



**Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Education of the Americas  
Cartagena, Colombia  
November 14-16, 2007**

**Report of the Canadian Delegation**

*Head of Delegation*

The Honourable Peter Bjornson  
Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth  
Manitoba

*Members of Delegation*

Dr. Emery Dosdall  
Deputy Minister of Education  
British Columbia

Ms. Natalija Marjanovic  
Deputy Director, Policy and Planning  
International Education and Youth  
Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada

Mr. Alain Grenier  
Head of Aid – Counsellor  
Canadian Embassy in Colombia

Dr. Raymond Théberge  
Director General  
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

Mr. Leonard Beaulne  
Deputy Director, Inter-American Relations  
and Regional Policy Division  
Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada

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**Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Education of the Americas  
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## **Introduction**

Ministers of Education of the Americas held their fifth meeting from November 14 to 16, 2007, in Cartagena, Colombia. The Canadian delegation was led by the Honourable Peter Bjornson, Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth, Manitoba.

Documentation related to this meeting is available upon request from the Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). A report of the meeting discussion will be prepared by the Organization of American States (OAS) and will be available upon request from the CMEC Secretariat.

## **Objectives of the Canadian Delegation**

1. Represent the interests of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), the Department of Foreign Affairs (FAC), and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).
2. Promote the strength of education systems of Canada and the expertise of Canadian administrators and educators.
3. Contribute to the hemispheric dialogue on initiatives related to equity in education, teacher training and professional development, and quality in secondary education.
4. Assist in the development of an education agenda in the Americas that will contribute to the meeting priorities of creating jobs, decreasing poverty levels, and strengthening democratic governance.

## **Preparatory Session**

The fifth meeting was preceded (November 14, 2007) by a meeting with the authorities of the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE) with the objectives of discussing the draft agenda of the ministerial meeting and creating a working group to review the drafting of the document "*Hemispheric Commitment to Early Childhood Education and Joint Agenda of Work (2007-2009)*." Dr. Emery Dodsall, Dr. Raymond Théberge, Ms. Natalija Marjanovic, and Mr. Leonard Beaulne attended this session.

## **Inaugural Session**

The inaugural session on November 14, 2007, was opened by His Excellency Álvaro Uribe Vélez, President of the Republic of Colombia.

## **Plenary Sessions**

During the preliminary portion of the ministers' meeting, Colombia was elected chair of the meeting.

The expectations of the meeting were to address the issues of quality and equity of education, attendance and completion of primary and secondary school, and the role of early childhood education in minimizing further inequities.

The Technical Secretariat described how the summit, the ministerial, and the Inter-American Committee on Education relate to one another.

Ms. Mary Eming Young of the World Bank spoke on the nature of comprehensive early childhood services. The key messages are to intervene early, often, and effectively; to build a system not just projects; and to monitor and evaluate.

In describing the current structure of the Americas, Ms. Gaby Fujimoto from the OAS Department of Education and Culture stated that over 200 million young children will not reach their potential.

The first ministerial presentations were given in the fourth plenary session, "Intersectoral government policy, comprehensive services, and diversity." The Minister of Colombia and the Secretary of Public Education of Honduras intervened. The presentation highlighted the efforts of both countries in early childhood education.

Minister Bjornson was a panellist in the fifth plenary session, "Legal and regulatory frameworks; approaches to funding for sustainability." Minister Bjornson's presentation (Appendix II) highlighted the pan-Canadian initiatives in ECE with concrete examples. The thrust of his comments aligned with the major theme of a multi-sectoral, cross-disciplinary approach.

The sixth plenary, entitled "Comprehensive early childhood service programs," highlighted the efforts of Costa Rica and Paraguay.

The next presidency of the CIE will alternate between Colombia and Ecuador. The first vice-chair will be Trinidad and Tobago; the second vice-chair will be Brazil.

During the final plenary, there were a number of presentations from representatives of civil society. The Hemispheric Commitment to Early Childhood Education was adopted (Appendix I).

At the closing press conference, Minister Bjornson was one of the three speakers to be chosen to give final thoughts on the meeting. His presentation (Appendix III) was broadcast on network television.

## Appendix I



**ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES**  
**Inter-American Council for Integral Development**  
**(CIDI)**



**FIFTH MEETING OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION**  
November 15-16, 2007  
Cartagena de Indias, Colombia

OEA/Ser.K/V  
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16 November 2007  
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### HEMISPHERIC COMMITMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

(Adopted at the ninth plenary session held on November 16, 2007)

[Pending revision by the Style Committee]

## HEMISPHERIC COMMITMENT TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

(Adopted at the ninth plenary session held on November 16, 2007)

WE, THE MINISTERS OF EDUCATION OF THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS), gathered in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia from November 14 to 16, 2007 for the Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Education,

WE REAFFIRM, after taking stock of the lessons learned in designing, executing, monitoring, and evaluating early childhood policies, that early childhood is a decisive phase in the human life cycle and a comprehensive approach to it will allow us to overcome the challenges of poverty, inequity, and social exclusion.

WE AGREE, for the purposes of this Hemispheric Commitment, that early childhood education is fundamental in the process of comprehensive development of children from birth to eight years of age, and we recognize that it is provided in different ways in different countries, but must include a joint effort by the family, school, and the community to develop effective public policies, as well as the contribution of the various sectors in society.

WE RECOGNIZE that equitable and timely access to quality and integral education adapted to global and local contexts and global realities is a human right, a public good, and a political priority, including in the framework of comprehensive care for the very young, and we underscore the need to give priority to the most vulnerable groups and those with special educational needs.

WE RECOGNIZE the family as the first and irreplaceable medium for educating and taking care of girls and boys, as well as the role of communities and governments in promoting policies of equitable access to quality early childhood education and its effective incorporation into each country's educational system.

WE UNDERSCORE the importance for States of promoting and conducting research and evaluation of early childhood education and of disseminating the findings, in order to generate the new knowledge and indicators needed to make better decisions based on empirical evidence. Of particular interest would be research into the relationship between integral care for the very young and repetition and drop-out rates, and aggression, and violence at later stages.

WE REAFFIRM that governments should aspire to guarantee their peoples a quality education for all that: (i) satisfies the basic need to learn, which includes, *inter alia*, creating, reflecting, valuing, participating, knowing, doing, living together, and being; (ii) promotes participation and responsibility on the part of families and the community, and mass media, and local and municipal governments; (iii) fosters the

development of factors relating to peace, development, and human rights, education in democratic values and practices, and protection of the environment; and (iv) incorporates technological innovation in order to develop the human skills needed to live in a knowledge society. In order to achieve an education with these characteristics, it is necessary to start in early childhood.

WE recognize the significant progress achieved in education in the region, thanks to governments' and civil society's efforts to guarantee inclusive, quality, and intercultural education adapted to global, local, and cultural circumstances, sponsored by the investments and institutional reforms set in motion.

WE UNDERTAKE to redouble our efforts to continue forging a democratic culture in our Hemisphere by implementing the Inter-American Program on Education for Democratic Values and Practices, emphasizing that the values and practices that foster peaceful coexistence begin to be formed in early childhood.

WE ALSO UNDERTAKE to continue advancing in the development of reliable education indicators through the Regional Educational Indicators Project (PRIE) and to explore ways of developing appropriate early childhood and preschool education indicators, based on existing international efforts. We are convinced that effective policies are based on reliable and timely information and, for that reason, we stress the need to have early childhood indicators based on scientific evidence.

WE AFFIRM the commitment of States or pertinent authorities to promote quality professional preparation and ongoing development for early childhood education staff, teachers, and technical personnel. We recognize the commitment of educators throughout the Hemisphere to the education of our children and young people.

WE RECOGNIZE the efforts undertaken by member states to:

- a. Eradicate the worst forms of child labor and reduce the number of children that work in violation of national laws, ensuring educational opportunity for children and youth;
- b. Develop educational plans for youth and adults, including literacy teaching and continuing education in the framework of efforts to eradicate illiteracy;
- c. Advance the development of community, intercultural, and multilingual education;
- d. Encourage and implement strategies for providing education to the most vulnerable groups and others with special educational needs, linked or not to disabilities;
- e. Forge ahead with the dissemination, appropriate use, and inclusion of information and communication technologies in our countries' educational processes and systems, and
- f. Support the drafting of a Social Charter and its corresponding Plan of Action through the "Joint Working Group of the Permanent Council and CEPCIDI on the Draft Social Charter of the Americas."



WE RECOGNIZE the contributions of the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), to the follow-up, implementation, and evaluation of our mandates. We delegate to CIE the task of following up on and evaluating the agreements reached at this meeting.

WE RECOGNIZE ALSO the support given to CIE by the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI) through its Department of Education and Culture, and instruct SEDI to continue assisting the Committee with its work of following up on the achievement of our goals.

WE RECOMMEND to our Heads of State and Government that we make a joint hemispheric commitment to quality education and comprehensive care for the very young, with a view to considering in the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Fifth Summit of the Americas, to be held in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009, guidelines for strengthening policies for early childhood that may contribute to the integral development of our countries.

WE agree to work together and with other relevant institutions – governmental, international, and civil society –to achieve the following objectives:

- a. Develop legal, ethical, and regulatory frameworks and/or financing mechanisms to ensure sustainable implementation of early childhood policies;
- b. Increase quality comprehensive early childhood education coverage, in accordance with each member state's possibilities and with the long-term goal of universalizing its integral care for the very young;
- c. Establish early childhood comprehensive care and education policies and processes and criteria for focusing on attending to the poor and vulnerable segments of society, ethnic groups, migrants, and groups with special educational needs;
- d. Implement comprehensive care programs for children that are tailored to their particular needs, characteristics, and contexts;
- e. Coordinate educational sectors and institutions with other national, local, and subnational authorities responsible for providing protection, nutrition, health, culture, and social welfare-related components in such a way as to guarantee the provision of comprehensive early childhood care;
- f. Strengthen initial preparation and quality on-going professional development for educators in early childhood education, including teachers, families, and communities as the first educational influences;
- g. Formulate policies and educational, inter-institutional, and inter-sectoral coordination strategies for the successful transition of children between the different stages in early childhood;
- h. Promote mechanisms for evaluating the quality of comprehensive care and early childhood education, and
- i. Encourage communication and dissemination policies regarding comprehensive early childhood care and education.

WE INSTRUCT the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE), to implement our mandates in its 2007-2009 Work Plan, paying special attention to the need to supplement efforts to move toward comprehensive care in early childhood. To that end, the CIE should use the document "Guidelines for Early Childhood Education Programming" (CIDI/RME/doc.7/07), which includes inter alia, to carry out the following actions aimed at:

- a. Evaluating comprehensive early childhood care programs with a view to identifying ways of improving and generating databases to facilitate the exchange of meaningful experiences among countries;
- b. Identifying best practices in comprehensive care programs; experiences with intersectoral coordination; and legal, regulatory and funding frameworks, with a view to designing and implementing bilateral and multilateral technical cooperation agendas; as well as putting in place communication and dissemination strategies for comprehensive care and education for the very young;
- c. Exchanging experiences and practices in the evaluation of children's development in early childhood, and in the training of teachers and other personnel responsible for early childhood care and education;
- d. Strengthening and extending regional educational indicators for early childhood within the Regional Educational Indicators Project (PRIE);
- e. Broadening the scope of the Educational Portal of the Americas, the Latin American Network of Educational Portals (RELPE), and the educational portals of the member states, with a view to facilitating the sharing of successful experiences and contents among countries, thereby helping to strengthen early childhood care and education policies, and
- f. Fostering the participation of civil society in programs, projects, and strategies for early childhood.

WE EXPRESS our gratitude to the Government of Colombia for its warm and generous hospitality and its contribution to the success of this Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Education in the framework of the Inter-American Council for Integral Development (CIDI) of the Organization of American States (OAS).

**Presentation from the Head of the Canadian Delegation  
The Honourable Peter Bjornson  
Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth, Manitoba  
Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Education of the Americas  
Cartagena, Colombia  
November 14-16, 2007**

**Fifth Plenary Session: Legal and regulatory frameworks; approaches to funding for sustainability**

Mr. Chair, colleague ministers, and delegates,

- I am very honoured to have the opportunity to speak on the important topic of early childhood education and development and specifically on what I believe constitutes a hallmark of successful early childhood programs in any country – the creation of legal and policy frameworks for effective allocation of resources to ensure that structures put in place continue to provide the strategic funding so vital for the development of any society’s most precious assets – its children.
- As many speakers before me have indicated, evidence from numerous research studies and evaluations of existing programs have shown time and again that investment in early childhood education and care is a crucial component of a person’s overall development.
- As both the representative of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and as the minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth for Manitoba, I would like to share with you some of Canada’s and my province’s experiences with early childhood education (ECE) frameworks, hoping that they will contribute to fruitful discussion and concrete action at this meeting and beyond.
- First I should mention that, in Canada, there is no federal department of education and no integrated national system of education. Canada is a federation, and education is the constitutional responsibility of the ten provinces and three territories.
- Similarly, child care falls primarily under provincial jurisdiction, and the federal role is limited largely to the transfer of funds to provincial and territorial governments for early childhood programs and services. However, the federal

government does play a direct role in providing early learning and child care for First Nations communities, military families, and immigrants and refugees.

- Across Canada, early childhood education and care programs are primarily for children from birth to age six but also include out-of-school care for children up to 12 years. Kindergarten programs, generally for five-year-olds, exist in all jurisdictions. Each of the 13 provincial and territorial governments has made significant investments in developing early learning and child care services. However, a substantial portion of children in day care, as much as 60% on average across Canadian jurisdictions, are placed in unregulated full- or part-time care. This may include care by relatives, friends or neighbours, nannies, nurseries or preschools, and various recreation programs.
- Approximately 40% of child care in Canada is regulated under provincial/territorial child care legislation. Approximately 77% of regulated care is privately operated, usually on a not-for-profit basis by parent groups, voluntary boards of directors, or other non-profit entities.
- The availability of and government support for child care varies from province to province. For instance, in Quebec, 30% of eligible children are in regulated child care with a provincial government contribution of \$1.6 billion dollars per year. Quebec is a province of seven million people, the majority living in urban centres.
- In Saskatchewan, a province of just under one million people, 5% of eligible children are in regulated spaces, with government support of \$19.6 million per year. While increasingly urban, Saskatchewan remains an agricultural province with a small population across a large geographic area. In Saskatchewan, just over 68 % of mothers with young children 0–5 years of age are working outside the home.
- In my province, Manitoba, the Government is committed to supporting early childhood development. As a result, new and expanded early years programming has been introduced.
- For example, Healthy Child is an interdepartmental program that addresses the needs of families and children throughout a child’s development. Led by the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, Healthy Child Manitoba bridges departments and governments and, together with the community, works to improve the well-being of Manitoba's children and youth. HCM focuses on child-centred public policy through the integration of financial and community-based family supports.
- Another program is The Manitoba Child Care Program, which
  - licenses and monitors child care centres and family child care homes according to *The Community Child Care Standards Act* and Regulations

- provides grants and program assistance to eligible child care facilities
  - works to place children with special needs into child care settings through the Children with Disabilities Program
  - classifies all child care assistants and early childhood educators who work in licensed child care centres
  - assigns a child care coordinator and subsidy advisor to work with each licensed facility
  - provides child care subsidies to eligible families to help with the cost of care through the Subsidy Program
- A number of policy frameworks have been created to facilitate the provision of quality child care programs. The main characteristics of child care policies in Canada's jurisdictions is their holistic approach to funding that targets all dimensions of ECE from pre-natal nutrition to an array of large-scale parent and community support programs.
  - In September 2000, the Government of Canada and provincial and territorial governments reached an agreement to improve the services and programs they provide for children under 6 years of age and their families. As a result, a federal/provincial/territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement was reached, followed by the adoption of a Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care adopted in 2003.
  - All governments participating in these two initiatives have committed to report publicly on their investments for Canada's children under six and their families. Regular reporting allows Canadians to monitor progress in improving and expanding programs and services for young children and their families.
  - The success and sustainability of early childhood programs depend on the ability to respond to the constantly diverse and changing needs of families. For instance, in light of growing child care expenses, the income tax measure, the Child Care Expense Deduction (CCED), has been introduced to recognize that child care expenses are a cost incurred by many parents, in order that they may be employed, operate a business, or pursue education.
  - In addition to changing dynamics at the family level, governments need to recognize the emerging demographic trends that make it necessary to alter child care policies to reflect new demographic and political realities.
  - The needs of minorities and vulnerable groups have to be equally taken into consideration in order for policies to become as inclusive as they are sustainable.
  - In Canada, to this day, there exists a gap in life chances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. With this in mind, the Federal Strategy on Early

Childhood Development for First Nations and Other Aboriginal Children was announced in October 2002 to address this issue.

- This initiative provides \$320 million over five years in the areas of better integration of programs and services, advancing research and knowledge, and making new investments to enhance existing programs and to intensify efforts to address fetal alcohol syndrome in First Nations communities.
- Along with all the achievements described above we are of course still facing many problems. A number of issues continue to be of concern as we work to blend early learning with childcare.
- For example, in Canada there is some reluctance to address the status, training, and wage differentials between early learning and care providers and elementary school teachers.
- Questions remain about the purpose of early learning and care environments; should the emphasis be primarily on cognitive development or on social development of young children. Should we focus on developing “school readiness” in children or should attention shift to making school environments “ready for young children.” Should we infuse the emergent philosophy and curriculum of early learning into the more structured, cognitive focus of the primary school system?
- We have also learned that the social policy context matters. Attitudes to, and investment in, early learning and child care are inevitably grounded within the larger social policy context. Ongoing discussions about the roles and responsibilities of families, communities and the state in the care and development of young children have not yet shifted the relatively low percentage of GDP invested in ECE in Canada. ECE initiatives can be vulnerable to changes in political contexts favouring either greater support for individual family investment or strengthening broad-based public investment. ECE policies are also shaped by changes in the social context; such as declining birth rates in developed countries, increases in immigration, and increasing rates of some types of disability.
- Despite all of these challenges, Canada is strongly committed to furthering its work in the field and supports the international community in general, and OAS members states in particular, in their aspirations to create and promote best practices for high-quality sustainable child care and learning programs.
- For this to happen, we must all work to ensure that everyone — families, child care providers, and decision makers — have the best information available and that we listen and act on meeting the needs of our youngest citizens. I think we all

share this critical goal and this meeting presents an occasion for all of us to contribute to this important mission.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to speak here today.

**Intervention from the Head of the Canadian Delegation  
The Honourable Peter Bjornson  
Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth, Manitoba  
Fifth Meeting of Ministers of Education of the Americas  
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**Closing Press Conference**

On behalf of Canada, I would like to extend our congratulations to my colleagues involved in this very important, very timely, very positive, and very productive meeting.

We have reaffirmed the value of investing in early childhood education.

We have recognized the need to provide policy frameworks to support the holistic approach to early childhood education.

My government, in Manitoba, not only supports this approach but has been recognized in Canada for our Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet and our inter-sectorial, interdepartmental approach to the development, health, and education of our children.

I have learned a lot from my colleagues during this meeting, and I look forward to continuing the dialogue in the future.