of the contents.

Throughout the study, as Stake (1995) suggested, I attempted “to emphasize the quality of activities and processes, portraying them in narrative description and interpretive assertion ... [taking into consideration]... the essentiality of contexts, multiple points of view, and triangulation” (p. 91). While I have attempted to “extend the elegant intricacy of understanding,” I am certain and I hope that “meticulous readers will find the infinite void still lying just beyond” (p. 93). We must continue the search for this better world for young children and their families.

CHAPTER 5

Summary and Conclusions

Summary

Answering the research questions.

Stake (1995) described the case study as:

A special something to be studied ... but not a problem, a relationship, a theme

The case, in some ways has a unique life. It is a something we do not sufficiently understand and want to—therefore we do a case study. (p. 133)

Stake noted that comparison between cases often modifies our previous generalizations because of our understanding that emerges from each case, and that atypical cases contribute to our understanding of other cases. “Our observations cannot help but be interpretive and our descriptive report is laced with and followed by interpretation. We offer opportunity for readers to make their own interpretations of the case, but we offer ours too” (p. 134).

Stake suggested that when we have the opportunity to choose our case study, it is more useful to pick the one most likely to enhance our understanding than to pick the most typical. When choosing the four communities to serve as my four case studies, I chose those that were atypical, based on the innovation and forward movement that they had reported in previous studies, at conferences, through personal contact and in provincial surveys. As it became apparent that school systems were increasingly involved in early learning activities, I wanted to study different approaches to the task—a challenging initiative for schools, and an important new frontier for education and educators. Because of my belief in the importance of grassroots community leadership, I

concluded that any genuinely grassroots movement would have to be different from any other and I purposely chose communities that described themselves as being unique in their approach to intersectoral coalition work. While I made a great effort to write about each of the case studies as a separate entity, as individual as any two unrelated people might be, I discovered similarities among them. In particular, I discovered a common direction. Each had covered different distances in different vehicles. They had stopped at different rest places and had travelled at different speeds. They had picked up and dropped off passengers along the way. However, they had all set their sights on the same destination—a better life for young children and their families.

In the beginning, I had intended to develop four different models that others could learn from and adapt to suit their circumstances. I hoped to find relevance in the experiences of those I interviewed and to tease out unexpected meanings in the cases. When I reached the analysis stage and puzzled over the differences and similarities of each story, a common theme began to emerge. I resisted at first because Yin (1994) cautioned the researcher using case study methodology to be wary of fitting the individual case into a collective case study or into an artificial framework. I weighed the relative merits of keeping them completely separate but concluded that if there were common features that developed over time in unique ways (as became clear in the cross sectional analysis), it would be useful to develop a flow chart to explain the phenomenon. At the same time, it would be necessary to maintain the identity of each community. I began sketching the common patterns I saw emerging in the cross-sectional analysis and after numerous revisions over a four-month period, the following flow chart took shape.

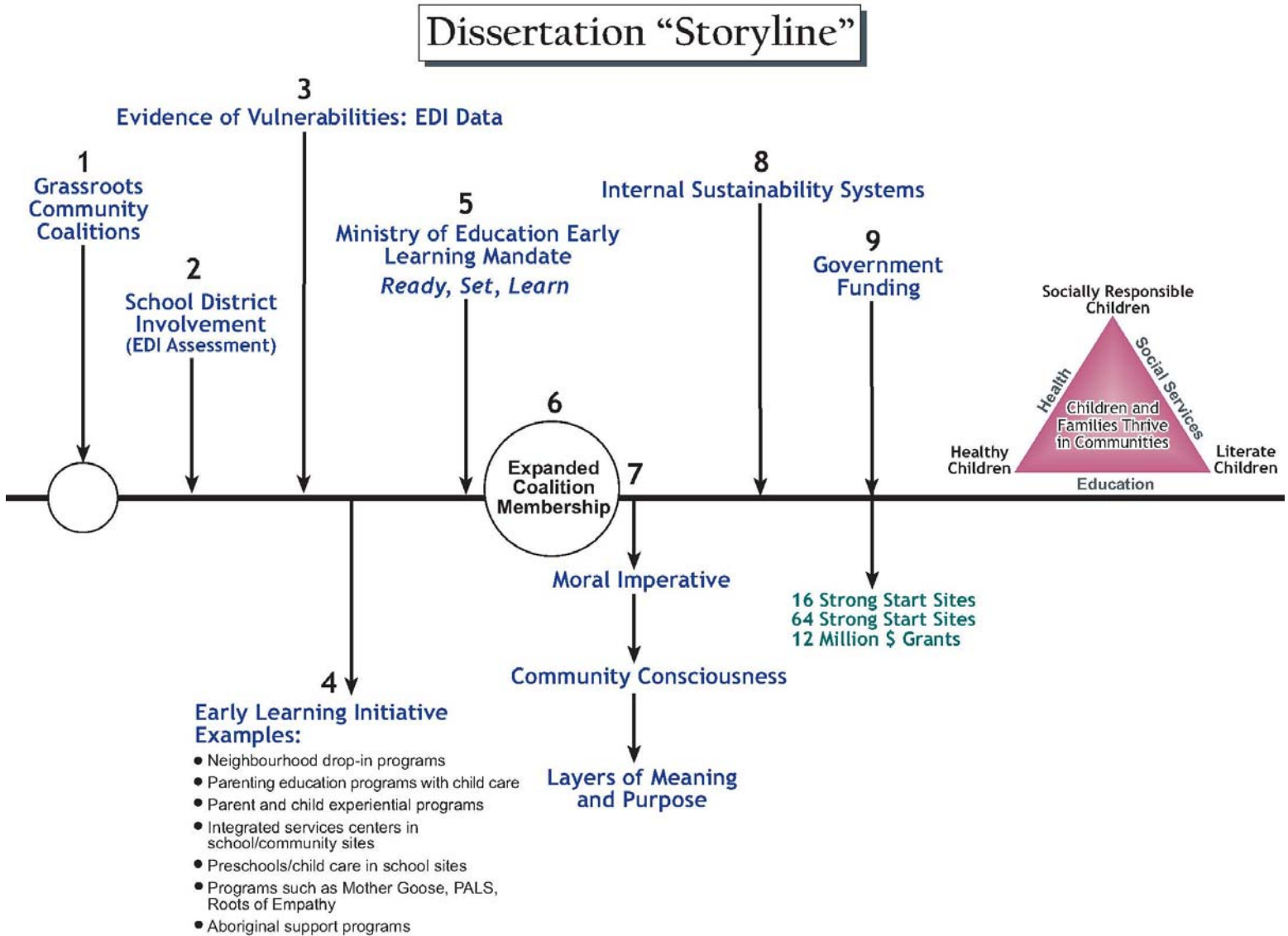


Figure 26. Flow Chart: Storyline Sequence of Events

I will use the storyline to answer the questions raised in my intellectual puzzle.

My research questions are divided into four categories that organize the summary of the four case studies as I describe the sequence of events in the flow chart. Many of the questions have been answered in Chapter 4 in the cross sectional analysis in which case I will refer the reader to the relevant page.

Category 1. The function of the intersectoral coalitions; how they evolve; characteristics that contribute to success or impede their success;

Category 2. The impact of EDI;

Category 3. School district initiated programs and services; and

Category 4. The benefits and evidence of enhanced school success.

The questions were designed to generate knowledge and explanations about social processes, relations, practices, experiences, related meanings and actions. These processes evolve through the collaborative efforts of intersectoral professionals. They are aimed at promoting a common early learning agenda, and creating social solutions for critical early learning issues. As Stake described, my effort has been “not to map and conquer the world but to sophisticate the beholding of it” (p. 43).

Flow Chart Sequence of Events

1. Grassroots community coalitions.

The storyline begins with a coalition for each case study. Historically, most BC (British Columbia) towns have established working coalitions, either formally or informally, in the past two decades. This was a necessity as the work of health and social services were intertwined with service-delivery needs. When *Success by 6* and other funding initiatives were introduced, one of the requisites was a governing body that was representative of broader community issues. Other partners joined the coalition table—still unique to each community, but including ECE representation as well as others. In the 1990s, serious grassroots planning (as opposed to government-driven funding directives) began to emerge. While many of the grants were targeted to specific criteria, there was room for creativity in the local application of the funding. While some school districts in

the province were nominally involved in the coalitions, it was often in the capacity of advisor, because most of the activity was unrelated to schools. Over time, coalition membership expanded differently as planning responded to local needs and initiatives. The topics of relationships, leadership and trust were raised most frequently as the most important factors that contributed to the success of the coalition. Funding, territorial issues and leadership uncertainty were raised as factors that impeded progress.

Three of the four most mature coalitions in the case studies had very stable memberships. Many of the same individuals had participated in the coalition work throughout, with new members being assimilated over time. These coalitions had taken extensive time to (a) develop vision and mission statements; (b) plan deliberate strategies to build team relationships; (c) confront issues with problem-solving strategies; (d) train in the use of skill-building processes; and, as many respondents described it, (e) leave egos at the door. There was a sincere pride in their stated ability to do this. Some of the individuals had known each other for more than 20 years. Many individuals had developed strong interpersonal and extraprofessional relationships, thus providing the basis for powerful collaboration. I concluded from my observations that this process of trust building was one that takes years to solidify, hence the more mature coalitions being the most productive and stable.

Effective organizations depend and thrive on trust. In relationships and organizations, trust amounts to being able to rely on each other, so that their world and relationships have coherence and continuity. When we trust, we believe others will act in a reasonably predictable way, according to agreed-on or assumed expectations, in a context of shared understanding and assumption of

good faith Trust is a resource. It creates and consolidates energy, commitment and relationships. (Hargreaves, p.461, 2007)

2. Initial school district involvement: EDI.

As previously mentioned, school districts in the province first became actively involved in early learning when Dr. Hertzman of HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership) persuaded school districts in the province to administer the EDI (Early Development Instrument) to all public school kindergarten students (and other private and band schools who were willing) in an effort to establish population-based data in five key domains. The first provincial cycle of assessment was completed in 2003.

3. Evidence of vulnerabilities: EDI data.

Later that year, presentations were made to communities on the results of the assessment. Because school districts' kindergarten teachers were responsible for administering the assessment, many kindergarten teachers and school district officials attended the presentation of the results, which identified the percentage of vulnerable children in each of the five domains. In some cases, it confirmed what the audience already knew. In others, community members discovered previously unidentified vulnerable children in unexpected neighbourhoods. The obvious questions became "Why?" and "What now?"

In my view, this was the beginning of an unstoppable momentum in creating collaborative community support for vulnerable children and families. I felt certain that my colleagues, with their dedication to the welfare of children, would be unable to turn their backs on this information. The EDI Impact Study engaged key leaders in 43 school districts to explore action resulting from the outcomes of the EDI assessment. The results

confirmed that all school districts valued the process and that hundreds of projects had been initiated by school districts (and many others) in collaboration with community coalitions in an effort to address the vulnerabilities.

4. School district early learning initiatives: Examples.

The types of programs in the hundreds of projects being implemented included neighbourhood drop-in programs, parent education programs, parent and child experiential programs, preschools moving into school settings, Aboriginal support programs, integrated family service hubs to packaged programs such as *PALS* (Parents as Literacy Partners) and *Mother Goose*. Many of these programs are described in two documents on the HELP (Human Early Learning Partnership) website: *The EDI Impact Study* (Mort, 2004) and *A Bold Vision: Documenting Early Learning Programs in Schools* (2007). Although school districts were not funded directly at this time, some districts reallocated funds to support new programs, some joined in with coalitions to support their programs, and others applied for grants from other funding agencies. The four case studies included in this research were among those who were more actively involved in coalition work and the implementation of new programs in direct response to the EDI data. Fullan (2006) cautioned us:

Early childhood programs are a natural ally for our three basics of literacy, numeracy and well-being Early childhood is finally getting some attention but needs to be more prominent, stronger, and more specific as an articulated link to success at the elementary level. (p. 93)

5. Ministry of Education: Early learning mandate.

At about the same time, the Ministry of Education announced that its mandate would begin to include Early Learning (birth to age 5). Although the legislation had not yet been passed, it announced funding for a *Ready, Set, Learn* program in school districts to encourage districts to begin to locate and engage with three-year-olds and their parents. Many school districts responded by hosting early-years fairs in schools. Initially, some school districts paid token attention to the importance of the issue and the events were small and ineffective. In the communities that were beginning to understand the importance of the connection between early learning and school success, and where there was emerging leadership, events were coordinated with health, social services and other agencies who created playful and exciting events that succeeded in providing information, linkages and support to young families.

6. Expanded coalition membership: Benefits and evidence of success.

The four community intersectoral coalitions described in this study were structured in different ways and for different purposes. All four coalitions actively encouraged new members to join the group (especially partners such as Aboriginal groups, businesses, service organizations, and municipal governments) to build community understanding and support for early learning issues. Individuals in all four communities said the inclusion of the school districts accelerated the pace of early learning activity because of school district infrastructure and multiple resources (personnel, facilities and expertise).

Is there evidence of success in these four communities? If so, what are the benefits? Members of all four coalitions expressed the belief that their work was making

a difference. Two of the school districts pointed to the EDI results as a demonstration of the beginning of a positive impact on their students. The other two believed it was too early to be able to measure the differences in child outcomes. Professionals other than educators were persuasive about the changes they saw in improved levels of service that resulted from the connectivity and linkages that had developed in communication between agencies and partnerships in joint projects. They expressed pride and confidence in their abilities to provide a higher quality service. In Boundary, the integrated family centres were a powerful vehicle for the orchestrated delivery of services. The data they were able to provide indicated positive EDI results.

In Qualicum, where most services offered were in the birth to age four ranges, and the only district where parents were interviewed in focus groups, parents were the most persuasive of all. They described the differences they saw in their children as a result of improved service offerings and programs: (a) enhanced language capacity; (b) enthusiasm for literacy activities; (c) positive social behaviours; (d) increased access to a variety of services; and (e) heightened self-confidence. Parents were equally vociferous about how the programs met their needs: (a) reprieve from social isolation; (b) opportunity for friendships; (c) modelling for how to work with their children; (d) increased knowledge about literacy and child development; (e) increased confidence in parenting skills; (f) a sense of being part of the community; and (g) access to integrated services.

7. Moral imperative; Community consciousness; Layers of meaning and purpose.

The moral imperative (resulting in heightened community consciousness, and layers of meaning and purpose) was the most unexpected and, perhaps, most important

outcome of the study. I re-visited experts who studied such phenomenon to attempt to understand what I had encountered.

I remembered a similar theme that was raised in the book *The Aquarian Conspiracy* by Ferguson (1980) who challenged leaders to see our society through new eyes by (a) raising our consciousness; (b) increasing our sense of personal power; and (c) acting on it by connecting with others to work for the greater good. I think her challenge is even more pertinent today and in a more compelling way. We now have the science that proves and defines the needs, thereby compelling us to combine all our resources and wisdom to find the solutions for our children whose opportunities quickly pass by.

Ferguson (1980) noted:

Seen with new eyes, our lives can be transformed from accidents into adventures. We can transcend the old conditioning, the dirt-poor expectations. We have new ways to be born, humane and symbolic ways to die, different ways to be rich, communities to support us in our myriad journeys, new ways to be human and to discover what we are to each other. (p. 42)

In his most recent book, *Changing Minds*, Gardner (2006) reminded us that human intelligence could be used positively or negatively—for every Mandela there is a Slobodan Milosevic. He stated, “I have sought to understand those precious individuals who use their skills at mind-changing to help bring about a better world” (p. xiv). He then discussed the topic of trust and trustees:

Individuals in communities, who are assumed to see the big picture clearly; who are concerned with the long-term welfare of the society; and who, most

importantly ... recommend and do what is right, rather than what improves their own lot or advances their own interests. (p. xiv)

McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2007) described learning from the past:

The human species has witnessed the rise and demise of numerous civilizations unable to respond to changing circumstances. Humanity's future depends on its abilities to manage today's complex interplay of the emerging new economy, changing social and physical environments, and the impact of the change on individuals, particularly children, in their most vulnerable and formative years. (p. 59)

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) took the issue from a world vision of inequities and poverty to early childhood education:

Early childhood education is a powerful antidote to these inequities. We are the first to agree that healthy societies make healthy schools. But it is not in the moral or self-interest of schools to wait for "society" to respond. They can begin by making partnering with parents and community a priority. They can join the wider society that is influencing them instead of trying to keep their distance. (p. 69)

Hertzman (2002), who was familiar with the social and early learning issues in British Columbia, noted:

The fact that the developing brain is an "environmental organ" means that improving child development is a question of improving the environments in which children grow up, live and learn, and not just fulfilling specific service mandates Finally, the determinants of child development are found at all levels of social aggregation: family, neighbourhood, community and economy.

This underlies the importance of an approach that is not only intersectoral, but also multi-level; honouring and supporting strong family and community development. (p. 12)

I witnessed the moral imperative on the part of many in the four communities and in the more mature intersectoral coalitions. Because of their projects, I witnessed the impact on many levels of the community—the community consciousness. Service agencies invited coalitions to attend their meetings as full partners, and planned community events together. Food markets contributed fresh food to ECE events to feed hungry families. Businesses contributed cash to support new initiatives. Formerly competing agencies worked out their differences in private in order to provide a unified effort on a project. Celebrations of children took place that engaged whole communities. Anonymous donations were made when the needs of a family became evident. A bank sponsored a program to build positive identities in children. Educators engaged in marketing and communication strategies to tell the stories. Children benefited all along the way.

The layers of meaning and purpose intrigued me. I witnessed retired seniors contributing several days a week in volunteer services to young children. They described how fulfilling the experience was and how, in their retirement, it felt like giving back. I interviewed the businessman who left his dealership one day a week to volunteer because it gave his life perspective. I interviewed the parent who was about to give her children up for adoption. She found comfort, solace and support in the interactions and activities the community provided. Her life is on a new path now, with her children. These are a few of the many stories told in Chapter 4.

The magnitude of the issue of isolation for women who could neither afford to finance care for their children nor afford the luxury of an automobile, which further increased their isolation, was a sobering revelation to me. The efforts moms made to reach the WOW bus, pushing a two-baby stroller and holding the hand of a toddler in wet, cold weather, just to reach the haven of fresh coffee, snacks, companionship and Mother Goose's cheer at a rural bus stop was remarkable. The bus was described with appreciation many times by grateful parents.

I have witnessed how the moral imperative of a few can cause a community of many to reconsider their lives and the impact they can have individually and collectively on behalf of children and families. At the same time, it brings a new sense of purpose to their own lives. Many times throughout these case studies, I have been awed and touched by the generosity of the human spirit when consciousness was raised.

In his most recent work, Senge (2007) extrapolated his concept of learning organizations to include higher aspirations:

Learning organizations are possible because, deep down, we are all learners. Most of us at one time or another have been part of a great team, a group of people who functioned together in an extraordinary way ... [trust, common goals, extraordinary results] ... Many say they have spent much of their life looking for that experience again. (p. 4)

I believe this might explain the collective spirit and sense of satisfaction within the coalitions in these communities.

8. Internal sustainability systems.

A common theme emerged in the three districts with the most mature coalitions. They now valued the programs that had been developed and the value was recognized in the community. There was growing evidence that the programs were making a difference to children and families; so how could these programs be sustained when funding was so uncertain? Each of the coalitions were engaged in creative planning to ensure that the needs of families could be met without relying completely on government sources. Each of the four communities are developing (or have developed) partnerships with community groups and are raising awareness about early childhood development as an issue that needs to be embraced by community members. The valuing of the programs and the evidence of achievement of goals clearly drove the desire for sustainability in all cases.

Leadership, however, was closely tied to the fact that the more mature coalitions were so far along in leading their community to sustainability. Kouzes and Posner (2007) explained:

Leaders inspire a shared vision Leaders cannot command commitment, only inspire it. To enlist people in a vision, leaders must know their constituents and speak their language. People must believe that leaders understand their needs and have their interests at heart. Leadership is a dialogue not a monologue. To enlist support, leaders must have intimate knowledge of people's dreams, hopes, aspirations, visions and values. (p. 66)

9. *Government funding.*

Just as these case studies were ending, the Ministry of Education announced new funding for sixteen pilot parent and child drop-in programs in schools. Later, that number climbed in an announcement of 85 (Strong Start) sites throughout the province.

Unfortunately, at the same time, the Ministry of Children and Families had announced cuts to childcare programs, causing considerable tension between the two groups and perceptions of competing priorities related to services to young children. Subsequently, government announced new funding to support family-centred hubs through which new childcare spaces could be offered in an integrated-services setting. This approach to early childhood program development (which many saw as whimsical) was one of the reasons that communities saw the need for program sustainability that is not entirely connected to government.

Dickens, Sawhill and Tebbs (2006) debated the effects of government investing (or not investing) in early childhood: They warned:

Because most of these benefits are longer term while the costs of mounting the programs are more immediate, the political system tends to be biased against making such investments. But any business that operated in this way would likely fail to succeed. A similarly dim prospect may be in store for a country that fails to take advantage of such solid investment opportunities. (p. 69)

Federal and provincial agencies, including government, have often targeted funding that was not consistent with grassroots philosophies or direction, leaving the coalitions with the dilemma of shifting their priorities to suit the granting agencies or declining the funding. Federal and provincial governments made promises that were not kept and re-

assigned priorities that placed local agencies in perceived competition with each other, thus potentially damaging local relationships.

On a positive note, the BC Ministry of Education, recently allocated \$12 million in funding grants for early learning to school districts, based in part on the EDI results, to support early learning programs. Many have questioned whether this was a one-time-only grant or the beginning of sustained funding. I believe that government has been encouraged by the grassroots school and community coalition momentum, and has therefore felt encouraged about the possibilities of success.

Hargreaves (2007) commented on encouraging school agendas:

But more important still is the necessity of creating more optimistic conditions in which teachers can regain confidence in themselves, setting them off on winning streaks of improvement that their students so desperately deserve. In the words of Helen Keller (1990), “Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence.” (p. 465)

Many school districts are choosing to employ staff to provide leadership for early learning programs, a move that may or may not result in forward movement and innovation. One question is whether school districts with strong and collaborative relationships within coalitions will permit coalitions to decide about the allocation of funding to services other than those provided by school districts. This would be a true test of the collaborative relationships developed to date.

10. *Children and families: Thriving in communities.*

Thriving children and successful families is the ultimate goal described throughout this study. Figure 25 proposes that to support families so that they thrive, we

need to provide integrated education, social and health services to create healthy, socially responsible and literate children. We need to focus our services on children and families, share resources, and raise community consciousness, and we need to celebrate our children.

When striving to raise quality, recover from disaster, start up a new service, or make a dramatic change of any kind ... leaders know that celebrations, when done with authenticity and from the heart, build a strong sense of collective identity and community spirit that can carry a group through extraordinarily challenging times. (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 69)

If our communities can provide and celebrate the social safety net that so many families need, but are too proud or too embarrassed to ask for, then perhaps all children will have the opportunity to be literate, healthy, socially responsible and happy, as well as productive and educated citizens.

The Implications for Further Research

Hargreaves (2006) quoted Albert Einstein: “We cannot solve the problems that we have created with the same thinking that created them” (p. 191). The four communities all demonstrated new and innovative ways of finding solutions for young children and their families.

They, as I had expected, provided four distinct examples of ways communities can mobilize in support of young families. At the same time, I am aware of many other programs, approaches and strategies being used in British Columbia to support early learning and involve schools. It will be important to continue researching these efforts and documenting them to help to build momentum.

The EDI (Early Development Instrument) is well established in the province. Communities are eagerly awaiting longitudinal studies that will demonstrate which interventions have been effective at reducing vulnerabilities in neighbourhoods. A training program that supports communities to develop their own capacity to research would be a worthwhile investment. By measuring, collecting, analyzing and interpreting local data, communities can effect change and reduce vulnerabilities by offering better programs in the right places.

Throughout the case studies it became apparent that some facilitators were more skilled than others at working with parents to extend learning to the home, although this was a stated priority. Research into facilitation practices with adults, and between adults and resulting training programs in ECE and education programs, would be valuable. Many of the parents attending the wide variety of Qualicum programs with reasonable frequency were certain that their families were experiencing benefits. The use of a case-study approach with individual families and a connected control group would provide insight into which experiences were most valuable to the parent and child.

Government has invested millions of dollars in incorporating parent drop-in centres in schools. Schools have the potential to provide a well-resourced and centralized facility that could serve communities establishing integrated services centres. The government decision is a specified short-term commitment. It will be important to generate research that may influence further government policy before other programs are implemented. I have not addressed the issue of program quality in this study because this was neither the goal of the study nor was there sufficient time spent in programs to do so. The Ministry of Education has developed a framework that is to be piloted over the

next year. Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw (2006) have published important work that informs early childhood practitioners who are actively involved in implementation work in BC about quality issues. As new programs continue to develop quality must be a major focus.

The issue of childcare-expenditure reductions has fragmented the early learning community in BC and alienated it from the emerging school early learning mandate. Research that defines the relative roles and relevance of each type of early learning program to the others would be beneficial.

Conclusions

Conclusion1: Community coalitions.

Conclusion 1: That intersectoral coalitions play a pivotal role in community development with certain conditions: Membership includes key services such as education, health and social services, and is inclusive of other community services unique to the needs of each community; coalition members understand and work towards becoming a high-performing team with trust, integrity, extraprofessional and interpersonal commitment to each other as high priorities; coalition members establish, as a primary task, a vision, mission and strategic plan that is developed collaboratively and implemented cooperatively; coalition members view their own resources, (staff, facilities, events, and finances) to the extent their organizations allow, as shareable resources to be used when possible for the greater good of families. In all four case studies, coalitions welcomed school districts as full members into the coalitions.

This view of the importance of coordinated community support has gained prominence in the literature. The following researchers concluded that a coordinated community effort is essential to support the development of young children and help them thrive (Goodlad, 1994; Hargreaves, 2003; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Schorr, 1997; Sergiovanni, 1999; and Walsh, 1997).

Conclusion 2: School participation.

Conclusion 2: Schools have a critical role to play if community coalition work is to reach its fullest potential. Schools are typically the heart of neighbourhoods, embodying family histories and providing play space and outdoor recreation opportunities. They are publicly-owned facilities with the organizational infrastructure to manage finances and complex programs. Their professionals are already attuned to family needs, literacy issues and community assets. In all four of the case studies, those interviewed were unanimous in expressing gratitude for the participation of the school districts, and saw the involvement of schools as accelerating the movement and progress of the coalition—in spite of some initial territorial issues that needed to be resolved.

Other scholars confirm these attributes as essential to success. Goodlad (1994) has been an advocate for a new and “powerfully productive symbiosis between schools and external agencies with schools playing a significant leadership role in the process” (p. 103). Fullan, Hill and Crevola (2006) noted:

A strong body of research shows that students make greater progress when parents, caregivers, and the community are supportive of the work of the school and involved in its activities What are needed are comprehensive and permanent programs of partnerships with families and communities. (p. 94)

McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2007) assert:

A community's capacity includes all its resources that are, or should be linked to early child development programs—schools, child care programs, family support, hospitals and other health services, social services, recreational programs, libraries, colleges, universities...and so on. Communities that come together to build on their strengths create social capital. (p. 155)

Conclusion 3: The need for reliable data.

Conclusion 3: Community coalitions require reliable data in order to propose significant change to policy-makers with confidence. In British Columbia (BC), elementary schools have participated in assessing all kindergarten students relative to the five domains of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and, as a result, have developed a heightened awareness and evidence of the needs of young children in their neighbourhoods. There are many other ways to explore community needs—family surveys; qualitative studies of neighbourhoods; analysis of community assets; examination of census data that might include consideration of family structures, socio-economic status and cultural differences in the resident population. Regardless of the approach, in all four case studies momentum was generated by the feeling of confidence that resulted from being able to examine and interpret hard data at the local level.

Conclusions 4, 5 and 6: Families, parent support programs and emerging child literacy.

Conclusion 4: Family literacy programs, offered in concert with the work of community coalitions, have the opportunity to meet a myriad of social and emotional needs of young families. Literacy improvement cannot exist in a vacuum separate from

the other challenges many families face—hunger, unemployment, poverty, marital crisis and isolation. Family literacy programs in the four case studies, while designed to meet the literacy needs of both children and parents, ensured that the literacy programs were co-located and interconnected with other agency services. Best of all, the three most mature coalitions were able to present powerful evidence of family literacy success within the context of serving many other family social needs. Parents, in many emotional stories, provided testimony to the social and other benefits that accrued through what was, initially, a family literacy vehicle (Chapter 4).

Scholars concur. Nickse and Quezada (1994) articulate this well:

Literacy practice does not thrive in a vacuum, or in families beset with social, emotional or economic problems Increasingly, developers of literacy programs are becoming aware that literacy improvement cannot be separated from the constellation of other factors that impinge on families' well-being, such as poverty and its effects, quality of parenting, and communication with schools...Programs are being developed with the realization that literacy is a slender thread that binds many issues together. (p. 211)

Social motivation theory (Wigfield & Asher, 1984) and the political pressure on schools to enhance literacy performance in the primary years, has resulted in a thrust to support family literacy by providing families with support in the form of family centers that include integrated intersectoral services.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) groundbreaking work in "human ecology" broke down barriers among the social sciences, and built bridges between the disciplines that support Conclusions 1, 2 and 3. Bronfenbrenner in his model of four interlocking systems,

considered child development from an ecological perspective that affirms the conclusions I have reached as a result of this research. (A fifth system, that is not as applicable to early child development, was later added.)

1. *The micro-system*: His perspective on the *micro-system* (that which includes the interpersonal environment of the home, extending into preschool and childcare environments) includes the view that increasing numbers of enduring relationships within this system will enhance child development. Each of the four case studies is achieving this by establishing programs that extend opportunities for parents and their children to engage with other adults in positive ways.
2. *The meso-system*: Bronfenbrenner proposes that the *meso-systems* are the relationship among settings such as the home, school and other sites with parent involvement and, that this system will be more powerful an influence on child development as the links become stronger and more diverse. In all four case studies these relationships were a major focus of a number of the programs.
3. *The exo-system*: The *exo-system* is one in which the child does not participate but one in which the quality of interrelationships among settings will have a bearing on parents and other adults who interact with the child. Parenting programs, Family Centres, interagency referral systems, hubs and the work of the intersectoral coalitions in the four case studies have established these relationships and linkages as a high priority.
4. *The macro-system*: The *macro-system* proposes the goal of interlocking social forces and strong inter-relationships among them. While Boundary (Case Study 1) is the closest to the ideal of the macro-system as defined by Bronfenbrenner's

model, Qualicum and Port Alberni aspire to this ideal; the Sunshine Coast's programs are too new to predict their pattern of evolution.

In all four case studies the design of coalition-based social programs focusing on children, such as family literacy programs interconnected with other social programs, are consistent with the Bronfenbrenner ecological model.

Conclusion 5: Highly-functional community coalitions that design integrated service programs have the capacity to reach traditionally hard-to-access families, break down barriers and offer comfort, support, safety and hope. The personal stories in Chapter 4 attest to this.

Conclusion 6: Once a strategic plan is in place and implementation of programs begin to mature, a sense of moral purpose develops and community consciousness is raised—resulting in a reinforcing cycle of pride, achievement and community innovation. In the three most mature coalitions this cycle of success was evident. Refer to page 209 for examples that support this conclusion.

Conclusions 7 and 8: Sustainable leadership at all levels.

Conclusion 7: Coalitions will only thrive with sustainable leadership unique to the individual coalition. Sustainable leadership theory specifies particular leadership characteristics that have been tested over time by many scholars. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) summarized the principles of sustainability—finding moral purpose, caring for others, planning succession, distributing leadership, taking risks but doing no harm, creating cohesion and networking, recognizing and rewarding leadership, nurturing and protecting those in the organization and honouring the past while forging new paths. This transformational type of leadership is typically not assigned to one individual for the

long-term; rather it needs to evolve from the grassroots of the coalition's evolutionary path—shifting amongst the membership of the coalition, responsive to the needs of the next steps of the strategic plan, and based, in large part, on the degree of trust with which the leader is perceived within the group. Leadership patterns were unique among the four case studies: shared and consultative leadership among several key coalition members; layers of leadership that were project based but where each reported to the coalition table which was chaired by one leader; leaders at different levels of the organizations who had developed unique reporting relationships; one leader for 17 years combined with shared leadership within the different agencies—a pattern that began to evolve differently upon his retirement. Key to all four case studies was the necessity for administrative support to maintain communication systems.

Scholars confirm the unique qualities of leaders who are successful while leading visionary change.

Quinn (2004) identified lessons that leaders have to learn in the face of uncertainty:

- That transformational leaders must accept results through the work of others who embrace the vision and move it forward;
- That leaders must build the bridge while they walk on it, with the confidence that they can go ahead without knowing how, trusting themselves to learn, and embracing the unknowable by offering followers the conceivable; and
- That they must be patient with adversity and resistance.

On a final note, Quinn described the uncertainty of the visionary's path and emphasized the importance of a leader's ability to trust in him- or herself. I found it profoundly applicable to the work of community coalitions in my four case studies:

We must trust in our vision enough to start our journey into the chasm of uncertainty believing that the resources will appear. This is most difficult. It requires that we move forward knowing that the final work for a truly deep systemic change effort may not include us. (p. 80)

Conclusion 8: In the beginning stages it is important for community agencies to take the lead by establishing vision, momentum and building partnerships; in order for change of this magnitude to be implemented and sustained, government must commit to a reorganization of service delivery models, funding targeted to the services and enabling legislation and policy development. While three of the four communities are working towards building sustainability systems internally, government organizational structures (often referred to as silos) and unreliable funding and granting mechanisms continue to interfere with proactive grassroots innovations. Community coalitions and the provincial government—now that would be a powerful partnership for the future of BC’s children!

Concluding the Case Studies.

Stake (1995) has been my constant companion on this journey. In the closing paragraph of his book, he noted:

Finishing a case study is the consummation of a work of art. A few of us will find a case study, excepting our family business, the finest work of our lifetime.

Because it is an exercise in such depth, the study is an opportunity to see what others have not seen, to reflect on the uniqueness of our lives, to engage the best of our interpretive powers, and to make, even by its integrity alone, an advocacy for those things we cherish. (p.136).

I understand what Stake means. I have committed most of my life to other people's children, doing the best I could to create meaningful learning environments where family was honoured and parents were encouraged to participate in the learning process with their children. It has been a joy to document the school system now as it approaches what is, essentially, a new frontier. The frontier is collaboration with other community agencies to develop a broad, coherent approach to community services for young families that makes sense.

I have had the privilege to research, study, witness, participate in, and describe community coalitions which are moving to a family-centred approach. In this approach, resources and services are linked so that parents can efficiently gain access to services that meet their family's needs. These intersectoral coalitions are weaving young children and families into the social fabric of their communities, diminishing isolation and strengthening families with a supportive social network.

I envision a future in which our BC communities move towards neighbourhood family and child centres (either in hubs or as satellites) planned at the grassroots level. In these centres, childcare is universal, children's rights are paramount and child poverty is no longer in the headlines. A network of community organizations (including schools) provide early learning programs, family support, and celebrate young children. They ensure that barriers to access are diminished and that vulnerable families are included and safe. The four case study communities in this study are blazing this trail, thinking big and starting small. They are already changing the lives and trajectories of the children and families they help. They demonstrate the possible and the particular. I thank them for including me in this study.

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Appendix A

Consent Forms

(Consent Form for Superintendents)

You are being invited to participate in a case study entitled *School Districts in Community/Intersectoral Coalitions: Models of Collaboration for Young Children*. Janet Mort is a Doctoral Student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (Language and Literacy) at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by telephoning her at 250 652 6299.

As a Graduate student, Janet is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Language and Literacy. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Alison Preece. You may contact her at 250 721 7831. The purpose of this research project: It is directed toward exploring the differences, if any, that have resulted when school districts have participated in successful interdisciplinary community coalitions to improve the quality of and the opportunities for services to young children and their families. These case studies will examine the structure, function and impact of six successful intersectoral community coalitions in BC, to determine if the coalitions resulted in improved coordination and quality of services and enhanced opportunities for the early learning of young children particularly in the area of language and literacy.

Research of this type is important because the case studies resulting from this research can be used to inform government, communities, intersectoral coalitions, interdisciplinary agencies, school districts, and any other groups interested in working collaboratively on behalf of children. These case studies will present evidence about what worked and what didn't and will be supported by the most recent research pertinent to all major topical areas that emerge in the study. The results of the study will be shared with all involved community partners and in this way, will help to disseminate effective practices throughout the province.

If you agree that your district will participate in this research, we are requesting that you authorize your District Contact to participate in Stage 1 of the study and provide your signature on the attached form to indicate approval. Your District Contact will be asked to answer the attached questions in a telephone interview first to arrange a site visit. During the site visit Janet will interview other members of your intersectoral coalition. If your district is chosen to participate in Stage 2 of the study (which involves more in-depth interviews with more individuals) she will also conduct focus groups of selected parent participants. All of the related questions are attached for your information.

The telephone interview and on-site interviews should require only a few hours of your District Contact's time or the time of any other individual – preparing for the interview, participating in it, and reviewing and approving the draft report on the coalition.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Appendix A

Consent Forms

(Consent Form for District Contact Person(s) and Intersectoral Coalition Members)

You are being invited to participate in a case study entitled *School Districts in Community Intersectoral Coalitions: Models of Collaboration for Young Children*, that is being conducted by Janet Mort. Janet Mort is a Doctoral Student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (Language and Literacy) at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by telephoning her at 250 652 6299. Permission for you to participate in the study was provided to us by your Superintendent.

As a Graduate student, Janet is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Language and Literacy. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Alison Preece. You may contact Alison at 250 721 7831. The purpose of this research project: It is directed toward exploring the differences, if any, that have resulted when school districts have participated in successful interdisciplinary community coalitions to improve the quality of and the opportunities for services to young children and their families. These case studies will examine the structure, function and impact of six successful intersectoral community coalitions in BC, to determine if the coalitions resulted in improved coordination and quality of services and enhanced opportunities for the early learning of young children particularly in the area of language and literacy.

Research of this type is important because the case studies resulting from this research can be used to inform government, communities, intersectoral coalitions, interdisciplinary agencies, school districts, and any other groups interested in working collaboratively on behalf of children. The case studies will present evidence about what worked and what didn't and will be supported by the most recent research pertinent to all major topical areas that emerge in the study. The results of the study will be shared with all involved community partners and in this way, will help to disseminate effective practices throughout the province.

The District Contact will be asked to answer the attached questions in a telephone interview first, prior to making arrangements for a site visit. During the site visit Janet will interview other members of the intersectoral coalition. All of the related questions are attached for your information.

The telephone interview and subsequent site visit should require only a few hours of your time – preparing for the interview(s), participating in it, and reviewing and approving the draft report on your coalition.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used in the study unless you see what is to be included and approve it with your signature.

In terms of protecting your anonymity only the name of the school district will be provided in the final report.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: a summary report to all districts, in the University of Victoria library, presentations at scholarly meetings, or in a published article.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher (and, if applicable, the supervisor) at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Interviews in Stage 1 are expected to take place in April, May or June of 2006. In Stage 2 interviews and focus groups will be conducted in the fall of 2006.

District Contact Person and/or Coalition Member

Name: _____

Title: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

<u>District Contact's or Coalition Member's Name</u>	<u>Signature</u>	<u>Date</u>
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We request that you keep a copy of this document for your records and return a copy to the researcher, Janet Mort at 250 652 7889.

Appendix A

Consent Forms

(Consent Form for Parent Participation in Focus Groups)

You are being invited to participate in a case study entitled *School Districts in Community Intersectoral Coalitions: Models of Collaboration for Young Children* that is being conducted by Janet Mort. Janet Mort is a Doctoral Student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (Language and Literacy) at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions by telephoning her at 250 652 6299.

As a Graduate student, Janet is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in Language and Literacy. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Alison Preece. You may contact Alison at 250 721 7831. The purpose of this research project: It is directed toward exploring the differences, if any, that have resulted when school districts have participated in successful interdisciplinary community coalitions to improve the quality of and the opportunities for services to young children and their families. These case studies will examine the structure, function and impact of six successful intersectoral community coalitions in BC, to determine if the coalitions resulted in improved coordination and quality of services and enhanced opportunities for the early learning of young children particularly in the area of language and literacy.

Research of this type is important because the case studies resulting from this research can be used to inform government, communities, intersectoral coalitions, interdisciplinary agencies, school districts, and any other groups interested in working collaboratively on behalf of children. The case studies will present evidence about what worked and what didn't and will be supported by the most recent research pertinent to all major topical areas that emerge in the study. The results of the study will be shared with all involved community partners and in this way, will help to disseminate effective practices throughout the province.

You will be asked to answer the attached questions in a focus group which will be held on.....(date)..... at.....(place and time)..... The purpose of the focus group is to explore your views on the value of the work of your community coalition and the projects that have resulted in support of young children.

The focus group should require only a few hours of your time – preparing for the meeting, participating in it, and reviewing and approving the draft report on your coalition.

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used in the study unless you see what is to be included and approve it with your signature.

In terms of protecting your anonymity only the name of the school district will be provided in the final report.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: a summary report to all districts, in the University of Victoria library, presentations at scholarly meetings, or in a published article.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher (and, if applicable, the supervisor) at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Focus groups will be conducted in the fall of 2006.

Parent Participation in Focus Group

Name: _____

Phone Number: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

<u>District Contact's or Coalition</u> <u>Member's Name</u>	<u>Signature</u>	<u>Date</u>
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We request that you keep a copy of this document for your records and return a copy to the researcher, Janet Mort at 250 652 7889.

Appendix B

(Questions for Stage 1 – Telephone Interview, District Contact)

1. When I conducted the EDI study in May, 2004 the following projects/services were underway in your districts: *(Review projects from EDI Impact study.)* Have these projects continued? Have they changed? If so, how?
2. Are there new projects/services and if so please describe?
3. How do these projects/services contribute to early learning, and language and literacy development?
4. What is the status of your community intersectoral coalition?
5. How involved is your school district in the coalition?
6. Would your district be willing to be a part of my PhD study?
7. If so, how will we proceed to get formal district approval and once that is secured can we make tentative arrangements for me to conduct a site visit to gather more data?

Appendix B

(Questions for Stage 1 and Stage 2 – On-Site Visits, District Contact and Members of the Coalition)

1. How long have you or your district/community been engaged in coalition work?
2. How would you describe or define your coalition?
3. Describe the role of leadership in your coalition? How did it evolve? What are the most important characteristics of coalition leadership?
4. What is your role within the coalition?
5. How does the EDI work impact on your planning and to what degree?
6. In your perception what benefit, if any, has accrued to young children, families, staff, parents or community groups as a result of the coalition work particularly in the area of language and literacy? How do you know or what makes you think so? What do you accept as proof? Is there anything you could share with me to confirm this? If there has been not benefit why do you believe this to be true? If necessary I will prompt the interviewee with the following question: What evidence can you provide for this perception—narrative, data, observations, logs, surveys, vignettes, testimonies, illustrations, case stories, etc.?
7. List and describe the most important factors that contribute to the success of the coalition in your opinion. If you had to narrow your choices which would be highest on your list?
8. How would you rank the effectiveness of your coalition on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being low)?
9. What are the factors that support its success and what gets in the way of success?

Appendix B

(Stage 2 – Questions for Focus Groups)

1. In which programs have your family, you and/or your child participated?
2. What do you value most in the programs offered? Why?
3. What difference do they make to your family, you and/or your child?
4. How do these programs contribute to your child's learning? If not, why not?
5. How do you support your child's language/literacy development? Have the programs/services helped? Why or why not?
6. Describe your coalition's membership and school district involvement in it.
7. How does leadership play a role in the coalition? Who provides the leadership?
Do parents have an opportunity to provide leadership?
8. What additional offerings would you like to have available?

(Stage 2 – Questions for Children)

1. What do you like most about coming to this [program]?
2. What is your favorite activity?
3. How do you feel when you can't come?
4. What have you learned that you didn't know before?

Appendix C

Detailed Timeline

- February 2006—Committee discussion, revision and approval of the proposal and ethics approval;
- May 2006 to December 2006—Stage 1: Case studies with on-site visits to four school districts for the purpose of conducting interviews with approximately 10 identified coalition members in each community;
- October 2006 to January 2007—Stage 2: A case study in-depth with one district expanding the data collection to include an increased number of interviews, focus groups, observations, and other pertinent data;
- December 2006 to February 2007—Analysis of data related to Stage 1;
- February 2007—Completion of Stage 2 site visits;
- February to April 2007—Comparative analysis of data from Stages 1 and 2 and preparation for writing;
- April 2007 to July 2007—Initial analysis presented to the committee for response and direction; writing completed and paper presented to the committee and revisited, reinvestigation and rewrite of the literature review.