Managing the Impacts of Full Day Kindergarten on Rural Childcare Centres in Ontario

by

Ogochukwu Udenigwe

A Thesis
Presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science
in
Family Relations and Human Development

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

© Ogochukwu Udenigwe, December, 2013
ABSTRACT

MANAGING THE IMPACTS OF FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN ON RURAL CHILDCARE CENTRES IN ONTARIO

Ogochukwu Udenigwe

University of Guelph, 2013

Advisor: Professor D. S. Lero

This thesis examined the impacts of full day kindergarten (FDK) in rural childcare centres as well as how these impacts are managed at the local level. The introduction of FDK in Ontario has generally been seen as a positive step; however, it has been observed that FDK implementation will have differentiated impact across the province. Rural areas are more likely to bear a heavier burden due to system change than their urban counterparts because they already face challenges in the early childhood sector. This exploratory study involved semi-structured interviews with seven Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) who described their roles in planning for and supporting rural early learning and childcare services. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with nine rural childcare centre directors who highlighted their strategies for managing the challenges presented by the introduction of FDK. Findings reveal that the most pressing problems facing the rural childcare sector are insufficient funding, fluctuating enrollments, and staffing challenges. Several CMSMs reported taking actions to aid rural communities. Several directors acknowledged the support of their municipal government but noted unsolved issues. Centre directors report many strategies they have used to maintain centre viability, some of which are additional marketing and promotion of their centres, developing business acumen, and improving staff benefits in order to attract and retain qualified early childhood educators (ECE).
Acknowledgements

I am extremely fortunate to have worked with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Donna Lero, whose wisdom, guidance, support and constructive criticism have shaped the course of my work and deepened my understanding of the subject matter.

I would like to thank my committee member Dr. Kathleen Brophy for her thought-provoking feedback.

I am indebted to the CMSMs and centre directors who took time out of their busy schedules to share their experiences.

I would like to say a huge thank you to Luisa Artuso-Della Croce and Laura Coulman for facilitating recruitment of participants.

To my course mates, thank you for positive learning experiences.

My heartfelt gratitude goes out to my dad and mum (Mr. and Mrs. Ogidi) and brothers (Chinedu, Ifeanyi and Ikenna) for their love, unwavering support and prayers.

I would like to thank my parents and brother in-law (Mr. and Mrs. Udenigwe, Chukwuma) for all their prayers. Thank you mum (Udenigwe) for your constant checking in.

To my babies Chimamanda and Chiwetelundu, whose kisses, sweet smiles and unconditional love I can always count on. Thank you for your understanding when mummy was too busy working on her “pieces”.

I would like to extend a special thank you to my husband and soul mate, Dr. Chibuike Udenigwe, Thank you for believing in me and for your abundant love, patience and steady assurances especially during stressful periods. You made this journey worthwhile and I am blessed to have you.

Above all else, I thank God, my heavenly father without whom I could do nothing, thank you for the strength to make this happen.

I would like to acknowledge the Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarships, Program Master’s Scholarships, awarded to me by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

“An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity”.

Martin Luther King, Jr
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iii

Table of contents ........................................................................................................... iv

Chapter 1 ......................................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Canada ........................................ 1
  1.2 Childcare in Rural Canada ..................................................................................... 8
  1.3 Rationale For Study .............................................................................................. 12
  1.4 Human Ecology Perspective on Rural Childcare ................................................. 13

Chapter 2 ......................................................................................................................... 14
  2.1 The Rural Context ................................................................................................. 14
  2.2 The Origins of Early Learning and Childcare in Canada ..................................... 20
      The Federal Role .................................................................................................... 21
      The Provincial Role ............................................................................................... 25
      Municipalities’ Role ............................................................................................. 29
  2.3 Importance of Childcare to Rural Communities ............................................... 33
  2.4 Challenges Facing Childcare Centres in Rural Communities ........................... 35

Chapter 3 ......................................................................................................................... 41
  3.1 Objectives of this Study ......................................................................................... 41
  3.2 Research Paradigm ............................................................................................... 42
  3.3 Research Design .................................................................................................. 43
  3.4 Data Collection .................................................................................................... 44
  3.5 Data Analysis ....................................................................................................... 47

Chapter 4 ......................................................................................................................... 49
  4.1 Role of CMSMS in the Introduction of FDK ....................................................... 50
  4.2 Key Issues in Rural Childcare ............................................................................ 52
  4.3 Positive Impacts of FDK ....................................................................................... 56
  4.4 Centre Directors’ Survival Strategies ................................................................. 57
  4.5 Rural Considerations ......................................................................................... 59
There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

Nelson Mandela
Chapter One: Introduction

The introduction is divided into five sections. The first section gives a general description of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Canada with a discussion on the benefits of childcare. The second section provides a description of childcare in rural Canada and briefly introduces the impacts of the newly implemented Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) approach on the rural childcare in Ontario. The third section explains the rationale for this study. Finally, the fourth section presents human ecological perspectives on rural childcare.

1.1 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Canada

The terms early learning and child care (ELCC) or early childhood education and care (ECEC) present a new approach to childcare. Friendly and Prentice (2009) recognise ECEC as a coherent, integrated and inclusive approach to services delivered to children and parents; they argue that care and education are inseparable concepts. A high-quality ECEC program is appropriately designed to include care and early learning that prepares children to succeed at school and improves well-being in children at risk. In addition, a high-quality ECEC program is designed to provide social support for parents by facilitating parental participation in the job market or pursuit of education (Friendly, 2011; Friendly & Prentice, 2009; McCain, Mustard & McCuaig, 2011). Neuroscience has shown that there are critical periods in a child’s development when the brain is wired and sculpted to receive “sensory input and develop more advanced neural systems” (McCain & Mustard, 1999, p. 5). This, in turn, influences learning, health and behavioural outcomes throughout a child’s life time. Numerous research studies have provided consistent evidence of the association between high-quality early childhood programs and every aspect of a child’s development. Impacts of high-quality care in the infant and toddler years include: higher reading and mathematics scores, higher IQ scores, higher graduation rates, higher employment rates, higher income levels, higher social competence and overall lower crime rates (Prentice, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, (2000); Wehner, Kelly, & Prentice, 2008). It is important to note, however, that “quality” is the key word because poor quality programs can have adverse effects such as retarding a child’s development and undermining national economic progress (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011).
Although quality in ECEC is most often focused on structural issues such as staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications, it has been argued that quality encompasses other equally important matters such as funding, governance, policies that support ECEC programs, and evaluation (Friendly & Prentice, 2009). A system of high-quality ECEC services developed through careful planning and implementation reconciles parental responsibilities in terms of balancing work and family. A report on the attitudes of Canadians toward childcare reveals that an overwhelming number of Canadians support the idea of a national ECEC program that is universally affordable and available to all children (Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada [CCAAC], and Child Care Advocacy Association of British Columbia [CCAABC], 2011). However, Canada has been critiqued for lagging behind other wealthy nations in the provision of accessible childcare. Canada lacks a universal and comprehensive childcare policy approach. In fact, childcare services in Canada have been called a “patchwork” of services due to the fragmentation of child care policy across each province/territory (Cleveland, 2008). Provincial jurisdictions have “exclusive authority” over childcare policies and each provincial government holds different views about the state of ECEC, thereby creating variation across provinces (Friendly & Prentice, 2009; Pasolli & Young, 2012). An example of these variations is the enormous differences in childcare fees across provinces, from $7 a day to $2000 a month (Friendly & Prentice, 2009).

“The fact is that Canada’s public support for young children and their families is the weakest among the world’s rich countries, such that Canada’s policies and investments fall far short of the commitments made under multiple agreements” (CCAC & CCAABC, 2011, p. 3).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports that compared to its counterparts, Canada lags in the development of early childhood development programs (Cool, 2007). Canada’s weak childcare policy was evident in a report released by UNICEF in 2008. In this report, UNICEF suggested certain minimum standards for protecting the rights of children in the early and most formative years of life. These standards state that a country should have: a minimum of one year paid parental leave at 50% of salary; a national plan for disadvantaged children; regulated childcare spaces for at least 25% of children under three; subsidized and regulated ECEC services available to at least 80% of four year olds; accredited training for at least 80% of early childhood educators (ECEs); a minimum of 50% of staff in
accredited ECEC service with post-secondary education and training in early childhood studies; a minimum of 1:15 staff-to-child ratio in preschool groups; minimum public spending on ECEC which should be 1% of GDP; low levels of child poverty, which should be less than 10%; and finally, an almost universal ECEC service (UNICEF, 2008). Of all of these standards, Canada meets only one, which is having 50% or more of staff in accredited ECEC services with a post-secondary education in early childhood studies. Table 1 provides a condensed overview of elements of Canadian ECEC services as indicated by UNICEF (2008).
### Table 1: ECEC Services in Canada

| Entitlement to ECEC programs | • Canadian children have no legal right to childcare,  
|                            | • In Québec, however, children have a legal right to  
|                            | ECEC from 0-6 years  
|                            | • Legal right to kindergarten for 4 and 5 year olds in  
|                            | Ontario  
|                            | • Rest of Canada has legal rights to kindergarten at 5  
|                            | or 6  
| Fees | • Fees paid for childcare services,  
|      | • Publicly funded (free) kindergarten  
| GDP expenditure | • Canada spends less than .05% of its GDP on  
|                 | childcare services. This is below the minimum  
|                 | standard set by UNICEF for ensuring child rights  
| Length of paid leaves | • 52 weeks of total paid parental leave, compared to  
|                      | 158 in some European countries  
| Policy approach to childcare | • Weak state support for services for families with  
|                               | children under 4 years old  


Beneficial or negative aspects of family policies have consequences for children and families as these policies will extend to other aspects of a child’s life such as family functioning. As Bronfenbrenner puts it:

“Policy research is now a thriving enterprise encompassing such diverse and essential topics as legislation at national, state, and local levels; the evolution and nature of programs serving families and children; educational policies and practices; legal and judicial procedures; policies governing mass media; the role of advocacy in the policy process; the development of strategies for dealing with drugs, child abuse, and other social problems; the construction of childhood social indicators; and analyses of the policy process itself. Least salient in this newly evolving field is a concern that is central in an ecological perspective on human development namely, how do policies affect the experience of those whom they are intended to serve? To put the issue more succinctly: What is the nature of the interface between policies and people” ((Zigler, Kagan, & Klugman, 1983 pp.393-394 as cited in Bronfenbrenner, 1996, pp. 737).
From a theoretical standpoint, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological system’s theory serves as a backdrop for understanding the trickledown effects of policies on children. Systems theory situates child development in an ecological perspective where a child’s experiences are occurring within interconnected systems which are also layers of the child’s environment (Thornburg, Mathews, Espinosa & Ispa, 1997). The benefits of a high-quality childcare system extend beyond children and families. These benefits are multifaceted and are described as follows:

**Benefits for children’s development.** According to McCain and Mustard (1999), studies in neuroscience and child development have shown that the early years of life are crucial in setting a good foundation for children’s success in the future. Brain development, learning, behaviour and health are all significantly influenced by experiences in the early years. High quality, developmentally attuned childcare services and interactions benefit all children (McCain & Mustard). In addition to improving brain development for children, high-quality childcare has been reported to have positive effects that continue into adulthood, thereby improving social outcomes, especially in children from families with low social economic status (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). These benefits include: higher reading and math scores, higher IQ scores, higher graduation rates, higher employment and income levels, lower rates of smoking, and lower drug use and lower crime rates (Prentice, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

**Economic development.** ECEC also promotes economic development with very high public returns (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011; Prentice, 2007). Canadian studies have focused on the immediate returns realized from the increased participation of mothers in the workforce (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011). A study conducted on Québec’s childcare system showed that with access to $7-a-day childcare, the employment rate of mothers with preschoolers increased by 12% between 2000 and 2008 (Fortin, Godbout, & St-Cerny, 2012). Further analysis conducted by Fortin et al. (2012) show that both the Federal and Québec government gained from mothers’ participation due to increased family income and decreased demand for government transfers. Additionally, mothers’ participation contributed a 1.8% boost in Québec’s total employment which resulted in a 1.7% increase in the province’s GDP (Fortin et
al., 2012). The authors estimated a return of $2.4 billion to both the Federal and Québec government for expenses on childcare.

Furthermore, childcare is important in economic development as it is a job creator. A study conducted in Winnipeg, Manitoba found that there are more jobs in the childcare sector than there are in the entire Manitoba film industry (Prentice, 2007). As well, there are similar numbers of jobs in the childcare sector as there are in health research or the energy and environment sectors (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011; Prentice, 2007). Another study conducted by Fairholm (2009) showed the childcare sector is one of the largest job creators: investing $1 million in childcare would create 40 jobs. Investing in childcare is a strong economic stimulant; for every $1 invested in the childcare sector, the economic output doubles (Fairholm, 2009). Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) of Ontario agree that childcare is a worthwhile pursuit because it is a labour intensive industry that creates employment in their local community and generates revenue. For example, the county of Wellington documented that their current licensed childcare centre generates over $20 million annually (County of Wellington Child Care Services [CWCCS], 2012). The quality of life and competitiveness of rural communities depend on their having the “infrastructure they need and that includes childcare services” (Prentice, 2007, pg. 6). This statement underscores the importance of basic infrastructure to communities, as the lack of infrastructure and services decreases the quality of life in the community. Consistent with this school of thought is the idea that childcare is part of the social infrastructure that enables optimal functioning of other sectors in the economy; and that the lack of quality and affordable childcare costs taxpayers more than a comprehensive, publicly planned childcare system would (CWCCS, 2012).

Poverty Reduction. The OECD explains that skills acquired at one stage of the life cycle affect other stages of the life cycle (Doherty et al., 2003). This is particularly true for early childhood education as this helps buffer some of the developmental disadvantages of growing up in poverty. Doherty et al. (2003) report that poverty increases children’s chances of developmental delay, resulting in higher risk of poor educational outcomes and delays in skills such as language acquisition, self-regulation and confidence. Schweinhart et al. (2005) studied the impact of preschool education on children from persistently poor families. Two groups from
similar family backgrounds were studied over time. Compared to the group that did not attend preschool as children, the preschool group showed higher numbers of high school graduations, higher university attendance, higher earnings and better social conduct. On another note, Besley and Coate (1998) argue that public provision of early childhood programs can redistribute income from rich to poor families. A childcare system that is available to all children will not only combat potential poverty, but will have immediate effects in a child’s life by improving general family financial well-being.

**Women’s Equity and Employment.** Affordable childcare enables parents, particularly mothers, to enter and stay in the workforce. Canadian economists argue that the cost of childcare is strongly associated with the likelihood of parents purchasing the service (Prentice, 2007). Fortin et al. (2012) documented that in 2008, 60% of Québec children had access to childcare at a subsidized rate of $7 a day; this was in comparison to only 18% of children in other provinces who had access to subsidized childcare. The authors also documented the benefits of affordable childcare on mothers’ labour force activity. In 2008, Québec mothers with preschoolers (children between the ages of 1 to 4 years) showed an 8% increase in their employment rate since 2000 and this rate rose to 12% in 2010 (Fortin et al., 2012) The presence of mothers in the workforce could be attributed to the low cost of childcare for their children.

Childcare is also fundamental in reducing labour market inequality between men and women. When childcare is available to mothers, they experience fewer workforce interruptions and accumulate more work experience through longer participation in the workforce (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011; Prentice, 2007). A striking example is the outcome of childcare initiatives in Québec. In just a decade, Québec has gone from having Canada’s lowest female labour participation rate to having the highest. Furthermore, despite having the highest labour participation, Québec women are having more babies (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011). Most importantly, the rate of child poverty has been reduced by 50% in Québec due to early childhood programs available (Campaign 2000, 2010).
An Eco-friendly Industry. Childcare is a sustainable and eco-friendly industry as it is a reasonably low consumption sector which generates no toxic waste. Instead, the childcare sector improves human capital in children through developmental programs (Prentice, 2007).

1.2 Childcare in Rural Canada

“Rural areas are important to Canada and make significant contributions to national economic growth … The quality-of-life and competitiveness of rural communities depend on their having the infrastructure they need and this includes childcare services...[The childcare] sector is important to the viability of rural communities, as more people look for off-farm income’ (Wehner, Kelly, & Prentice, 2008, p.5).

Child care services are plagued with many issues such as being too expensive for many parents, few licensed child care spaces, an inadequate subsidy system, limited access, limited funding, and challenges attracting and retaining staff. These issues are even more pronounced in rural communities (Wehner, Kelly, & Prentice, 2008). Rural areas are widely believed to be ideal places for raising children, and life in rural areas has been considered less stressful and more conducive to family life than in urban areas (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). These assumptions neglect the challenges faced by rural communities, particularly with significant shifts in employment and family patterns (Vanier Institute of the Family [VIF], 2012). Similar to urban families, most two-parent families in rural areas require two incomes to sustain a basic standard of life. As a result, maternal employment has been on the rise, particularly for mothers with young children. Families in rural areas are considered “lucky” to have extended family members to help out with childcare tasks. This belief belies the reality for many rural families, which is that most extended family members are equally active in the workforce and are therefore unavailable to offer support in terms of childcare (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; VIF, 2012). Consequently, non-parental/non-familial childcare is a necessity for many young families in rural areas (Rural Voices, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2006).

This thesis focuses primarily on regulated childcare in rural Ontario. In Ontario, the Ministry of Education has the responsibility for issuing licences to operators of childcare and for enforcing the Day Nurseries Act. The province has two types of licensed childcare programs: day nurseries
such as nursery schools, full day care, extended day care, and before and after school programs. The other type consists of family/home day care where children receive care in a private home residence that is overseen by a licensed home childcare agency that recruits, trains and supports providers (Government of Ontario, 2013). Childcare centres typically offer developmental care to children ranging from 3 months to 12 years of age, although the majority of services offered by childcare centres are targeted to preschool children (McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). Childcare centres support parental participation in the workforce or parental involvement in further education while providing developmental programs for children. Licenced childcare is operated by non-profit and for-profit providers and by municipalities. In Ontario, the provincial government funds, licences, and develops policy to support licenced childcare, while at the local level. Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) plan and manage childcare services (Government of Ontario, 2013). Funds provided by the government are mostly used to provide subsidies to low income families and for wage subsidies; however parent fees account for the majority of centre revenues, and can be very expensive for middle income families, especially those requiring care for an infant/toddler or for two or more children below school age, (Friendly, 2011; McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). As evidenced by Statistics Canada data, the use of childcare is not unique to urban areas; there are similar proportions of children aged 6 months and older in non-parental childcare in both rural and urban areas (Bushnik, 2006). Figure 1 indicates changes in childcare use patterns in rural areas between 1994 and 2003. The percentage of children in non-parental childcare was considerably lower in rural areas than in urban areas between 1994 and 1999. These numbers changed to reflect an increase in the proportion of rural children in non-parental childcare between 2000 and 2003; by then, the proportion of children in child care in rural areas was similar to that in urban areas (approximately 50%) (Bushnik, 2006).
Figure 1: Children in Non-parental Childcare in Urban and Rural Areas

Source: Bushnik, (2006)

With these statistics in mind, the importance of quality childcare in rural communities cannot be overemphasized. It is important to note, however, that rural communities possess certain characteristics that impact on the availability, sustainability and quality of childcare services. Businesses such as farming are seasonal; therefore the need for childcare can vary at different times in the year. Dwellings in rural communities are sparsely located which means that inhabitants have to travel long distances to access any type of service and this invariably leads to few users for any one type of service (Doherty, 1994; Rural Ontario Municipal Association [ROMA], 2011). Staff wages are typically lower in rural areas, making it difficult to attract and retain qualified early childhood educators (ROMA, 2011).

The introduction of full day kindergarten (FDK) in Ontario has generally been seen as a positive step. The program, under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, links early childhood services with public schools. Four and five year olds are being moved out of childcare settings and into the public education system and are offered a two-year, full day early learning program that is child centred, integrated and developmentally appropriate (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2010). The program, which is delivered by the local school board, aims to provide 4 and 5 year olds with an integrated day of learning (OME, 2010). The purpose of the program is
rooted in the realization that learning through experiences that occur early in life sets the stage for future learning. Consistent with this line of thought are results reported in the *Early Years Study* 2 report that reveal that “the early years shape brain development and influence lifelong learning, behaviour and health” (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007, p.25). The full day kindergarten program gives 4 and 5 year olds positive learning experiences through a planned curriculum and a play-based program that recognises play as a means of a child’s expression of curiosity (OME, 2010). Full day kindergarten allows for universal access to ECEC for all 4 and 5 year olds throughout the province. It is intended to offer a ‘seamless day’ of education and care, including before and after school care provided by extended child care programs operated on school premises.

FDK is being phased in over a five year period and is expected to be fully implemented in 2014. Evaluation of the first two years of FDK in Ontario affirms the positive impacts of the program on children’s development. Vanderlee, Youmans, Peters, & Eastabrook. (2012) conducted evaluative studies with the purpose of examining the impacts of Ontario’s FDK program on children’s developmental health and school readiness. Early Development Instrument (EDI), a measurement of early child development, was used to identify impacts of FDK in the following developmental domains: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication skills and general knowledge. Findings from the study conducted by Vanderlee et al. (2012) show that children in FDK programs attained higher EDI scores than non-FDK students. In regards to school readiness, findings showed that FDK improved school readiness for children; these children are well prepared for grade 1 and have a higher likelihood of being successful in school than non-FDK children (Government of Ontario, 2013).

The government of Ontario is providing financial assistance to childcare centres and to schools as communities implement the full day early learning kindergarten program, which is being phased in across the province; however, some rural areas remain apprehensive about the impact of FDK on already existing issues in rural childcare such as limited licensed childcare spaces, the effects of decreased enrolments, difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified staff, and the potential closing of existing childcare centres (Ontario Municipal Social Service Association
[OMSSA], 2011a). These existing issues will be highlighted throughout this thesis through findings from study participants. It has been noted that FDK only magnifies the challenges that exist in rural communities, potentially resulting in fewer licensed childcare services available to rural families (Friendly, 2011).

1.3 Rationale for This Study

Considering that the implementation of FDK compounds the challenges faced by rural communities, it is imperative that issues related to rural childcare be critically explored. Several articles offer recommendations for strengthening rural childcare. OMSSA (2011a) suggests that the Ontario government match its commitment to FDK by a commitment to opportunities for children of all ages. OMSSA recommends that more competitive salaries be offered to staff, as well as providing incentives to keep local staff in rural areas. Furthermore, OMSSA recommends providing funding for relocation and renovations, as well as for operational costs of buildings in order to address the challenges of infrastructure and building new programs.

Although the challenges faced by rural communities as a result of the implementation of FDK have been acknowledged, little is known about the survival strategies that rural childcare centres are adopting as FDK is being implemented. This study was designed to learn about how the implementation of FDK is affecting rural child care programs and what strategies providers and local CMSMs are using to adapt to system change. It incorporates information obtained from both CMSM staff and child care program directors and provides an initial analysis of the circumstances that may reduce or exacerbate the difficulties rural child care programs may be experiencing. The specific objectives of the study are:

1) To understand the level of involvement of Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) in supporting rural ELCC services,

2) To learn how centre operators have been affected to date by the introduction of FDK and/or expect to be affected in the near future, and

3) To examine what characterizes situations in which child care centre directors are able to make positive changes to buffer negative effects and be resilient, and what appears to characterize situations where centres appear to be more vulnerable.
1.4 Human Ecology Perspective on Rural Childcare

This research is focused on the human ecology framework that situates the realities of individual lives in the contexts in which they live. This framework has three main premises. The first is that individuals are not isolated and interact with their physical and social contexts. Individuals are actively interacting with the contexts or environments in which they live (Keating, 2008). For the purposes of this research, it is important to situate child care as a phenomenon in a rural context and understand the experiences of childcare operators and the daily challenges they face when providing childcare in rural areas. The second premise of the human ecology framework is that environments have boundaries which are permeable, thereby allowing interactions and influences from other environments (Keating, 2008). In the context of this research, characteristics of rural communities such as sparse populations and the challenges of travelling to where services are located may affect the availability and accessibility of services and service delivery (ROMA, 2011). In this way, the physical environment influences existing programs and for childcare operators, maintaining the viability of their business becomes an issue when it is not easily accessible to the entire community.

The third premise of the human ecology framework is that individuals are not “passive recipients of their environments” (Keating, 2008). Individuals have varying capacities to adapt to their environments. In the context of this research, it is imperative to understand adaptive strategies of operators as they combat the many challenges presented by the introduction of FDK. This research seeks to understand if or how rural child care operators are taking advantage of financial or human resources to adapt to changes. It is important to note that the environment of focus includes both the immediate environment and macro environments such as polies enacted by the provincial government.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The literature review is divided into four sections. The first section gives a clear definition of a rural area and the characteristics that present challenges for service delivery. The second section describes the origins of childcare in Canada and events that shaped the responsibilities of the different levels of government in childcare. The third section examines the importance of childcare to rural communities. Finally, the fourth section reviews full day kindergarten (FDK) and the challenges presented by FDK to rural childcare.

2.1 The Rural Context

Despite greater urbanization over time, 2011 census data indicates that approximately 19% of Canadians reside in rural areas (Statistics Canada, 2011). The Province of Ontario is comprised of 444 municipalities of which 335 (75 per cent) are either rural or partially rural (ROMA, 2011). Considering these numbers, there is a need to focus on the needs of rural communities. The Ontario Federation of Agriculture [OFA] (2002) argues that rural families have unique needs for social services, particularly childcare services. These services must be accessible in order to alleviate the challenges faced by rural families. Before delving into concerns of rural communities, it is important to define the term “rural” as various definitions impact policy issues.

Statistics Canada (2008) defines a rural area in four ways. The first definition is a census rural area. This definition refers to the population living outside settlements with 1,000 or more inhabitants. The population density is typically 400 or fewer inhabitants per square kilometer. A second definition of rural area is defined as rural and small town; these are areas outside census metropolitan areas (CMA) and census agglomerations (CA). CMAs and CAs have populations of 100,000 and 10,000 inhabitants, respectively; 50% or more of the workforce in CMAs and CAs commute to urban areas. A third definition is the metropolitan influenced zone (MIZ). There are four categories of MIZ: a strong MIZ is a population where 30% or more of the workforce commute to an urban core, a moderate MIZ is a population where 5% to 20% of the workforce commute to an urban core, a weak MIZ is a population where less than 5% but greater than 0%
of the workforce commute to an urban core, and finally no MIZ refers to areas where no inhabitants commute to an urban core. The fourth definition presented by Statistics Canada is Predominantly Rural Regions. Predominantly rural regions were previously defined as having more than 50% of the population residing in rural communities with a population density of less than 150 people per square kilometre. Predominantly rural regions are now classified as rural metro-adjacent regions which are primarily rural census divisions that are adjacent to metropolitan centres and rural non-metro adjacent region which are primarily census divisions not adjacent to metropolitan centres. This paper deals with childcare issues in rural communities that require local solutions. For that reason the census rural definition will be used because it is based on geographic units.

Figure 2: Rural and Urban Population in Canada

![Rural and Urban Population in Canada](image)

Figure 2 indicates the steady decline in the rural population over the years and the steady rise in the urban population, however “rural Canada is not about to disappear” (Federation of Canadian Municipalities [FCM], 2009, p.8). Why do rural communities matter? Rural areas play an
important role in maintaining the wealth of the nation; they also provide the foundations for urban growth through the production of food, timber, minerals and energy (FCM, 2009; ROMA, 2011). According to the ROMA (2011), rural communities are instrumental in Ontario’s economic development. Rural areas provide timber, food, and energy, thereby laying a foundation for urban growth. Furthermore, resources in specific rural communities such as fresh seafood, and natural oil and gas continue to be exploited (FCM, 2009). Rural communities were historically established in close proximity to industries upon which Ontario as a province was built. Examples of such industries are farming, mining and forestry. In another example, rural Nova Scotia was the home to one of Canada’s largest food processing firms, Oxford Foods (FCM, 2009; ROMA, 2011). Rural communities have had a long history of being able to provide a desirable quality of life for their citizens; however, monetary and political obstacles make it impossible to continue to do so (ROMA, 2011). Rural municipalities have the ability to self-govern and respond to the requirements of their citizens; however, in order to deliver key services that are flexible and responsive to local needs, provincial support is required. Provincial support in terms of monetary and policy development will help ensure that rural communities continue to provide a high quality of life. In order to be progressive, urban needs such as infrastructure and reliable services will be required in rural areas; the key is in how these services are implemented.

**Policy making and rural communities.** The Rural Ontario Municipal Association advocates for a distinction to be made between urban and rural circumstances during policy development (ROMA, 2011). A one-size-fits-all approach to policy and program development design does not work efficiently in rural communities. There are unique and significant implications of certain policies in rural areas that should be taken into consideration during the process of policy development (FCM, 2009). For example, rural communities face challenges when providing required services and programs to their citizens. An insight into the demographics of rural communities will aid in understanding the challenges they face. Figure 2 shows that rural communities face declining populations. This is as a result of outmigration, skills shortages, low employment rates, and a rapidly aging population as explained by the Canadian Forum for Policy Research [CFPR] (2012). These challenges preclude steady revenue for rural communities; furthermore, basic amenities such as health care and social programs all
compete for funding from the municipal government. This often results in a shortage of the funds rural communities require to meet their needs (Canadian Forum for Policy Research [CFPR]). The minimal incoming revenue and shortage of funds compound the issues faced by rural communities.

Upon the realization of the debilitating consequences of a one size fits all approach to policy development in rural areas, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) sought to provide an understanding of the uniqueness of rural and northern communities through the Northern and Rural Lens (ROMA, 2011). The Lens, created in 2006, was intended to be a change impact assessment tool to assess the potential impacts of a new policy initiative or a change to an existing program prior to implementation. The Lens consists of a set of questions which address the different phases of program and policy development. They include: consideration, delivery options, communications, and measuring and reporting. ROMA (2011) presents a set of issues to be considered in each phase of program or policy development. In the “consideration phase”, the following issues should be considered:

- the impact of the new policy/program on rural communities,
- specificity of these impacts to rural and Northern areas,
- if and how these impacts will be addressed,
- the unique relevance of the new program/policy to rural and Northern Ontario,
- the level of priority of this program/policy for rural and Northern populations,
- whether the rural and Northern communities were consulted prior to the development or modification of the program/policy,
- if and how benefits of the new implementation are maximized in rural communities, and
- if the initiative supports Aboriginal and Francophone communities.

In the “delivery phase”, the following issues should be considered:

- addressing roles and responsibilities of governments, considering less expensive means of service delivery,
- identifying factors affecting delivery of the program/policy,
- establishing partnership with other bodies and organizations to make the most of the benefits of the program/policy, and
empowering communities by delivering the program/policy through local community organizations.

When “communicating” a new policy/program, it is important to consider if:

- tools for communications have been tested with and are suitable for rural and Northern Ontarians, and
- if the key messages being communicated address the needs of the rural and Northern community.

In the final phase of “measuring and reporting” a new program/policy, it is paramount to consider:

- the best way to evaluate a program/policy for the implications it has had on rural and Northern communities,
- the benefits of the program to the overall quality of life in rural and Northern Ontario and
- finally modifying the program/policy so that it addresses the needs of rural and Northern communities.

**Characteristics of rural communities.** An abundance of research has shown that designing and implementing an initiative in rural areas presents different challenges than would be encountered in urban areas (Asthana & Halliday, 2004; ROMA, 2011). It is important to appreciate the characteristics of rural communities as it aids in understanding why certain policies that work in urban areas are not sustainable in rural communities. ROMA (2011) asserts that the characteristically low population density in rural areas translates into an inadequate number of individuals available to sustain businesses. The lack of businesses will also impede the development of job opportunities. Furthermore, the lack of manpower will increase the cost of providing certain public services such as transportation, water and waste removal and treatment. A scattered population where services are utilized by few users further implies that it would be more expensive to provide infrastructure and public services to such communities as the services might not be utilized to their utmost potential (Doherty 1994: ROMA, 2011).

Similarly, Asthana and Halliday (2004) reported that the costs of operating services are higher in rural areas. One of the many contributors to this is the lack of accessible services which translates into service providers incurring high travel costs. Staff who spend more time travelling spend less time delivering services. Consequently, they are more likely to be seen as inefficient
and unproductive and are less likely to be satisfied with their jobs. Transportation costs are also incurred by users of services and it is particularly problematic for low income individuals/families and for groups such as the elderly, individuals with physical disabilities, women and young children. Asthana and Halliday (2004) also observed a relationship between rural and service quality. They reported that there is often limited availability of services provided for rural dwellers and the services provided are not up to par with services provided in urban areas. Furthermore, the predominant work pattern in many rural areas is seasonal; individuals may work for long hours in certain months and have shorter or no work hours in other months. The seasonal cycle results in unique requirements for programs and services such as childcare; childcare services that respond to such working patterns are necessary, however, this is lacking in most rural areas (ROMA, 2011). With these characteristics in mind, the need for social supports cannot be overstated.

**Rural child care.** A study conducted on farm families on the Canadian prairies revealed that 51% of mothers with young children work outside the farm (Kubik, 2005). Based on this statistic, rural childcare is an important social issue that deserves attention. Childcare includes services such as childcare centres, nursery schools, before and after school programs, and care provided by non-relatives in a child’s home or in the provider’s home for children between the ages of 0-12 (Doherty, 1994). The aforementioned characteristics of rural communities have an impact on childcare services. Businesses such as farming build a working year around the seasons, therefore the need for childcare fluctuates based on the weather. Dwellings in rural communities are sparsely located. As a result, inhabitants have to travel long distances to access services and this invariably leads to few users for any one type of service (Doherty, 1994; ROMA, 2011). Public transportation is normally lacking in rural areas and this restricts movement; consistent with the Metropolitan Influenced Zone definition of rural areas, it is not unusual for residents of rural areas to commute long distances to work in an urban area each day (Statistics Canada, 2008). Rural families require childcare services that are offered on a year round full-time basis, and also on a seasonal basis. Additionally, rural families require childcare that extends beyond usual working hours (Doherty, 1994).
2.2 The Origins of Early Learning and Childcare in Canada

To facilitate a better understanding of childcare, knowledge about its origins and the roles of the three levels of government in childcare is needed. In the late 1800s, childcare services known as “day nurseries” or crèches were founded to meet the needs of poor mothers who had to participate in the workforce while kindergarten was developed as part of the education system for all preschool children. This history created a significant divide in the early learning and childcare (ELCC) system which plagues Canada to this day. Canada still has the unfinished business of ensuring that all Canadian children have access to and enjoy the benefits of high-quality early learning programs (Mahon & Jenson, 2006; McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011). The first childcare programs were established in Québec in the 1850s by charitable organizations that provided basic supervision and care to children whose mothers were needy and had to participate in the workforce out of necessity (Doherty, Friendly, & Beach, 2003; Friendly, Beach & Turiano, 2002). Childcare centres created for the same purpose and also run by charitable organizations made their way to Ontario in the late 1800s. British Columbia, Manitoba and Nova Scotia offered similar childcare programs beginning in the 1920s. Nursery schools and preschools developed quite separately and were seen as a form of enrichment, providing early learning and social experiences for middle class families. Private kindergartens existed in Canada, but the first kindergarten integrated in to the public school system was created in 1885 in Toronto with the aim of preparing 3-to-5 year olds for entry into the formal school system. This was a full school day program which emphasised developing school-related skills in children. This program evolved to part-day programs for 5-year-olds which became more available in other cities and rural communities across Ontario by the late 1960s (Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario [ETFO], 2001). Senior kindergarten is currently available for 5 year olds across all Canadian provinces and territories (Doherty et al., 2003). After World War II and the influx of immigrants, Toronto established publicly funded junior kindergarten for 4-year olds (Doherty et al., 2003; Friendly et al., 2002). Junior kindergarten was made increasingly available throughout Ontario and by 1995, approximately ninety five percent of 4 year old children were attending junior kindergarten province wide (ETFO, 2001). Doherty et al. (2003) observed that the differences in the purposes and origins of child care and early education
(kindergarten) programs reflect differences in government responsibility and funding. The following section will focus on the roles and responsibility for childcare in Canada.

**The federal role.** The Canadian federal government, although not having a direct role in childcare provision, shapes the development and availability of childcare through direct and indirect funding mechanisms (Cool, 2007: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada [HRSD] 2011). While the historical division of powers gives the provinces and territories primary responsibility for funding, planning, and delivering health, education, and social services including child care, over the years, the federal government has taken approaches to improve services for children through collaborations with the provincial/territorial governments. The federal government became involved in childcare during WWII when the labour pool was depleted and married women had to enter the work force to work in certain wartime industries (Jenson & Mahon, 2002). *A Provincial War Time Agreement* was developed to fund childcare services for such mothers. This agreement involved 50% cost sharing between the federal and provincial governments. Only two provinces participated in this agreement, Ontario and Québec, thereby creating 2,500 spaces in Ontario and 120 childcare spaces in Québec (Cameron, 2009). In Ontario all three levels of government became involved in childcare during World War II. At the end of the war however, the federal government terminated its financial support because it was assumed that a particular kind of family – composed of a father as breadwinner and mother as homemaker -was capable of taking on the responsibilities of childcare (Mahon & Jenson, 2006). In response to this termination, Day Nursery and Day Care Parents’ associations and other childcare activists in Ontario convinced the government to share in some responsibility for childcare. This led to the establishment of the 1946 *Ontario Day Nurseries Act* (DNA) which established minimum standards and rules on cost sharing with municipal governments (Friendly, 2011; Mahon & Jenson, 2006). Municipalities and provincial governments were involved in 50 percent cost sharing of the operating cost of childcare centres.

In 1966, the federal *Canada Assistance Plan (CAP)* was established as a means of sharing welfare costs between the federal and provincial governments primarily for services and subsidies targeted to low income families (Friendly, 2011; Mahon & Jenson, 2006). Conditions for use of this plan were that federal funds would be made available only for children from low
income (or potentially low income) families who had to be in a public or not-for-profit childcare (Friendly et al., 2002). This resulted in the use of federal funds mostly for fee subsidies. CAP provided a backdrop for funding childcare as a welfare program instead of as a universal or educational program (Friendly, 2011; Friendly et al., 2002; Mahon & Jenson, 2006). The CAP was critiqued for having a fixed percentage requirement for cost sharing (50 percent from the provinces), thereby disadvantaging poorer provinces/territories that cannot generate as much revenue as other provinces/territories (Doherty, Rose, Friendly, Lero, Irwin, 1995). CAP funding restrictions also did little to expand or fund services for modest and middle income families who also struggle with meeting the cost of daycare. Doherty et al documented that children from moderate income families used regulated childcare less than children from low income families and credits this disparity to childcare subsidy policies; the authors argue that the CAP essentially “excluded the middle class from regulated childcare” (Doherty et al., 1995, p. 28). As well, each province/territory was responsible for determining eligibility criteria for subsidies and this resulted in differences in access to childcare across provinces/territories (Doherty et al., 1995; Mahon & Jenson, 2006). Finally, contrary to the assumption that fee subsidies would be used by parents to purchase regulated childcare, in most communities without strict regulations, parents were known to purchase unregulated childcare which may be less expensive, but with more variable quality (Cool, 2004; Doherty et al., 1995). Furthermore, because the CAP brought about total control of social services (including childcare) by the provinces, municipalities were displaced from the provision of such services.

The supply of regulated childcare blossomed in the 1970s and 1980s regardless of limited funding arrangements. The Income Tax Act allowed parents a tax deduction for receiptable, work-related childcare expenditures and the Unemployment Insurance Act allowed maternity benefits for new mothers (Friendly et al., 2002). Meanwhile, public kindergarten continued to be separated from “care” and became an entitlement such that by the mid 1990s, 4 and 5 year olds in Ontario and 5 year olds in other provinces/territories were enrolled in predominantly half-day kindergarten programs. By the early 1990s, several federal governments made failed attempts at developing a national early learning and care program. In 1996, amidst concerns about deficits and debt, the federal government abolished the CAP and replaced it with a decreased amount of block funding for provinces to spend on education, health and social services, along with more
autonomy about how the funds could be utilized (Friendly et al., 2002). This new block fund was termed the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), which in 2004-5 was split into the Canadian Health Transfer and the Canadian Social Transfer (CST) (Friendly et al., 2002; Mahon & Jenson, 2006). The CST remains the main vehicle for federal transfers that include child care spending.

In 1997, the National Children’s Agenda was created as a framework for the federal, provincial and territorial governments to work together in order to improve the well-being of children (Cool, 2007). The federal, provincial and territorial governments also agreed to The Social Union Framework, in 1996-7, with the aim of working together to support the delivery of social programs and services (Cameron, 2009; Cool, 2007). This cooperative relationship resulted in the federal government providing some support for early childhood services through the following funding initiatives: the 1998 National Child Benefit, the 2000 Early Childhood Development Initiative, the 2003 Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, and the 2005 Bilateral Agreements with provinces.

a) The National Child Benefit [NCB]: In an effort to reduce child poverty and support parents as they make the transition from paid employment to the workforce, the federal, provincial, territorial and First Nations governments made a commitment to work together through the NCB (Cool, 2007). This funding initiative from the federal government provides a monthly payment to low income families with children and earmarks funds to be used by provinces and territories for additional services and benefits directed to low income families with children (Cool, 2007; NCB, 2011).

b) The Early Childhood Development Initiative: Under this initiative, the federal government provides funding to provincial and territorial governments to support their investments in the areas of healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; parenting and family; early childhood development, learning and care; and community supports (Cool, 2007; Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services, [OMCYS] 2011). A high degree of flexibility was given to provinces in allocating these funds, thereby creating greater variation in the programs and services available in each province. Some chose to increase childcare services while others failed to do so (Cool, 2007).
c) The Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Childcare: Funding was made available from the federal government and was provided to the provincial and territorial governments through the Canada Social Transfer. These funds were intended to focus solely on licensed child care services for children under the age of 6, including childcare centres, regulated family childcare, and preschools and nursery schools (Cool, 2007).

d) The Bilateral Agreements with the provinces: In 2004-5 the federal government endeavoured to develop a comprehensive multilateral agreement to fund a national early learning and childcare program; however negotiations with the provincial/territorial government proved unsuccessful. Nevertheless, beginning with the provinces of Ontario, Manitoba and Québec, the federal government entered into bilateral negotiations with each province, requiring each province to develop an action plan that set out spending priorities based on principles of quality, universality, accessibility, and developmentally appropriate programming (the QUAD principles) (Cool, 2007). These arrangements committed the federal government to an initial five year funding program.

e) In 2006, the newly elected federal Conservative government, which was opposed to a national early learning and care system, terminated the bilateral agreements: provinces and territories received only one year of funding (Cool, 2007). Instead, the federal government promised to provide direct financial support to families through a $1200 per year “choice in child care allowance”, which has subsequently been renamed the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB). In addition to the UCCB, the federal government initially established a community child care investment program, subsequently renamed the Child Care Space Initiative, which was intended to encourage employers to create childcare spaces for employees in exchange for limited tax credits (HRSD, 2007). This initiative was eventually transferred to the provinces/territories, who continue to develop, fund and license ECEC services, supplementing the funds they receive through the CST. In addition to the transfers described above, the federal government directly funds early childhood services to First Nations communities, immigrants and refugees, and military families, as well as funding multipurpose family resource programs that may include early literacy and drop-in programs. The government also funds research on child care policies and programs.
The provincial role. The provincial and territorial governments are primarily responsible for the development, funding, and provision of childcare services and for policy developments (Cool, 2007; Friendly & Beach, 2013). Provinces and territories have different approaches to early childhood services, thereby resulting in significant differences in the availability and affordability of high-quality services across the country (Cool, 2007; Friendly & Beach, 2013). Variations in childcare occur across many dimensions such as: affordability of parent fees, fee subsidy policies, availability of regulated centre-based and family childcare, early learning curriculum frameworks, post-secondary education requirements and wage enhancements for staff in childcare, and the overall approach to funding (Pasolli & Young, 2012).

Parent fees differ across provinces: three provinces have fixed maximum fees for childcare—Québec, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island (Friendly & Beach, 2013). Except in Québec, childcare fee subsidies are available in all provinces/territories to eligible low income families to help them access childcare, however subsidy levels, even for eligible parents are inconsistent across provinces. For example, in some provinces subsidy levels change for subsequent children in a family while other do not (Pasolli & Young, 2012). Additionally, childcare remains unaffordable for fully subsidized parents in certain provinces where the subsidy rate is set below the actual cost of childcare (Friendly & Beach, 2013). Availability of regulated childcare spaces also varies across provinces, space availability for 0-5 year olds ranged from 10.5% to 41.6% across provinces (Friendly & Beach, 2013). In terms of funding, except for Saskatchewan where no funding is provided to for-profit centres, all other provinces or territories provide some form of funding to for-profit childcare, but it may differ from the funding provided to non-profit childcare. Furthermore, seven provinces have adopted a curriculum framework for childcare centres; however, none of the provinces share a common curriculum framework (Friendly & Beach, 2013).

ELCC policy in Ontario has undergone a recent transformation. Recent notable changes include launching of the Best Start Program, the establishment of the College of Early Childhood Educators and the “modernization of childcare”. The government has launched the Best Start program and is encouraging integrated children’s services (childcare and parent resource
programs) in Best Start Child and Family Centres across the province (Ministry of Education, 2012). Another notable change was the professionalization of the ECE when the government of Ontario created the College of Early Childhood Educators in 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2008). This is the first self-regulatory body of ECEs in Canada that regulates the ECE profession by promoting and ensuring high standards in the profession. Furthermore, in order to integrate early learning programs and childcare, responsibility for childcare was transferred to the Ministry of Education in 2010. Under the Day Nurseries Act, The Ontario Ministry of Education is responsible for policy and operations of childcare such as licencing regulations and enforcing licence requirements (Ministry of Education, 2012). The Ministry ensures that provincial standards are met by all programs (Ministry of Education, 2012). These standards take into account the health, safety and developmental needs of children in care. Subsequently, FDK was introduced in 2010 with plans for full implementation by 2014 (Pascal, 2009). The introduction of FDK to Ontario for 4- and 5-year olds was termed the “biggest transformation” in the province’s education system (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5).

Another process of transformation was the modernization of childcare. The government developed a long-term vision for childcare that was guided by the following five principles: Support and choice for children and families, commitment to quality programs for all children, an efficient funding formula, supportive legislation and regulations, and evidence-based decision making and reporting (Ministry of Education, 2012). A key area for action identified by the Ministry was an operating funding formula. The government had previously provided funding to CMSMs, DSSABs and First Nations; however, most funding allocations were outdated and did not reflect current needs resulting in inconsistencies. The new funding formula is aimed at increasing transparency and allocating funds based on the needs of communities (Ministry of Education, 2012). As part of the modernization of childcare, the province released the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework in 2013. The framework provided guiding principles to support Ontario’s vision for early years as well as areas for action. The four guiding principles for this framework are: child and family-centred programs and services, high quality programs and services, strong partnerships, and accountable programs and services (Ministry of Education, 2013). Furthermore, the province prioritizes action in the following four areas: continuing the implementation of FDK, creating effective approaches to implementing Best Start Child and
Family Centres, improving access to speech and language services, and transitioning and modernizing the childcare sector (Ministry of Education, 2013).

These changes notwithstanding, inconsistencies still exist in childcare program approaches and quality throughout the province. The government adopted a “school first” approach to funding new childcare spaces where childcare spaces located in schools are preferred. Childcare programs not co-located in schools are disadvantaged by this approach. Furthermore, there are still concerns about quality (encompassing health and safety) of the informal childcare sector because the DNA does not apply to informal sector so it is neither licenced or inspected (Ministry of Education, 2013). Auspice, the ownership of childcare, continues to be an issue. ECE trends show that for-profit childcare is expanding in Ontario (Friendly & Beach, 2013). All childcare sectors in Ontario (public, non-profit and for-profit) receive funding from the provincial government and this raises issues about encouraging the advancement of the for-profit sector which has been shown to be of lower quality than the public and non-profit childcare sectors (Cleveland, 2008).

Discussing funding for childcare in Ontario in further detail, in 2013, the Ministry of Education implemented the Ontario Child Care Service Management and Funding Guidelines for CMSMs and DSSABs. The new approach to funding is aimed at helping CMSMs/DSSABs be more effective in administering childcare services in their communities. As mentioned in previous sections, 4 and 5-year olds will no longer receive full time care in the existing childcare system; they will move into the school system instead. This change impacts on the revenue of the childcare system, therefore financial considerations are necessary to support the childcare system as it restructures to cater to the needs of the younger age groups. The new funding formula has three main components for which funds are allocated: Core Services Delivery, Special Purposes, and Capital. The Core Service Delivery allocation provides stable funding to the childcare sector for the availability of childcare for parents through fee subsidies, recreational and extended day programs, and support for children with special needs participating in these programs (Ministry of Education, 2012). Under the Special Purpose allocation, funds are intended to be used to offset the cost of providing services to certain populations and certain areas. There are eight components under this allocation and they include: a rural/remote component, language
component, FDK transition component, transformation component, cost of living component, Aboriginal component, capacity building component, repairs and maintenance component and utilization component. Finally, the Capital allocation is intended to assist CMSMs and DSSABs with maintaining and improving childcare infrastructure, particularly as childcare programs transition to serve younger age groups due to the implementation of FDK (Ministry of Education, 2012). Table 2 indicates the dollar amounts allocated for specific childcare services. Of particular interest is the amount allocated specifically to rural childcare.
Table 2: Childcare Funding to Ontario CMSMs and DSSABs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allocation Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Funding in $millions (out of total $922.1 million)</th>
<th>% of total funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Core services</td>
<td>Supports access to licensed child care and early childhood program by all parents.</td>
<td>$718.4</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special purposes (rural)</td>
<td>Helps operators providing childcare services in rural areas and areas with dispersed population where service delivery is more expensive</td>
<td>$28.0</td>
<td>21.0% (Rural=3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Capital (Retrofit)</td>
<td>Helps operators restructure existing JK/SK spaces to serve cater to younger generation</td>
<td>$8.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Municipalities’ role.** Municipal governments’ roles in ECEC vary across municipalities in the ten Canadian provinces and three territories. Some municipal governments participate in cost sharing with their provincial government; some are legislated to operate their own childcare centres while some have no legislated role in childcare delivery. For example, in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Manitoba there is no legislated municipal government roles in childcare development or operation (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada [HRSDC], 2012). Furthermore, in Newfoundland and Labrador, school districts operate licenced childcare programs for teen mothers and the Inuit community, under the Nunatsiavut Government, operate childcare centres (HRSDC, 2012). Although there is no legislated role of the municipal governments in childcare services in Nova Scotia, municipalities and the province fund the provision of kindergarten under the public school system. In Québec, municipalities are not authorized to operate childcare facilities (HRSDC, 2012). Saskatchewan municipalities, under provincial legislation operate childcare centres. The Francophone school division provides
half-day preschool programs for 3-and-4-year olds with no parent fees (Friendly & Beach, 2013; HRSDC, 2012). In Alberta, municipalities operate licensed childcare programs which are funded through its 80/20 (80% from the government and 20% from the municipalities) cost sharing agreement with the provincial government. There is no legislated role of municipal governments in British Columbia but some municipalities play an active role in developing childcare (Friendly & Beach, 2013). In the North West Territories, school boards operate preschool programs and in Nunavut, the District Education Authority operates childcare programs. In the Yukon, municipalities are permitted to operate childcare services, but do not currently do so (HRSDC, 2012).

Only in Ontario do municipal governments maintain significant authority over services for preschool children (HRSDC, 2012; Mahon & Jenson, 2006). Ontario municipalities have two key roles: managing public funding for regulated childcare services and directly operating public childcare services; Municipally operated centres were reported to offer higher quality ELCC than for-profit and non-profit services (Beach, Friendly, Ferns, Prabhu, & Forer, 2009; Cleveland, 2008). Municipal governments are also involved in service planning and the development of childcare (Beach et al., 2009). A brief review of the municipal involvements in childcare shows that in 1998, municipalities planned Ontario Works and childcare services; in 2006, municipalities were responsible for planning and implementing Best Start programs aimed at providing integrated services to support parents and children from the prenatal period to age six (OMSSA, 2011b; Pascal, 2009). Recently, Ontario municipalities were recognized in the provincial Municipal Fiscal and Service Delivery Review (PMFSDR) for having played a key role in service delivery at the local level (OMSSA, 2011b). The responsibility for childcare service planning, management, delivery, special needs resourcing and research/evaluation falls to the 47 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) or District Social Service Administration Boards (DSSABs) (Cameron 2009; Doherty et al., 2003; Friendly, 2011; The Association of Day Care Operators of Ontario, 2006). Municipal governments administer fee subsidies through a recently updated cost sharing program with the provincial government. Municipalities decide how these cost shared funds are disbursed.
Service management at the local level has been termed the “key role” for CMSMs and DSSABs. For example, some municipalities manage public expenditure and planning for non-profit, for-profit and public childcare services (Friendly, 2011; Pascal, 2009). Cost sharing between the province and municipalities occurs for fee subsidies with the municipalities paying 20% and the province paying the remaining 80%. The provincial government sets general eligibility criteria for subsides by income testing and determines which services are eligible to be subsidized; nonetheless local municipalities can set different eligibility thresholds. Municipalities administer the fee subsidies and determine who to offer service contracts to (Friendly, 2011). The province requires all CMSMs to develop service plans which include a detailed overview of local needs in regards to childcare. CMSMs also identify current needs and barriers to childcare services in their areas (Brownell, 2002: Friendly, 2011). As previously discussed, in late 2012, the Ontario government announced changes to how funds will be allocated across municipalities and the criteria that will be used for funding allocations. The intention was to move to a more active, responsive approach that allocates more funds to areas where needs for more services and subsidies are evident. A special amount is also identified to offset the additional costs of providing service in rural and remote areas (Musson, Gordon, & Davis, 2012).

Municipalities face a dilemma as they are caught between the powers delegated to them by the province and protecting the interests of the local population (Cameron, 2009). Ontario municipal governments, for example, face certain financial issues that threaten their ability to provide quality childcare services to their citizens. The funds from the cancelled national ELCC program were transferred from the province to municipalities; these funds were unconditional transfers and municipalities were not required to give details on their expenditure; however, the municipalities reserved these funds and have been relying on them since 2006 (Friendly, 2011; Mahon & Jenson, 2006). Funds were used to address the many issues faced by municipal governments such as addressing the needs of low income citizens. These funds were exhausted in 2012 and new allocations were needed to support both system change and limited growth. These sorts of financial pressures undermine the ability of municipalities to provide exceptional funding for childcare. Friendly (2011) reports that Ontario’s funding base is static because the funds transferred from the provincial government are not at par with inflation thereby causing the municipalities to fall behind in addressing childcare needs such as fee subsidies, wage grants,
special needs funding, and family resource programs. Another policy issue that has put pressure on the municipal governments’ role as childcare service providers in Ontario is the introduction of the full day early learning program. The new program was initiated without a clear plan and with limited funding, infrastructure and policy support (Friendly, 2011). As mentioned earlier, this undermines the municipalities’ ability to provide high quality childcare (Friendly, 2011). These factors and other economic constraints experienced at the local level have recently had particular impacts on municipalities that have provided directly operated municipal child care programs, leading to centre closures and/or transfers to private operators in London and Peel Region, among other places.

ROMA reports that municipal governments in rural areas find it challenging to provide adequate programs and services to their citizens because municipalities fund a diverse range of programs ranging from health care to social programs, infrastructure and the environment (Brownell, 2000). Outmigration from rural areas presents further challenges as this reduces the labour pool and revenue stream from which to draw resources (Brownell, 2000; Ontario Federation of Agriculture [OFA], 2012). In regards to childcare specifically, municipalities have different experiences when planning and managing childcare. Less populated rural municipalities are usually disadvantaged in terms of resources (Brownell, 2002; Friendly, 2011). Similarly, rural areas attached to urban areas are at a disadvantage because, although they make contributions to the regional childcare system, the bulk of childcare services are in urban areas where there is more demand. As a result, such rural communities might be lacking adequate childcare services.

System planning in Waterloo region. This section gives an example of system planning in one Ontario municipality. The CMSM in the region of Waterloo involves the community in system planning through two committees: the Children’s Planning Table and the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Community Advisory Committee. The Children’s Planning Table consists of childcare service providers such as agencies and organizations; funders are also included in the table. Children’s Planning Table members plan how services can be integrated and coordinated for children from birth to 12 years of age. Their role is to develop an Early Years System Plan which aims to meet the needs of children and families through
integrated services while maximizing funding for the ELCC system. The ELCC committee offers advice on issues relating to high quality early learning and care in the region (Region of Waterloo, 2012). The Children’s Planning Table is one of the agencies that make up the Child Care Special Needs Resourcing Partnership (CCSNRP) that provides services to children with developmental concerns in ELCC settings from 0-6 years of age. Through the Best Start Child and Family Centre Service System and Working Group, 18 children’s services providers (including the CMSMs) will integrate a range of affordable, accessible, culturally appropriate and inclusive services designed to promote better outcomes for children and families (OMSSA, 2011b).

2.3 Importance of Childcare to Rural Communities

Many research studies have discovered that rural families face serious time pressure as a result of working long hours in a day. In 2001, a Canadian wide study of rural families in the agricultural sector found that both men and women work for an average of 11 hours a day all week (Prentice, 2007). In addition to household and farm-based work, women in rural communities are increasingly taking on paid employment outside the home. The study also found that more women reported working off the farm than they had in previous years. The study showed a 49 percent increase in women working off the farm between 1982 and 2001 (Prentice, 2007). Consistent with these findings is a report from the Vanier Institute of the Family which suggests that, just like their urban counterparts, more rural mothers with young children are working outside of the home. The report also asserts that most rural families need two incomes to maintain a basic standard of living; the trade-off for this, however, is limited time and resources (VIF, 2012). The time pressure faced by families is further intensified by the lack of supports such as childcare. Childcare is important to rural communities to ensure children’s safety, to promote economic and social development, and as a vehicle for providing access to a range of services and supports. Childcare centres serve as integrated hubs for making services available and accessible. Finally, quality early childhood education is crucial to creating and maintaining a vibrant, educated rural population (Calhoun, Olfet & Testo, 2005).
Farm children’s safety. The Canadian Agriculture Injury Surveillance Program reported that 274 children and youth between the ages of 1 to 19 years were killed in agricultural injury events between 1990 and 2003 (VIF, 2012). The highest rate of accidents occurred among children aged 1 to 4 years. The VIF lists the most common causes of agricultural injuries as: bystander passenger run overs (17.2%), machine rollovers (15%), extra rider run overs (14.2%), drowning (12.4%), and machine entanglements (5.5%). With these numbers in mind, it is important to understand that there is more to rural childcare than just supporting working parents. Farm children live and play in spaces that expose them to the risk of injury. Spaces can include heavy equipment and vehicles, large animals, water areas, and pesticides and other chemicals (VIF, 2012). Because rural areas are limited in the resources available to them, it is not unusual to find parents trying to balance farm work with child supervision. This highlights the need for childcare. OMSSA (2011a) argues that licensed childcare in farm communities enhances the safety of children by providing a safe and supervised environment in which to play. In the absence of such safe environments, parents may be left with no choice but to leave their children at home in close proximity to heavy machinery and farm implements (VIF, 2012). The cost of such decisions might be as tragic as losing a young life.

Rural Revival. Quality early childhood education is crucial to creating and maintaining a vibrant, educated rural population as this enhances labour force participation (Calhoun, Olfet & Testo, 2005). One of the major challenges of rural communities is a declining population. Access to childcare could therefore impede the decline of the rural population. This, in turn, will foster economic growth and development. As mentioned earlier, childcare supports and creates jobs in rural areas. Rural areas are still important to Canada as they make significant contributions to the country’s economic growth. In terms of attracting and retaining long-term residents in rural communities, a study conducted in rural Manitoba found that the lack of childcare is one of the negative aspects of living in a rural community (Prentice, 2007). In its efforts to attract immigrants to rural centres, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture (2012) suggests that including affordable and accessible childcare as one of the strategies for rural revival may make rural communities more appealing to immigrants.
**Child care centres as service hubs.** Researchers report that parents in rural communities who perceive childcare as unavailable and unaffordable report less confidence in their parenting skills due to reduced coping abilities and high stress levels (Thornburg et al., 1997). However, childcare centres in rural communities often serve as service hubs which improve parents’ access to information about other services for young children and their families. Pascal (2009) observed that although childcare centres located in elementary schools pose a challenge in terms of distance, they have higher attendance than those located outside schools because such centres serve as community hubs that cater to families and children from the prenatal phase to adolescence. These hubs are open to the community and provide services such as parenting and family literacy programs, early learning and care, health, culture arts and recreation services (Pascal, 2009). They provide one stop access to families (OMSSA 2011).

### 2.4 Challenges Facing Childcare Centres in Rural Communities

Even before the implementation of FDK, the childcare sector in rural Ontario has always faced challenges due to the unique characteristics of these rural communities (OMSSA, 2011a). Such characteristics as seasonal variation in work patterns, variation in childcare needs, commuting long distances for work, and sparsely populated areas require childcare services that offer seasonal care and emergency or periodic care as well as care for extended hours. Rural childcare centres are overwhelmed with major challenges including: unoccupied spaces, funding and staffing.

**Unoccupied spaces.** As previously mentioned there are fewer users of services due to the declining population in rural communities; however this does not dismiss the needs of families who require those services. Because the majority of funding for childcare centres comes from parent fees, it is important that spaces are filled for centres to remain viable (Doherty, 1994). As Ontario Municipal Social Service Association explain, “the problem isn’t always the lack of child care spaces. Sometimes, it’s the inability to fill all the spaces that affects the providers' ability to stay open” (OMSSA, 2011a, pg.3). Furthermore, having fewer children in a childcare centre precludes hiring the required number of staff to operate age segregated groups (infant, toddler, preschool, school age). For this reason, childcare supervisors in rural centres are likely to
be spending more time filling in for the lack of staff, thereby overlooking their administrative and leadership roles (Atkinson Centre, 2011; Doherty, 1994). Moreover, a childcare centre with a small number of children implies an equally small budget for that centre. This inhibits securing financial cushions for unexpected expenditures (Doherty, 1994).

**Funding.** Rural childcare services face funding challenges. Centres cannot rely solely on parent fees to operate. They require stable operational funding to sustain their service; however, OMSSA (2011a) reports that as the enrolment population declined in the childcare sector, funding did the same. Many reports have shown that childcare centres in rural areas tend to lack spaces for infants and toddlers as they are considered expensive to care for (Atkinson Centre, 2011; OMSSA, 2011a; Prentice, 2007). A strategy for funding employed by most centres has been the subsidization of care for the infant and toddler population through revenue generated from 4 and 5 year-olds.

**Qualified staff.** Rural communities find it difficult to attract and retain appropriately trained staff (OMSSA, 2011a). This is because most qualified staff want salaries that are commensurate with urban childcare centres; however, pay scales in rural centres are generally lower. The lack of qualified staff raises concern about the quality of care provided as centres may be forced to employ under qualified workers (Atkinson Centre, 2011; OMSSA, 2011a).

**Full day kindergarten in Ontario.**

“Every child has the right to the best possible childhood; Ontario’s vision is to make Ontario an international leader in achieving the social, intellectual, economic, physical and emotional potential of all its children” (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services [OMCYS], 2007, p.3).

Based on earlier consultations and expert panels, as well as the wide-ranging proposals included in the Pascal report, *With Our Best Futures in Mind*, the Ontario government envisioned a plan for early learning in Ontario and announced it in 2009. The plan included Best Start child and family centres; this was in response to the need for more integrated and accessible services for children from the prenatal years to 12 years of age offered under municipal leadership (City of Toronto, 2013; Pascal, 2009). According to this plan, children from 4 to 12 years old would be offered school-based programs that are developmentally appropriate. The provincial
government’s plan also included school board-operated FDK programs with before and after school programs (also referred to as extended day programs) where the need exists. This vision also included a hope that childcare directors/operators would lay more emphasis on catering to infants and preschool children in their centres (City of Toronto, 2013; Pascal, 2009). The FDK program offers a two-year full day early learning program available to preschool children 4 and 5 year-olds whose participation is by parental choice (Government of Ontario, 2011; Pascal, 2009). FDK is child-centred and play-based, meaning that it focuses on promoting children’s cognitive, creative, emotional, physical, language and social development and well-being. There are options of half, full or a fee based before-and-after school programs. The fee-based before-and-after school programs offers developmentally enriching programming for children (Pascal, 2009).

With sufficient interest from parents, provincial legislation requires school boards to offer the before-and-after school programs. These programs provide an integrated on site program from 7am to 9am and 3:30pm to 6pm. Amendments were made to the legislation in 2010 to allow for third party operators to deliver these programs; third party operators are licensed childcare programs that operate on behalf of school boards (City of Toronto, 2013). The third party approach has been shown to be expensive and creates additional transitions in a child’s day compared to when it is offered directly by school boards. It has been noted that children experience stress when they have to make so many transitions in one day (City of Toronto, 2013; Pascal, 2009). Another issue presented by the use of third party operators is the challenging staffing model for childcare directors/operators; these directors/operators would need to find staff to work split shifts, at the beginning of the day and at the end of the day. Furthermore, board operated programs and childcare programs fall under the Education Act and Day Nurseries Act, respectively, thereby creating differences in licensing and staffing ratios (City of Toronto, 2013).

Concerns about the state of the early learning and childcare sector in rural areas have been ongoing. The introduction of the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program (FDK) has added to the aforementioned challenges faced by childcare centres in rural areas. FDK is expected to be implemented widely by 2014. It is also expected that without proper intervention,
the introduction of FDK will have adverse effects on rural childcare (OMSSA, 2011a). Below are some key facts about FDK as described by the Government of Ontario (2011):

- September 2010: First year of FDK for 4 and 5 year olds with 35,00 enrolled in the program
- September 2011: 20 percent of the total kindergarten population were enrolled in the FDK program, about 50,000 in approximately 800 schools
- September 2012: 49 percent of kindergarten population enrolled in FDK program, with 1,700 schools offering the program
- September 2013: it is estimated that 2,500 schools will offer FDK to approximately 75 percent of the students
- September 2014: full implementation of FDK throughout Ontario schools
- Average class size: 1 teacher, 1 early childhood educator with a maximum of 26 students.
- $200 million in funding for the program came from the Ministry of Education in year 1; $300 million in year 2
- The Ontario government has allocated $500 million in funding in order to support the implementation of FDK.
- Research argues that the return on investment for every $1 spent on early childcare is seven fold.

*With Our Best Future in Mind* detailed 20 recommendations for the successful implementation of FDK. One of Dr. Pascal’s many recommendations was the need for a child and family system in Ontario that would enhance a continuum of programs and services for children from birth to age 12. In order to sustain the FDK program, Pascal recommended new funding in addition to the existing commitment by the government by way of $1-billion for staffing, $1.7 billion for capital, and funding for transitions. In regards to challenges faced by rural childcare, Dr. Pascal observed that “it would be ineffective and costly to layer a new program on top of a web of unsolved problems” (Pascal, 2009, p. 5). It has been observed that FDK implementation will have differentiated impacts across the province. Rural areas are more likely to bear a heavy burden as a result of these changes than their urban counterparts because they already face challenges in their early childhood sector (Atkinson Centre, 2011).
Challenges as a result of FDK. The benefits notwithstanding, full day kindergarten magnifies the structural problems of rural childcare services. FDK involves systemic changes which negatively impact rural childcare systems because they are already plagued with a declining child population and FDK magnifies these challenges by moving the 4 and 5 year olds, who represent a substantial portion of the population, to school based programs (Atkinson Centre, 2011). This magnifies funding challenges because some centres are already finding it difficult to sustain services. The Ontario government is transferring all its resources into its FDK program for the proposed 5 years of implementation; this leaves childcare centres to their own devices to cater for the 0-3 year olds (Chianello, 2010). Caring for 0-3 year olds is expensive and requires more resources: 4 and 5 year olds were key sources of revenue for childcare centres as they helped subsidize care for the infants and toddlers (Chianello, 2010). These centres must reconstruct their funding arrangements to adapt their services to cater to 0 to 3 year olds who are more expensive. OMSSA (2011a) notes that this creates more difficulties for rural areas that already face a declining population and therefore have fewer children in childcare to begin with. OMSSA recommends that rural centres benefit from receiving funds for basic costs to run a centre regardless of the number of children enrolled.

For many rural childcare centres, it is not feasible to reconstruct their centres to cater to the 0-3 year olds; as a result, these centres may go out of business (Chianello, 2010). OMSSA (2011a) reports that many rural, northern and remote communities are losing childcare services; some are even at risk of losing their only childcare centre. Furthermore, in 2011, OMSSA reported that more than 8,100 children in rural communities across the province were at risk of losing their childcare, and these numbers include more than 500 children with special needs. OMSSA reported that at least 200 licensed centres have closed between 2009 and 2011, while 200 are at immediate risk of closing. In rural Ontario, more than 90 towns and villages will be left with no local licensed childcare. The Atkinson Centre (2011) observes that “public funding is provided to services because they exist” (pg. 2). That means that with the high rate of closure of rural childcare centres due to the declining population, centres will find it challenging to attract funding which would enable them to remain viable. To combat the challenges faced by rural communities, FDK implementation in these communities requires its own particular strategic leadership, adequate funding resources, and sustainable programs. Having these in place would
ensure quality outcomes from FDK (Atkinson Centre, 2011). The literature has shown that implementing FDK without adequate planning can have an adverse effect on 0-3 year olds who may lose their licensed care space or even experience inadequate quality of care (Friendly, 2011; OMSSA, 2011a).
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides details of the methodology used to conduct this study. The sections of this chapter are structured as follows: first a review of the objectives of this study will be presented. Second, theoretical constructs of this study will be revealed. The third section will include information on the research design. Fourth, a description of participants will be presented. Fifth, procedures for data collection will be outlined, giving details on participant recruitment and data analysis.

3.1 Objectives of this Study

Recent reports have duly observed that solutions to challenges faced by childcare centres as a result of the implementation of FDK should not have a one-size-fits-all approach because the FDK program is a significant system change that will have differential impacts in rural and urban communities (OMSSA, 2011a; ROMA, 2011). Currently, little is known about the survival strategies that rural childcare centres are adopting due to FDK. The mains goals of this study were to explore some of the direct and indirect impacts of FDK in rural areas and to gain insight into how these impacts are being managed at the local level. The specific objectives of this study are:

1) To understand the level of involvement of Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) in supporting rural ELCC services;
2) To understand how centre operators have been affected to date by the introduction of FDK and/or expect to be affected in the near future, and
3) To examine what characterizes situations in which child care centre directors are able to make positive changes to buffer negative effects and be resilient, and what appears to characterize situations where centres appear to be more vulnerable.

This research study entailed collecting information from two different groups - childcare centre directors/operators and CMSMs. CMSMs are the local level of government. They are more aware of the needs of families in their communities and over time have become more involved in service planning and fund allocations (OMSSA, 2012). One of their mandates is to prioritize the
basic needs of the local communities and promote their economic and social well-being. This places CMSMs in a position to facilitate the development of ELCC at the local level and work to sustain the availability and quality of services in their area.

**Research Questions.** Guest et al. (2013) explain that research questions arise as a result of a gap in the literature or as a need to develop a theory. A review of the literature has shown the dearth of information on the challenges specific to rural childcare centres in general, and in the wake of the introduction to FDK in particular, as well as how these challenges are being addressed by childcare operators. The questions aimed to discover CMSMs’ and centre directors’ actions or inactions that promote resilience or vulnerability in the rural childcare system as FDK is being phased in. CMSMs and centre directors were asked different sets of interview questions. The interviews for CMSMs consisted of two parts: the first part requested demographic information about their counties, and the second part asked questions about their involvements in the rural childcare system. (See Appendix D for a complete list of questions for CMSMs). Likewise, the interview questions for centre directors consisted of three parts. The first part asked demographic information about their childcare centre, the second asked about the specific challenges of FDK (if any) and strategies for adapting to them. The final part focused on questions related to directors’ perceptions of their municipality government’s involvement in rural childcare. (See Appendix E for a complete list of questions for centre directors.)

**3.2 Research Paradigm (Theoretical Framework)**

This research takes a constructivist approach to research. As explained by Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), a constructivist theoretical framework aims to understand individuals’ experiences and holds the assumption that reality is socially constructed. Participants’ views and experiences of the phenomena are of upmost importance to the researcher and form the basis of the study. In this research, the phenomenon being studied is the differential effects of the newly introduced FDK approach on CMSMs and rural childcare providers, and the different experiences of these individuals as they manage and deliver childcare services in rural areas. The literature shows that the delivery of childcare services presents different challenges based on characteristics such as
location and how funds are distributed, among other things. Themes were developed from the different perspectives of the childcare directors/operators and CMSMs.

3.3 Exploratory Research Design

“…a purposive, systemic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize the discovery of generalizations leading to description and understanding of an area of social or psychological life… the emergent generalizations includes descriptive facts [and] social processes…” (Stebbins, 2001, p.4).

The above quotation gives a definition of exploratory research in the social sciences. It is purposive, meaning that the research sets out with a purpose in mind, with a phenomenon to study or investigate. This phenomenon is usually not clearly understood. The researcher therefore uses his/her imagination, insights, and experience to propose new ways of understanding the phenomenon (Reiter, 2013). As the definition explains, exploration involves prior planning or prearranged undertakings which, in many ways is similar to most forms of research; it requires prior preparation in order to stumble over the unknown (Stebbins, 2001). Through such preparations, a researcher can achieve rigour in exploratory research. Exploratory research needs to be honest and transparent in order to be rigorous. Researchers need to understand that perceptions about a phenomenon may be influenced by their own experiences and preconceived ideas. It is therefore important that researchers conducting exploratory research maintain high levels of reflexivity (Reiter, 2013).

This thesis takes an exploratory approach to research, seeking to gain new insights and understanding of the strategies employed by directors of rural childcare services and local CMSMs for overcoming the impacts of full day kindergarten. It was important to gain information from the centre directors because they are involved in the day-to-day operation of childcare programs such as administration and managing finances (Day Nurseries Act, 1990). This study aimed to understand how they were adapting their programs to mitigate the pressures presented by the implementation of FDK. As well, perspectives of CMSMs were important because they are the local level of government directly involved with planning and managing childcare; therefore they are more likely to be aware of the needs of rural childcare system as it
adapts to the implementation of FDK. Ultimately, this study aimed to juxtapose the perspectives of both groups. This study uses semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions that allow participants to reflect on their experiences. Where applicable, data are summarized that describe centre characteristics. This study uses a qualitative approach in order to explore participants’ experiences and perceptions. Specifically, thematic analysis was used to identify major themes and issues that emerged from participants’ rich descriptions, the meaning they attribute to their experiences, and their perceptions of the challenges they are facing in the midst of system change.

3.4 Data Collection

Participants. The research included 16 participants, 7 of whom are directors of regional or county child care services departments in Southwestern Ontario (CMSMs) and 9 who are directors of childcare centres in rural communities. Centres included both non-profit and private, for-profit childcare centres.

Sampling and recruitment. Sampling involved a purposive sample of CMSMs from seven counties in Southwestern Ontario. The Director of Child Care Services for Guelph and Wellington County and a senior childcare policy and research analyst in that office facilitated this research by helping the researchers access potential participants. Contact was initiated with other CMSMs by the Director sending an invitation letter on our behalf (see Appendix A); subsequent correspondence was carried out between the CMSM Directors and myself and my supervisor, Dr. Donna Lero. Eight CMSMs were contacted initially and all but one (1) agreed to participate. Those who did agree, in turn, facilitated contact with directors/operators of rural childcare centres in their areas by sending out invitation letters on our behalf that described the study. Eleven Centre directors were contacted initially but only 9 agreed to participate. Centre directors who agreed to participate were asked to email the researchers to set up a convenient time for a telephone interview. Informed consent was obtained through a written consent form (see Appendices B and C) that was signed and returned by the participants prior to the interview. Participants dialed into a conference call using a toll free number. The interviews involved a
one-time call scheduled to last for 45 minutes. Each interview included the researcher, the researcher’s supervisor and the participant.

**Data collection.** All prospective participants (both CMSMs and centre directors) received a description of the study and a copy of the interview questions in advance, both as a vehicle for obtaining informed consent and to allow participants to reflect on the questions ahead of time. The format used for interviewing CMSM directors and centre directors was a semi-structured interview, which allowed the researchers to obtain descriptive information and establish rapport prior to moving to more open-ended questions. This process allowed participants to speak freely. It also allowed the researcher to probe for details and clarifications in a natural way. All interviews were digitally recorded, after permission to do so was granted. Following the interviews, each centre director was sent a gift card for $50.00 as a token of appreciation for their involvement in the research.

**Trustworthiness (Validity).** The constructivist philosophy has an ontological standpoint of multiple realities of a phenomenon for multiple individuals. The epistemological standpoint is one that argues that knowledge is co-constructed between a researcher and participants (Hays & Singh, 2012). With this in mind, it was duly noted that validity in qualitative research is in the “eye of the beholder” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 194). Nevertheless, other sources have indicated measures that researchers can use to deal with issues of validity or trustworthiness in qualitative research. According to Shenton (2004), qualitative research should address the following criteria in pursuit of trustworthy data: credibility (internal validity), transferability (generalizability), dependability, (reliability) and conformability (objectivity).

**Credibility.** “Validity of [a] study is the truthfulness of …findings and conclusions based on the maximum opportunity to hear participant voices in a particular context” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 192). To achieve credibility, we used triangulation. A form of triangulation involves using a range of informants (Shenton, 2004). In order to understand rural childcare, this study gathered information from both CMSMs and childcare centre directors. As a means of ensuring honesty in participants, participants were made aware that they had the option of withdrawing from the study at any point and they were encouraged to freely share their opinions from the
beginning of the study. This is consistent with Shenton’s (2004) suggestions for establishing credibility. It was recommended that in order to encourage genuine and willing participation, participants should be granted an unconditional right to withdraw at any point.

**Generalizability.** “Ultimately, the results of a qualitative study must be understood within the context of the particular characteristics of the organisation or organisations” (Shenton, 2004, p.70). Mackenzie & Knipe (2006) opine that qualitative research cannot be generalized as it is based on specific contexts, however the authors suggest that each situation presents a fragment of the bigger picture, therefore generalization is not impossible but should be done with caution. Shenton (2004) suggests that researchers provide a clear description of the phenomenon and the context of the study to enable comparisons. This research provides the context of the study, which is rural communities and the phenomenon of interest is the impact of the introduction of full day kindergarten and how it is experienced differently based on “place”.

**Dependability.** To address the issue of dependability or reliability, it was suggested that researchers give a detailed description of their methods to allow for replication. This has been done in this section.

**Conformability.** Hays and Singh (2012) recognise the difficulty in ridding qualitative research of biases; nevertheless, Shenton (2004) suggests that researchers admit their beliefs and assumptions and recognize the limitations of their study. My beliefs, social location and experiences combine to influence my theoretical standpoint. I am a married mother of two young children residing in a census rural community. I emigrated from Nigeria and have resided in three Canadian provinces where I gained an understanding of their different childcare policies. I advocate for a universal high quality childcare system in Canada. These experiences have shaped my interest and approach to this study. The limitations of this study will be addressed in chapter six.
3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis has been defined by Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) as “A rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible...its primary concern is with presenting the stories and experiences voiced by study participants as accurately and comprehensively as possible” (Guest et al., 2012, p. 15–16).

The interviews from both CMSMs and centre directors resulted in about 30 pages of notes. Extensive notes were also taken for all sixteen participants by both the researcher and the researcher’s supervisor during the interviews. Unfortunately, many of the taped recordings were not usable. Consequently, the written notes taken from all sixteen participants serve as the basis for much of the analysis and for the direct quotes from participants. Recordings from four CMSMs and three Centre directors’ interviews were usable for the analysis.

Thematic analysis was selected as the method of data analysis for this study, following the procedures developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). A theme is part of the data that captures important information in relation to the research question. It is usually a patterned response throughout the data set. The intent in this study is to give a sense of the predominant themes that emerged from a rich description of the entire data set. Thematic analysis was inductive (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes that were generated were directly linked to the data and there was no pre-existing framework.

Coding was performed manually because the data was of a manageable size. Codes as defined by Guest et al. (2012) are the most basic information about the phenomenon that can be accessed meaningfully (Guest et al., 2012). Pages of text were reviewed in a recursive manner. Results were organised and reported separately for CMSMs and centre directors. About 20 coding categories were generated from CMSM responses and five sub themes were initially generated and further developed to two main themes. Similarly, four sub themes and two main themes were generated from centre directors’
responses with about 20 coding categories. Thematic maps (showing main and sub themes) was used to manage information obtained (See Figures 3 and 4).

**Figure 3: Thematic Map Showing Main and Sub Themes for CMSMs**

- Awareness of CMSMs
  - Challenges
  - Strategies
  - Benefits/positives
- Actions of CMSMs
  - Role shift
  - Considerations/provisions

**Figure 4: Thematic Map of Main and Sub Themes from Rural Childcare Centre Directors**

- Challenges
  - Pre-existing Challenges
  - FDK impacts
- Resilience
  - Strategies
  - Municipal response
Chapter 4: Findings

Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings from interviews with CMSMs and centre directors, respectively. To maintain confidentiality, CMSM participants are referred to as CMSM1 through to 7. This chapter is divided into five sections as follows: Section 1 highlights CMSMs’ perspectives of the impact of FDK on their roles as service managers. Section 2 presents CMSMs’ views on the challenges faced by rural childcare centres as a result of FDK implementation. Section 3 highlights CMSMs’ reports of the positive implications of FDK on rural childcare centres. Section 4 reviews CMSMs’ understandings about the survival strategies being undertaken or potentially available to rural childcare operators. Section 5 presents actions taken by CMSMs to aid rural childcare centres. Table 3 provides an overview of the available childcare services in the different counties from which service managers were interviewed. These are not arranged in any particular order and do not correspond to the CMSM numbering pseudonyms.
As service managers of a range of services, it was important to gain an understanding of CMSMs’ perspectives on their responsibilities with regards to the implementation of full day kindergarten. CMSMs explained “Our role is supporting and building capacity” (CMSM3). Another CMSM noted “CMSMs might not have been involved in the administration of childcare but they are now…we became more involved in supporting childcare programs” (CMSM6). When asked if the introduction of FDK has affected their roles as service planners and providers, a number of CMSMs mentioned having experienced a change in their roles. A dominant theme
was the broader responsibility they now have for integrating full day learning services into the existing childcare system. These added responsibilities have changed their perspectives on their roles. Some have taken up the roles of advocates and educators as they strive to educate the Ministry of Education and the community about FDK and its effects on child care. One CMSM commented on this:

“It has changed my perspective on my role. I have a responsibility to roll out FDK. I provide information to the school board; it is a shift in responsibility... As a service planner, we now provide information to the Ministry of Education. This is a much bigger and broader responsibility .... We play a role in teaching them about ECE…they don’t understand. For example, we need to contextualize data with the Ministry of Education” (CMSM3).

In addition to experiencing a role change, some of the CMSMs are contending with a heavier workload as a result of managing and rolling out FDK. One CMSM noted “Our work load has shifted and increased…Things are fast paced…We are trying to mitigate the impacts [inaudible]” (CMSM5). Another CMSM shared a similar view:

“CMSMs are small and the intensity of the work has tripled in trying to manage the roll out of FDK… we work behind the scenes in updating Ontario childcare system software…we have also taken up leadership roles in provincial discussions” (CMSM6).

CMSMs have assumed responsibilities for establishing collaborations with the school board and licensed childcare centre directors. Many of the participants reported forming or strengthening relationships with the public school board. These partnerships help the schools contract out extended day programs to interested licensed childcare operators. CMSMs noticed that these partnerships strengthened their leadership roles and enabled them to take a more “hands on”, creative and innovative approach towards mitigating the impacts of FDK implementation. Notwithstanding their new responsibilities, some CMSMs felt that their roles as service managers have been hampered by insufficient funding. Some mentioned that adjusting to service delivery changes has been a challenge with limited financial resources. Several CMSMs commented on this: “We have experienced changes in the resource base and there is tension as we try to maintain service delivery” (CMSM6), “The implementation has affected us more in terms of funding” (CMSM7).
4.2 Perceptions of Key Issues in Rural Childcare

The majority of the CMSMs commended rural childcare operators for their flexibility and their consideration for the needs of families. They also expressed knowledge of the issues plaguing rural childcare, particularly with the implementation of FDK. One CMSM recognized that rural areas have unique needs and stressed the importance of having child care in the rural areas. In most rural areas, closures of any childcare centres would present difficulties. One CMSM expressed the importance of childcare in rural communities:

“Their unique needs should be met because they are the only option. They try to be responsive to rural families in terms of hours. If the program closed, it would be a huge problem. We have to retain them” (CMSM1).

Similarly, another CMSM commented on the importance of licensed home childcare providers to their community:

“Our home childcare programs provide flexible hours, even nights. They are an important component of our system…but there is no rural incentive to become or stay licensed as a home care provider” (CMSM3).

Space rigidity. CMSMs agreed that co-location with a school is beneficial for childcare centre operators, but they noted the structural barriers to such options. One CMSM noted that the option for childcare centres to become co-located in schools is more difficult in rural areas where most buildings are old, thereby making it more difficult to alter structures.

“Co-locations are newer programs so it is possible in newer schools, but the option is not possible for older schools… In co-located schools, [childcare] operators have been able to offer extended day and youth development programs. This has led to the development of programs and the expansion of space on behalf of school boards” (CMSM1).

Another CMSM had this to say about one of their municipally operated rural childcare centres:

“The group of children that generate income [the 4 and 5 year olds] are lost…but they [rural childcare operators] can’t open an infant room because they can’t convert their building. They are only left with toddler rooms” (CMSM5).
In contrast to rural areas, CMSMs explained that structural challenges would be less of an issue in urban childcare centres because they have a steadier enrollment pattern and larger pool of children and families to draw from, and therefore would not need to restructure their buildings. One CMSM explained:

“In urban centres, there is more capacity for different combinations. For example, they have room to open an infant room. And they are not so tied to fluctuations in enrollment and are a lot more steady. In rural areas, fluctuations are seasonal...people move out to where the jobs are so that affects enrollment [of children]” (CMSM5).

**Enrollment.** Closely tied to structural issues is enrollment in rural childcare centres. The loss of 4- and 5-year olds, besides being a huge financial loss to the childcare operators, was seen to have increased the cost of care. The loss has resulted in a big change in the age group enrolled and greater costs to best serve them. The majority of CMSMs were concerned about the viability of infant and toddler programs in rural childcare centres due to limited enrollments and/or closures.

“In one of the centres, they made the choice not to move into infant care. They are struggling with enrollments. The JK/SK teacher to child ratios was higher and the current lower ratios increase the cost of staffing” (CMSM7).

Another CMSM commented on the difficulty that operators face with trying to maintain a program for infants and toddlers: “I struggle with that. We have had operators open infant programs only to close them. Again, in a rural community I think that we have a lot of informal childcare” (CMSM2).

A few CMSMs added that issues of enrollments may not be as a result of the implementation of FDK because rural childcare has faced challenges prior to the introduction of FDK, one director opined:

“No, no, I would say enrollment has been good. Rural childcare struggles anyway; the implementation [of FDK] adds another variant of struggle to rural. Enrollments are an issue, but I don’t know that it is specific to rural centres” (CMSM2).
Staffing challenges. CMSMs were aware of how FDK implementation affected already existing challenges with staffing in rural childcare centres. Maintaining staff was seen as an ongoing issue, although it was noted that this was not unique to rural communities. However, compared to urban childcare centres, CMSMs noted that rural childcare centres are bearing the brunt of staff challenges due to their location. One CMSM commented on the effect of staffing challenges on the quality of rural childcare programs:

“They are suffering from not having qualified ECEs compared to urban…Getting staff to commute is an issue, ECEs drive around and now there are fewer ECEs in the programs…The Ministry is providing director’s approval for non-qualified staff. …That will lead to a decline in quality of these childcare programs. It is a bandaid solution…ECEs experience tension on who to serve-- childcare centres or bigger education folks” (CMSM5).

CMSMs also stated that rural childcare centres are losing qualified staff to the public school system mainly due to low wages and inadequate benefit packages. It is also challenging recruiting qualified staff. Additionally, some CMSMs disapproved of the work ethic of recent graduates and stated it as a challenge faced by many childcare centres. One of the CMSMs shared similar opinions on these issues: “We have lost so many seasoned ECEs…One of our staff who was allocated full time to emerging implementation now works with schools and the Ministry of Education” (CMSM4). Similarly, another CMSM commented:

“Staff turnover is greater in rural areas. They are generally paid less and [have a poorer] benefit package and travel time is a problem, especially since a lot of spaces are part time…Some of the staff [in a licensed rural childcare centre] quit and took the infants with them to their home …the infant centre closed” (CMSM6).

Before and after school programs and extended day programs. The majority of the CMSMs stated that before and after school programs are available in rural areas. One CMSM opined that extended day programs will benefit rural childcare centres in this time of transition because it will expand their spaces. Although its benefits were highlighted, CMSMs were cognizant of some directors’/operators’ apprehension. They mentioned that some rural operators
have refused to operate the extended day programs due to the challenges involved. CMSMs explained these challenges as follows: “It [before and after school services] is extensive here; however, transportation is always an issue and a huge cost to the centres who have to provide their own transportation” (CMSM2).

“Childcare centres are reluctant to operate FDK afterschool programs because it is not financially viable…One operator tendered to do it and we will support their deficit…We are involved in childcare…The operators are given the task to market the before and after school program. We have areas where there is need for school age extended day programs but no operators due to cost and transportation issues” (CMSM3).

**Profit vs. non-profit centres.** CMSMs reported that plans to mitigate the effects of FDK are more favourable towards the non-profit childcare centres. School boards give out third party contracts for extended day programs only to non-profit operators. Furthermore, the funding guidelines have put more emphasis on quality and for that reason some CMSMs mentioned prioritizing the non-profit childcare sector in their considerations. Some CMSMs give incentives to encourage the growth of non-profit childcare in rural communities through funding decisions.

“There are a lot of commercial programs that do not operate for the full year. Too many commercial, for my comfort, and for that reason we enhance the per diem rates for rural non-profit…Non-profit is prioritized…the funding guidelines mentioned quality more and take a slightly biased approach to non-profits” (CMSM6).

However, some CMSMs are concerned about the impact of FDK on for-profit childcare centres and the impact on their community. One CMSM commented: “FDK does not benefit commercial centres and without the commercial centres, we won’t have a child care system” (CMSM2). When asked if for-profit childcare centres are considering becoming non-profit, one CMSM opined:

“They are not. Every now and then we talk about it. I do talk about it…One of them in particular has had the childcare centre on her
property on the farm for so long. The idea of answering to a board or whatever -- It is not about making money; I don’t think it is about making money” (CMSM2).

Another commented on the quality of both non-profit and for-profit childcare centres:

“Fifty percent of infant spaces [in our community] are commercially operated and 50 [percent] are directly operated. In terms of quality, both for-profit and non-profit are the same…Before last September, growth was primarily in the commercial sector but we have seen a small growth in the non-profit and that is due to school boards looking for extended day care contracts” (CMSM6).

4.3 Positive Impacts of FDK

These challenges presented by FDK notwithstanding, the CMSMs were cognizant of the positive implications of FDK to rural childcare centres and to rural communities in general. It was reported that the implementation of FDK has made childcare spaces available to children. One CMSM noted an increase in the operating criteria for certain age groups. Two communities had not experienced any closures. If anything, the introduction of FDK had led to a demand in spaces for licensed childcare in that community. One of the CMSMs explained: “No, no, there hasn’t [been any closures]. If anything we have had more open, definitely we have had more open than close” (CMSM2).

Other positive implications of FDK included the choices available to families and children as well as ECEs.

“Families have more choice to send their children to play-based licensed care... Licensed centres are good and high quality...Before and after school programs have helped operators expand their programs...ECEs have the opportunities to work in settings where they are compensated better” (CMSM1).
4.4 Centre Directors’/Operators’ Survival Strategies

CMSMs gave their perspectives on how rural child care operators are managing the challenges brought about by FDK implementation. In areas where FDK was yet to be implemented, CMSMs reported that childcare operators are in an active service planning phase. In those areas where implementation was in effect, the following themes were generated from CMSM’s responses:

**Funding opportunities.** One of the many adaptive strategies CMSMs noticed was that rural childcare operators are taking advantage of funding opportunities and other opportunities to remain viable. Several CMSMs mentioned:

“Rural operators have been involved from the beginning…They have looked at impacts early on. They adapted with funding and creating spaces for children early on. They agreed to be third party operators…Transition funding has been offered in rural areas; some have taken up the offer for structural funding” (CMSM1).

“[Rural childcare operators are adapting] by understanding budgetary and financial situations…They have come to the County to ask for money” (CMSM3).

**Partnerships with school boards.** CMSMs came up with the following points as to how rural childcare operators are forming partnerships in an effort to remain viable with the introduction of FDK.

- The non-profit operators are working with school boards in a more committed way; they are looking at providing before and after care on behalf of the schools
- Rural communities are moving entire childcare centres into public schools
- Rural childcare centres are looking to partner with agencies that can house them with low rent

**Staff considerations.** An emerging observation was that rural childcare operators are emphasising support for their staff. CMSMs mentioned that operators are more accommodating of staff demands and are working more closely with them.
Another CMSM noticed that operators collectively post job advertisements to attract highly qualified ECEs.

“They [rural childcare operators] are looking at how to recruit staff…A few [rural childcare operators] are considerate in new ways, for example they let staff go early in the day… They also work with staff on emerging curriculum” (CMSM3).

Creating awareness. CMSMs also observed that rural childcare operators are actively marketing their programs and are constantly looking for different and better marketing strategies. They are also creating awareness of their services in the community. One CMSM commented:

“Nursery schools are beginning to talk more about their value in the community. There is more articulation of their value in the community that we hadn’t seen before. They are also articulating their work with children with special needs” (CMSM6).

Lowering fees. Although this was a minor theme, one CMSM reported that childcare centres in their area are lowering their rates to compete with the high volume of unlicensed care. One CMSM observed that parents often resort to informal care: “Inadvertently some changes push parents to informal sectors.” (CMSM4). In response to that, operators in some communities have lowered their prices to match what is being offered by the informal childcare sector.

One CMSM reported not being aware of any survival strategies in rural areas and expressed concern about the possible closures of childcare centres in that community. The quote below explains:

“Very little, that is exactly what I am trying to say…I can’t say that I have seen anything adaptive yet…I am worried that they are going to close. I don’t know that planning will stop it…Lots of people commute, so location is not always as important in rural areas as people would like to think; we are commuting anyway…they tend to choose programs they like as opposed to, sort of, the location of it” (CMSM2).
4.5 Rural Considerations (What has Been Done and What Planning is Being Undertaken)

Several CMSMs reported that they had tailored implementation plans specific to rural communities. They also mentioned that they are taking actions to aid rural communities. These plans had manifested in different ways such as funding considerations, soliciting the voices of rural childcare operators in the planning phase, and lobbying on behalf of rural childcare centres for extended day programs.

**Financial.** A dominant theme that emerged was that some form of financial consideration was made specifically to rural areas. Most CMSMs have taken steps towards helping to address the financial viability of childcare centres. Some assisted rural child care operators with financial planning as these CMSMs explained:

“We continue to seek their input and advice. OMSSA sponsored a licensed rural childcare forum 3 years ago…we continue to support rural with funding …Transition funding has been offered to rural areas, and some have taken up the offer for structural funding. One of the things we saw is that operators need to have sound business plans and we employed consultants and offered their services to non-profit operators. [We] trained and developed a business savvy plan…there is lots of sharing across rural operators” (CMSM1).

“Childcare centres have been helped with spread sheets to help them understand how to calculate finances…the rural centres were helped to organise finances… for instance we have hired a consultant and have had meetings with providers on how they can adjust the loss of the 4 and 5 year olds…we do role play and pretend scenarios” (CMSM5).

Some CMSMs noted that there is unique service delivery for rural communities and have therefore provided supplemental funding to rural areas. Several CMSMs commented on this: “We have allocated additional enhanced funding for rural communities and we recognise that there is unique service delivery for rural communities” (CMSM6).
“We had some feasibility studies and embarked with the childcare providers on feasibility planning. Consultants were hired and some of the operators opted to go to infant care and some chose not to...Funding was used to forward the stability plans to transform preschool spaces” (CMSM7).

CMSMs reported making plans for areas which are yet to fully implement FDK. Two CMSMs explained:

“We are interested in determining the needs of the community. In 2014, the infant and toddler program is not sustainable so far...our demographics change, so does childcare needs. So far, we are trying to determine childcare needs and trying to distribute funding to centres and implement funding changes” (CMSM2).

“We are trying to be creative and innovative...we are more ‘hands on’...We required all childcare operators to do sustainability plans and do budgets and have a snapshot of what they will face with FDK” (CMSM3).

Similarly, a CMSM was particularly disturbed with the number of for-profit commercial centres in the area and gave incentives as a way of encouraging the growth of non-profit childcare.

“There are too many commercial centres for my comfort and for that reason we enhance the per diem rates for rural centres’ fee subsidy allocation...what we cover corresponds to the rate they charge a full fee paying family...all rural centres get the higher per diem subsidy” (CMSM6).

One CMSM reported providing funding to aid the affordability of rural childcare.

“We are trying to gather some financial numbers and figure out how to support them under the new funding framework and subsidize the cost of care so that the centres can lower their rates” (CMSM)

**Forming partnerships.** Many of the CMSMs report a more comprehensive use of the schools in rural areas. CMSMs established partnerships with school boards and this has enabled access to low cost spaces in schools for rural childcare operators. Moreover, CMSMs encouraged non-profit childcare centres to offer before and after
school (extended day) programs on behalf of schools as they believe it will increase
centre viability, particularly for vulnerable centres. One CMSM mentioned partnering
with the school board and undertaking feasibility studies with non-profit rural centre
operators about becoming third party operators. One CMSM commented:

“[childcare] operators are upset about losing 4 and 5 years[olds].
Based on this, the board came up with a modified report and gave
them space …so rural operators operate extended day programs on
behalf of the school board…I want to make sure rural folks are well
positioned. If they have unique needs, I want to make sure I meet
them… [There will be] no childcare in that community without
childcare benefiting from the public schools” (CMSM1).

Similarly, other CMSMs mentioned forming partnerships with the community in order
to deliver childcare services:

“We use special needs resource consultants to look for ways to help
enhance the play-based learning within childcare centres and the
professional development. We also have service collaboration with
other childcare centres…A school had room and parts of the school
were reconstructed to include a family centre…Best Start spaces
have been transformed into infant spaces” (CMSM7).

**Considerations for staffing issues.** CMSMs reported that they are taking action
to aid rural childcare centres with issues related to staffing. CMSMs aided professional
development for ECEs through access to career development courses. One CMSM gave
an example of a professional development strategy funded by the Ministry of Education
where ECES and supervisors participated in a 30-credit hours course that focused on
childcare practices. This course updated staff practice. The cost of tuition as well as the
cost for hiring replacement staff for the duration of the training was covered. Similarly,
another CMSM had this to say about their contribution to the professional development
of ECEs:

“Municipal staff (ECEs) are offered a higher wage so we are able
to maintain staff, but others are losing staff…About 6 of the 9
childcare centres have lost staff. About staff loss, we are a
supportive network…we are investing money in professional
development and leadership development in childcare” (CMSM7).
In addition to training staff, CMSMs are trying to alleviate staffing challenges by campaigning for improved staff wages. One CMSM commented:

“… the new operational strategies are focused on supporting staff wages… Increase wages of fulltime, not-for-profit childcare programs that serve birth to 3.8 age group… We are looking at higher wages for ECEs. The current median wage for ECEs is $13.50 per hour. Through this strategy, it will be raised to $20 to $25 per hour” (CMSM6).

**Rural voice.** The childcare operators are considered part of the community and some CMSMs mentioned the importance of ensuring their voices are heard. For this reason, some rural childcare operators were included on planning committees that guide a more efficient delivery of programs to children and families. One of the CMSMs mentioned:

“Yes, we have included rural voices at the planning table. There is a strong rural voice on the table. There are about 4 rural operators on the table. They are the only operators in the rural community” (CMSM1).

Similarly another CMSM commented: “I am on different provincial tables and continue to reinforce the need for rural childcare” (CMSM5).

Findings from this study also show a continuum from CMSMs who had reported tailoring implementation plans to rural areas to those who had not. One CMSM reported not having advanced any plans of service delivery that will be specific to rural areas. This was however, a minor theme. As this particular CMSM noted:

“The impact has been somewhat staggered and providers have been in a “wait and see”…As far as planning, I can’t say we have done anything ahead…nothing too tailored particularly to rural” (CMSM2).

**Promoting licensed childcare.** CMSMs are responding to rural childcare issues by marketing licensed childcare centres in rural communities. One CMSM explained:

“Last year, we did a quality child care campaign -- publications and radio ads informing parents about childcare and fee subsidy…Childcare providers were invited to participate in [newsletter] publications” (CMSM7).
Closing remarks. Some CMSMs concluded their interviews with words of support for the childcare system. One CMSM mentioned providing support for rural childcare:

“I want to make sure rural folks are well positioned. If they have unique needs, I want to make sure I meet them…we have monthly teleconference with OMSSA and share success stories” (CMSM1).

Another CMSM acknowledged that rural childcare is in need of a major change and suggested maximizing space and disseminating information as ways of improving rural childcare programs. The CMSM opined: “Childcare programs need major change. We need to have candid discussions; especially on the use of school space…we need to keep everyone informed…” (CMSM3). Furthermore, CMSMs commented on the benefits of rural childcare to rural communities:

“Rural childcare has never been stable but has always managed to hang on and it is important to stay in the community. They are a centre where people go to see how children learn and play and for other intangible benefits to the community. It would be a huge loss if they disappeared” (CMSM5).
Chapter 5: Findings – Childcare Centre Directors

This chapter presents the findings from interviews with rural childcare centre directors and is divided in five sections as follows: Section 1 delineates directors’ views on the most pressing problems facing rural childcare in the past year. Section 2 focuses on directors’ perceptions of the specific impacts on rural childcare centres of implementing FDK, highlighting both positive and negative impacts. Section 3 reveals resilience in rural childcare directors through the various strategies they use to maintain their centres regardless of challenges. Section 4 presents centre directors’ perceptions of their municipal government’s response to their plight. Finally, in section 5, directors express their opinions about FDK.
Table 4 provides an overview of the centres run by the childcare directors/operators interviewed for this study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director 1</th>
<th>Spaces</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number of Staff</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Operation</th>
<th>Phase of FDK implementation in area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director 1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16 mos-6 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Stand alone</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Fully implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 2</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12 mos-6 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Stand alone</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Not fully Implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 3</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>18 mos-5 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Standalone</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Full implementation in September, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 4</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15 mos -5 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Stand alone</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Fully implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2.5- 6 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Co-located with a public school</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Full implementations in September 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 6</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3 mos- 6 years</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Stand alone</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Full implementation in September, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 7</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0 mos -3 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Stand alone</td>
<td>Non profit</td>
<td>Fully implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0 mos – 6 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Stand alone</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>To be implemented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director 9</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18 mos- 4 years</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Co-located</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>First phase of implementation September 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Pressing Problems in Rural Childcare Centres

The unique characteristics of rural areas present challenges to the licensed childcare sector. Initially, the interview questions aimed to achieve a general overview of the problems facing rural childcare centres that were not necessarily tied to the implementation of FDK. In fact, when asked to identify what they perceived to be the most pressing problems facing their childcare centres directors referred to some problems that were directly related to the introduction of FDK as well as issues that are more general. The following themes emerged from the directors’ responses:

**Financial issues.** Childcare directors felt that funding was a main area of concern for their centres. Several centre directors commented on the limited funding available to operators. Some opined that even when funding was available, it was tough to access because public schools were given funding priority.

“We looked at the funding and the financial part as a main area of concern… FDK has not affected us yet but we have not been able to access any of the funding. No funding available to childcare. If [we] wanted to renovate [we] could get the funding, but schools get funding first” (Director1).

**Enrollment.** Several operators reported drops in enrollments as one of the many issues plaguing their centres. Over the past year many directors had experienced fluctuations in the enrollment patterns of all age groups; for example, some centres have more unfilled spaces than they did a year ago. For many directors, more recent decreases in enrollments occurred within the kindergarten age group (4 and 5 year olds). One director mentioned:

“So next year I have 4 spaces in my kindergarten program, whereas over the last 22 years that has never happened. It is very unusual that we have spaces that are not filled… I have 6 toddler spaces, I typically have a full waiting list to get into my toddler program and now I can’t fill it for September so that is very unusual and I once again believe that it is directly impacted by FDK” (Director2).

Another director gave an example of the issue of lower enrollment.

“The preschool room is busy but quiet in the winter. September 2012 has the greatest impact on preschool room: enrollment dropped from 15 to 7 preschoolers” (Director6).
Similarly, another director projects future enrollment decreases: “And the numbers will drop; we will be to at least 14 children in prekindergarten from the 32 we are at now” (Director8).

For one director, the drop in enrollments was evident in the centre’s shrinking waitlist

“We are beginning to see a decrease in my waitlist, a decrease in people needing care, whereas there was a time ….you don’t want to have lots of people waiting, but now my waitlist is very small…The centre has been full in the past year but certainly you can start seeing (umm) that that is not happening. Like this time of the year I am typically full for September, whereas right now I am not and I do feel that there is a direct correlation to what is happening in the community with full day kindergarten” (Director2).

Reductions in enrollment are closely linked to the financial viability of a program. Centre directors opined that the change in the number and ages of children has resulted in a less financially viable situation for them. Similarly, childcare directors mentioned that the cost of childcare itself is expensive and this could be discouraging parents from enrolling their children. Directors also perceived that parents are unaware of the availability of subsidy.

**Staffing issues.** For all of the directors, attracting and retaining qualified staff was a huge concern and an ongoing issue. Attracting staff to a rural area was challenging, but even more so, retaining them was more difficult. Unlike the school boards, childcare centres do not offer competitive wages to ECEs. Additionally, most centres do not offer many non-wage benefits to ECEs, making it easier to lose staff to jobs with more competitive wages and benefits. Similarly, one director observed that staff morale is an issue and that she has been observing higher rates of absenteeism among staff. Two directors described staffing issues as follows: “Staffing, trying to find qualified ECEs in rural areas is challenging… also school boards have the ability to pay more, but we can’t” (Director1). “Retaining ECE staff… It is difficult and tough to compete, because we are non-profit. Staff are not offered benefits” (Director9).

Furthermore, these issues were shown to have a ripple effect. One director mentioned how enrollments affect staffing, which inadvertently affects funding:
“Based on the number of children, staffing is scaled back. With less staff, less funding is received. Wage subsidy increases only yearly. With less wage subsidy, there is less dollars to centres” (Director3).

**Role changes.** A minor theme that emerged from rural childcare directors was that of change in their role. One of the directors mentioned being more involved in paper work than having “hands on” involvement with running the centre. This focus on paperwork is taking directors away from their responsibilities on the floor with the children and staff. As well, directors who are ECEs have to deal with management and business issues for which they have limited training.

“One of the other problems that we have may not be a problem, but it is taking a lot of work though we are successful at it… but it is the operating criteria, and documentation takes time and with that I am never in the class anymore. Too much paper work…supervisors are too busy and not having the time to step back and take a look. ECEs are dealing with marketing and director issues” (Director5).

### 5.2 Impacts of FDK on Rural Childcare Centres

Centre directors acknowledged the impact of FDK on their childcare programs; impacts were also anticipated in areas where kindergarten had not yet been implemented. Directors reported a mix of positive and negative impacts, although themes of negative impacts were more common. The following themes were developed from directors’ comments about the impacts resulting from the introduction of FDK.

**Enrollment patterns.** As described previously, several directors reported a drop in enrollments as a result of the introduction of FDK. As 4- and 5 year olds enroll in FDK, it creates a gap in the spaces filled by those children. Directors’ comments show that a drop in enrollment is not restricted to the 4- and 5-year old age groups; many are experiencing this drop with other age groups. Several directors commented as follows:

“We sent out surveys to community members…Parents will be sending their children to FDK so we anticipate fewer children and are looking at having a 5 to 5.5 hour part-day program for kids who will be going to kindergarten the following year. It will be a kindergarten prep program but play based” (Director1).
“I am concerned about my KG program and in order for us to be viable, we need to be at capacity and my toddler program and kindergarten program are not…so I see my enrollment decreasing for next year.” (Director2).

“I lost the school-age program in school because I’m not non-profit…This year I will be losing 15 children in September. In our second centre, it affected us a little bit especially at the beginning of the school year. We closed our preschool classroom and opened the infant program last year…We are in the process of moving, strategizing about school-age [programs]” (Director6).

“We experienced a direct impact [of FDK] on our preschool room. In the old centre, we were at an average of 15 children in our preschool room every day, but this past year, as low as 7 in our preschool room. We lost about 55% of the group. Now, infant numbers have dropped low…We anticipate another drop in September. 11 of our children will be off to school…a lot of toddlers will move out…a loss in enrollment” (Director7).

“There will be a new school. So the school we are located in anticipates a drop by 50%. Kids will move to the new school. Enrolment will be reduced and might be so for like 5 years” (Director9).

While most of the impact of FDK on enrollment was negative, one director sees it as an opportunity to increase enrollment for school-aged children in their before and after school program. The director made the following comment:

“[FDK] has increased the need for before and after school care. Licensed spaces have increased. Junior kindergarten/senior kindergarten after school programs are getting busier. Waiting list is already in place…we are expecting higher numbers in school age and junior kindergarten/senior kindergarten before and after school” (Director5).

**Change in the age composition of children.** As older children enroll in the FDK, centre directors have to change their services to focus on younger age groups. For some directors, this change was not only about losing the children, but also about losing the families because they had formed a connection with them. One director explains: As a small centre, we miss the families” (Director7).
Rooms/Centre Closures. Another impact of FDK is the closure or impending closures of rooms in centres such as infant or toddler rooms. Some directors reported already closing rooms, while others decided to keep rooms open even with low enrollments. They are, however, operating those rooms on a part-time basis. Some directors commented on this as follows:

“Part-day program will operate 3 days a week so a classroom will not be functioning on a full-time basis.” (Director1).

“Maybe the kindergarten program may not be opened full time and this is because preschoolers don’t sleep in the afternoon. School-age programs will be empty and will be re-licensed for toddlers.” (Director8).

Some directors who have not had to close any rooms yet are apprehensive about having to close rooms in the future. Some are considering renovating their centres in order to avoid room closures; however, structural issues present a barrier for some who would like to revamp their building to suit the needs of younger age groups. One director commented on this:

“I am worried … and certainly it was never something I had to worry about before. There are concerns about will there be enough demand in our community for preschool children. The way our centre is laid out, because it is an old house renovated into a daycare, our kindergarten program is on our third level which we wouldn’t be able to have toddlers up there… so our kindergarten space would have to change for a preschool space so is there enough demand for preschool? I don’t know. I would like more if they could change the preschool age, if it was 2 years as opposed to 2 and a half, I think that would help us stay viable. We would be able to have a younger preschool age group and an older preschool age group” (Director2)

When asked if they are considering combining their programs with other programs, three of the directors mentioned the possibility of becoming co-located with a new school building. One director opined that this co-location would enhance centre viability and remove the overhead costs of running the centre. Regardless of these benefits, one director did not feel that co-locating with a school would be an ideal fit for a childcare centre. Some directors approved of the benefits of co-locating with another school but are ineligible to do so because they run private centres.

“I am not eligible to move to school so no to combining [with schools]. I own my own building, we are the only licenced childcare in [area]” (Director6)
**Extended day programs.** With the introduction of FDK, licensed, non-profit childcare centres can be granted contracts to provide before-and after-school programs on behalf of the school boards. Several directors reported getting awarded the contract to offer before- and after-school programs in their area. However, they are concerned that recruiting staff to work split shifts may be a deterrent. One director mentioned the impending challenges of offering the before-and after-school program:

“We are looking at remaining viable but we have chosen not to be the third party operator for the after school program. Staffing would be a huge challenge. It wouldn’t be beneficial” (Director1).

Another director commented as follows:

“‘There is one [before-and after-school program] to be brought in September; another 7 to 8 could be opened within the communities due to need. Trying to find staff could be tough due to the hours they will be committed to” (Director3).

Similarly, other directors turned down the opportunity to offer the before-and after-school programs due to the potential for similar challenges. One director commented on this:

“It is tough for us to do because my after school teacher would need to work a split shift and it is just not a great career choice to have to do that, so we just haven’t offered that. My hope would be that once the school offers the before school care, the people in the community will utilize that and then they can come to us for the after school portion” (Director2).

**Staffing patterns.** With the introduction of FDK, centre directors reported making necessary changes in their staffing patterns. For most directors, it was necessary to hire part-time staff to facilitate their before-and after-school program. This arrangement presented some challenges, as the following director explained: “Staffing is always a problem with our centre. We have managed it in the past but it will be a struggle to hire people for split shifts” (Director5).

For some directors, the retention of staff is contingent upon the enrollment patterns of different age groups; some will lay off staff of age groups where there are low enrollments. One director commented:
“Yes, with our enrolments infants and toddler staff will be laid off since infants’ enrollments will drop in the summer. Two staff had interviews for FDK with the school board, so there is a possibility of losing staff” (Director7).

**Recruiting and Retaining ECEs.** The introduction of FDK has had an impact on the already existing issues of recruiting and retaining qualified ECEs in rural areas. Directors observed that their physical location was one deterrent in attracting staff. One director commented on this: “We are not too far from the main community, but the perception is that we are out in the country and so keeping staff has been difficult” (Director1).

Similarly, directors gave another example of the challenges presented by their location. They reported incurring travel costs for staff that have to commute to work, but they only provide limited compensation. Director 7 commented on this: “The biggest challenge is retaining staff due to wages. We pay travel for up to 45 minutes away from the centre” (Director7).

For several directors, recruiting qualified ECEs was problematic; for example, directors reported receiving more job applications from unqualified individuals than from ECEs. “Incredible challenges. We receive a lot of applications from people with passion, but no licence. When we post job advertisements, it is difficult to get a decent number of qualified staff” (Director8).

They attributed the shortage of adequately trained staff to the non-competitive wages that they offer. One of the directors opined:

“…hard time keeping staffs with wages. Staff are lost to other employment not in the field because you cannot afford to sustain a living on the job. In the last 6 months, we have hired a few teachers, but they are not qualified ECEs. We get folks from other fields. A few times we have posted ads and (there was) no qualified ECE applicant” (Director7).

Furthermore, the loss of qualified ECEs to better paying jobs was a common theme among all the directors. Many directors lamented the loss of staff to the school boards because the
childcare system cannot afford to offer competitive wages and benefits like the school boards. They commented as follows:

“I think the tricky part comes in that [umm]… it all becomes with the viability, you know? We are trying to offer better wages, higher RRSP matching, you know, things like that in order to keep our staff and to want people, you know, new grads to want to work here but that gets tough… We wanted to stay as competitive as we could, but we are certainly still not matching what is happening at the school board by any means” (Director2).

“It is tougher because the pay isn’t good and you can work in the school system with more pay. We have lost 3 staff to the schools. Core staff have benefits. Supply staff do not get benefits. Keeping them is tougher. The non-core staff left to the school” (Director4).

“[Staffing is] one of our biggest challenges. Recruiting is tough and though we advertise, ECEs are more interested in getting with ministries. But being a non-profit, we can’t offer benefits…our new hires are not fresh graduates and they are older, so younger ones are tougher to attract” (Director9).

“I am frustrated with the wage disparity between working in a school and a childcare centre with the same qualification; hence, the difficulty in finding qualified staff. In this area, a lot of ECEs were working as Education Assistants in the school system even preceding FDK implementation” (Director7).

These challenges notwithstanding, some directors described feeling fortunate to attract qualified staff regardless of their centre’s location. The issue of staff loyalty was important and some directors emphasized this in the hiring process. Director 2 explained:

“I mean I just went through an interview process bringing in people from mat leave and I am quite pleased to see that there were some really good people specifically located here in childcare, so I was happy and pleased to see that. It is a little bit different now and it becomes a question I ask in the interview process… sort of like “What
are your career goals and is there hope to stay in childcare” and I don’t really want someone that will say, “You know I will work here for a bit but if I get a call from the school board, I am going to go to them because that is not ideal for me.” (Director2).

5.3 Resilience in Rural Childcare Directors/Operators

All the directors affirmed that it was essential to maintain their childcare centres’ viability in the face of the challenges presented by FDK. Each director disclosed the strategies they have used or are expecting to use to maintain centre viability. While some were further along or had adapted unique strategies, many directors were responding in similar ways with the majority focusing on promoting enrollments and demand through strategic marketing, repositioning themselves to attract younger children, or taking advantage of the opportunity to offer before and after school or extended day programming in partnership with their local board.

Additional marketing and promotion. A dominant theme among centre directors was their use of strategic marketing to promote their centre. Some directors recruited board members who had marketing backgrounds and their skills were utilized in promoting the centre.

“Marketing…More strategic recruitment of board members - board members that have marketing background…a lot of it comes down to the strength of the program and the relationship the staff has with children…word of mouth also promotes” (Director1).

Directors utilized various media to promote their centres. These included community newsletters and websites. In their advertising, many of the directors aimed at attracting informal care users by emphasizing the benefits of licensed childcare programs. The following remarks from some directors shed more light on this:

“We are putting a focus on promoting programming…[we are] explaining to the community and to families why they should choose a licensed childcare program…We use local papers, and submit articles and pictures regularly…Promoting the importance of childcare…We try to put forth the profession and why it is important to be an ECE” (Director7).
Many centre operators raised awareness of their presence through word of mouth, a means many directors found effective. One director remarked:

“We have gone on a little blitz with that… we are looking at rebranding, you know, we are really putting it out there to parents that we are an early learning centre [ummm], and that is the place you want to be and letting people know that there are spaces… We have connected with parents…and you know [they are] bringing our new ad that we have created to their employees and things like that. So we are really getting the word out there in the community and to businesses.” (Director2).

**Developing business acumen.** In response to financial strains caused by the introduction of FDK, most directors commented on the importance of having business savvy. Some enhanced their managerial skills by enrolling in business courses/workshops aimed at teaching them business resilience. Several directors felt that they were in a better position to plan and adjust to any business issues. Director 2 commented on this:

“You know, I took the business resiliency course that was offered in the region and with that we have certainly come along with the board for some business plan as to [you know] plan A, plan B type thing; but there are really only a couple of plans that are going to keep us viable [ummm], so that is really what we have done at this point. You know, we have some plans waiting and when that change needs to happen, it will, and the hope is that it will work as we hope it will.” (Director2).

**Structural Changes.** In response to losing the older children to the public school system, many directors are reorienting their rooms and centres to accommodate younger age groups. Also, some are upgrading their toys and materials to be more age appropriate for younger children. One director’s comment describes the changes: “The implementation pulled 2 years’ worth out of development age of our children. We have had to relook and revamp our toys to get age-appropriate toys [for the younger children].” (Director7).

Some directors are unable to make structural changes in their centres due to funding issues. One director mentioned that without formal commitment from CMSMs and the provincial government, it would be difficult to maintain the viability of programs aimed at younger age groups.
“We are looking into funding formulae and trying to get some assurances of viability before making structural challenges. We are trying to make structural changes to centres to bring in infants, but we are looking at municipalities to see how they are able to support. We are also assessing market viability for infants and what municipalities can do to help with wage subsidy” (Director3).

**Increasing parent fees.** Although this was a minor theme, one director mentioned increasing parent fees as a strategy for sustaining centre viability. The director mentioned that maintaining centre viability is a difficult endeavour but as the program has had a steady level of enrollment, increasing parent fees seemed like a reasonable option.

**Taking on before-and after-school programs.** Becoming third party operators for the before-and after-school program was seen as another strategy for maintaining centre viability. One director commented:

“ We are taking on the before-and after-school program because of the low cost of running the program…It has been successful…It helps increase revenue and we are putting more dollars into staff training” (Director5).

**Offering more flexibility in childcare services.** Directors mentioned flexibility as one of the strategies they are using to maintain the centres. Parents are offered more flexibility in their childcare routines. This improved customer service helps retain the loyalty of parents. One director gave an example: “[We offer] more flexible childcare now…parents have the option of terminating their childcare and holding their spot for when they come back…We cater to the needs of each family” (Director9).

Directors were also taking action to address staffing challenges through various strategies to retain their staff. Specific initiatives included increasing staff wages, offering benefits to staff, promoting the ECE field, and staff appreciation activities or awards.

**Increasing staff wages.** Several directors are responding to the dire state of ECE wages in the rural childcare sector. They reported plans to increase staff wages or to offer some monetary incentive to staff working in rural areas. Several directors commented as follows:
“I am not necessarily concerned about staffing challenges. I think, I hope, things will be looked at for wage subsidy and that there is going to be some equality for ECEs as a whole working within the school board and also working within daycares” (Director2).

“Our Board of directors is trying to look at increasing wages. We would like to offer a competitive wage because we are the lowest paid centre in the area and we are working with the municipality to see how they can support us. We are trying to address policy and procedure and match wages of staff to maintain standards” (Director7).

One director mentioned receiving wage improvements allocations for their staff from their municipality government. “We need….wage improvement allocations for people in ECE to stay -- an incentive to stay in the field. And that is through the service organization. It is from the municipality” (Director8).

**Offering/improving benefits.** In addition, several centre directors revealed that most staff are not entitled to benefits, as director 1 mentioned: “Because we are still new, there are no benefits to our staff. The board is looking at this to implement.” (Director1). Most directors commented that they are beginning to offer some form of benefits to their staff. Some already had a registered retirement savings plan (RRSP) in effect for their staff, while others were considering it. One director explained: “…but as far as what we are able to do on our own as a non-profit centre, we are already doing it. We have offered the RRSP” (Director2). The RRSP plan involved staff contributing towards their retirement and having the board match those contributions. The following director commented on this:

“Right now we are staying status quo. If we are losing more staff, the board would step up. The board has implemented an RRSP program and the board matches that. Staff who have been here for two years are invited to apply for this match up. It has been in place for six years” (Director9).

**Promoting the ECE field.** Directors attributed the shortage of qualified staff to the low enrollments in ECE programs. Some directors took it upon themselves to create awareness about the field and encourage individuals from the
community to pursue a career in the field. Director 3 commented on this: “We are trying to be the employer of choice…. Letting people know and talking to them about the benefits of working in childcare (Director3).

**Staff appreciation.** Several directors commended their staff; many stated that they have “great staff”. Directors showed commitment to enhancing staff morale through various means such as celebrating staff accomplishments, being flexible and accommodating of staff, rewarding above average performance by employment of the month awards, and treating staff to meals. Directors acknowledged the payoff from these inputs. Director 5 commented as follows:

“It is a desire of staff to feel appreciated. It is our desire to put more money into staff. We have taken a bit more of an outreach with our staff and allowed them to sit in professional development meetings and the staff teach their coworkers. It has been seen to make a difference in their attitudes. One staff has been going above and beyond. We do make sure that our teachers are involved in parent meetings. The agency has done more staff recognition. The staff get snacks” (Director5).

### 5.4 Directors’ Perceptions of the Municipal Response to FDK Implementation

Directors gave their perspectives on municipal governments’ responses to rural childcare issues. Several directors acknowledged the support of their municipal government and felt that they have been proactive in responding to rural issues; others felt that the municipal government could be more engaged in and supportive of rural childcare. Funding was cited as one of the supports extended to rural childcare directors. Directors used these funds to renovate their buildings; in one instance a new centre was built using some funding from the municipality. Several directors commented as follows:

“I feel we have been supported by the regional funding from our municipal government… The [municipal] government are in a tricky spot trying to balance things.” (Director1).

“I feel like they have supported us as much as they can. There has been some funding available that we have been able to utilize to help with transitioning some of our rooms -- say converting our kindergarten room to a preschool room and converting our preschool room possibly into a toddler space so there has been funding available for that.” (Director2).
“They have been supportive for us. We are non-profit and are fortunate for grant money and are successful in receiving grants. Other centres have not been as fortunate. We have a supportive board. We have grants from the local community as well.” (Director5).

Several directors, however, expressed contrary views on the response of their municipal government to rural challenges. Some felt that rural issues were not considered during the implementation of FDK and are still not being considered. Director 4 commented:

“They didn’t think of how rural was going to be impacted when implementing FDK. They did not anticipate that there aren’t a lot of kids in rural. Policies are generally not made with rural needs in mind.” (Director3).

Besides funding, centre directors felt that municipal governments have been instrumental in amplifying rural voices on issues affecting their childcare sector. Directors reported that their municipal government alerted them of any opportunity to express their concerns; their service managers encouraged them to be vocal on rural issues. In addition, directors reported attending quarterly meetings set up by CMSMs where they all share information and keep up to date with childcare policy information. Director 8 commented on this: “Our service provider is aware and supportive of challenges...If there was an opportunity to make our voices heard, they inform us. Our service providers have been good advocates to see the difference between rural and urban.” (Director8).

Notwithstanding their appreciation, many centre directors felt that the municipal or regional government could offer more help to rural childcare operators. Some feel that more funding should be directed towards the childcare sector as opposed to the bulk of the funding going to the public school system. One director mentioned that with adequate funding, they would be able to renovate and include more spaces, a task they are unable to carry out due to limited funding. Some feel that rural issues need to be considered more closely. Director2 noted:

“Once again, a little bit of a joke because that dollar amount that we are getting as opposed to what they spend in schools is ridiculous, right? So it is tough, there are millions spent in schools and then we are getting thousands” (Director2).
Furthermore, directors felt that in response to the challenges of service delivery in small towns with a dispersed population, municipal governments could combine schools. They also emphasized the importance of assessing the needs of each community prior to program implementation because certain communities possess unique needs. One director commented: “Some communities are specific to what their needs are and they [municipal governments] could have each community have a say in the way their programs are run.” (Director9). In addition, directors would like to receive feedback from meetings with the Ministry of Education on issues concerning rural programs.

5.5 Directors’ Overall Perspectives on FDK

“We are not baby sitters”

Directors expressed their overall views on the implementation of FDK. While they recognized the positive aspects of it, they shared their personal opinions on this policy change and offered insight into what they felt could be done differently. Several directors opined that the objectives of FDK were already being met in high quality licensed childcare programs. Director8 commented as follows: “FDK is a good idea, but we were offering quality childcare. I have concerns about the quality of FDK… for example class size. ECEs focus on the whole child. Also, all the dollars allocated to FDK schools could have been spent better” (Director8). Directors felt that funds spent on the new initiative should have been directed towards the childcare system where these services to children were already in place as one director noted:

“Well, I mean obviously, they certainly are excited and see it as a really wonderful thing and certainly from a personal perspective, I don’t see it as a wonderful thing. I get pieces of it, I understand the reason behind it. I suppose it was about those children who could not afford childcare and just weren’t getting out there... I have issues that all this money has been spent on schools. If we have put a small portion of that into daycare, the amazing things that could have happened... and we could have met the needs of those underserviced children” (Director2)
On a final note, directors highlighted the limited support for children with special needs in the rural ELCC sector and advocated for better inclusion of children with special needs in rural programs.
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Limitations of This Research
This study is not without its limitations, most of which relate to the scope and sample size. The scope of the study was limited to the experiences of rural centre directors and CMSMs from South Western Ontario who were able to participate. Selection biases are likely and we do not assume that the findings are representative of the experiences of all CMSMs or rural centre directors in this region or other rural Ontario regions. Further research could examine how these and other centre directors are affected over time as FDK is fully implemented and as more attention is paid to funding and support issues for licensed child care providers. It would also be valuable to learn more about centres that close as a result of FDK as well as centres that become more proactive and resilient in serving the needs of the children and families in their community.

The challenges of sustaining high quality, inclusive child care in rural areas remains an understudied area; however it is a critically important service for rural communities and requires careful examination and responsive, flexible support from policy makers and service managers.

6.2 A Comparison of the Perspectives of CMSMs and Centre Directors on Concerns that Relate to FDK

The preceding chapters have summarized CMSMs’ and centre directors’ perspectives on the opportunities and challenges presented by the introduction of FDK in Ontario for childcare services in rural communities and directors’ views of how effective municipal service managers have been in addressing their needs and concerns. This chapter juxtaposes the responses of CMSMs to those of centre directors and identifies some of the implications for policy and practice that emerge from this study. Among the key issues raised by centre directors that are affecting their viability are funding issues; the impacts of decreased enrollments, particularly the loss of 4 and 5 year olds; staffing issues including challenges attracting and retaining qualified staff; and concerns about strategies such as offering before-and after-school/extended day services. As will be shown below, these concerns are inter-related, potentially affecting both the sustainability and quality of child care services.
Rural childcare directors/operators cited insufficient funding as one of the most pressing problems facing their childcare centre in the last year. By contrast, CMSMs did not identify funding, as such, as a critical issue for rural childcare centre directors. The views expressed by the centre directors in this study are similar to the opinions expressed by focus groups held in Waterloo region in 2011 and 2012. As reported in the Region’s Early Learning and Child Care Service Plan 2012—2015, (urban and rural) operators identified a number of funding concerns among the top five challenges that could threaten their current and future viability. The specific concerns that were high priorities include a) insufficient funds for wage subsidies for current staff, b) the cost of infant/toddler care, c) insufficient per diem rates, and d) lack of wage subsidies for new staff. In addition, ELCC operators expressed concern about the limited funding available for renovations and transformation of junior/senior kindergarten spaces to infant and toddler spaces due to uncertainty of the demand for these spaces (Region of Waterloo, 2012). Similarly, rural childcare directors/operators in this study suggested that there is limited funding available to them and it is not easily accessible. Furthermore, centre directors showed disapproval of the large amounts being doled out to the public school system compared to what is being invested in the childcare sector. Several directors clearly advocated that community-based childcare programs should be treated as full and equal partners in an ECEC system (i.e., an integral part of services for children to be funded by the Ministry of Education). One director summed it up in these words: “There should be more funding within the [childcare] system. If childcare is part of the Ministry of Education, it should be looked at as part of it, as a full part” (Director1). Additionally, directors are advocating that increased funding for younger children be prioritized.

Both CMSMs and centre directors/operators cited declining enrollments as a key issue facing the rural childcare sector, although some CMSMs opined that this may not be unique to rural areas. Centre directors cited the loss of 4-and-5 year olds to FDK programs as the major cause for drops in enrollment. CMSMs were also aware of enrollment issues facing rural childcare centres and identified low enrollments in infant and toddler programs as the main enrollment challenge facing rural childcare. Declining enrolments was shown to have a ripple effect; it affected work hours allocated to staff, which could result in the loss of qualified staff to better paying jobs. The
loss of qualified staff, in turn, has a huge impact on the quality of the program. Declining enrollments and fewer staff also affect funding and the viability of these rural child care programs. OMSSA (2011) explains that the loss of quality licensed childcare is not beneficial to children’s development, particularly in rural areas where it has been shown that licensed childcare is decreasing and the unlicensed childcare sector is growing. Quality childcare is also essential to impede a declining rural population. OMSSA (2011) supports this point by explain that new families and businesses are less likely to be attracted to areas without quality childcare.

CMSMs and directors agree that rural childcare centres face staffing challenges. CMSMs are aware that maintaining qualified staff is a key issue facing rural childcare because of low wages and transportation costs. With the introduction of FDK, rural childcare centres are losing staff to school boards that can offer higher wages and better benefits. A recent national study of childcare programs in Canada (You Bet We Still Care!) acknowledged this challenge faced by childcare centres. The study reported that competition from the school system for qualified ECEs was more of an issue in Ontario than elsewhere across Canada (Flanagan, Beach, & Varmuza, 2013). Furthermore, CMSMs were fully aware that unqualified staff are securing employment in some centres. Several childcare centre directors/operators in this study explained that they seldom receive job applications from qualified ECEs and have had to hire individuals with passion, but little training. Both CMSMs and centre directors acknowledged that this is a band aid solution. Similarly, the aforementioned Waterloo Region’s ELCC service plan reported that childcare operators listed the lack of registered ECE graduates as one the large challenges facing their centres. Centre operators who participated in focus groups in Waterloo region and in the interviews conducted for this study are frustrated that they are losing qualified staff to school boards who offer better wages and benefits (Region of Waterloo, 2012). Likewise, the recent national You Bet We Still Care! Study reported that centre directors across Canada are experiencing similar recruitment challenges: 65% reported the lack of qualified applicants for positions and almost 43% stated that staff were not satisfied with their wages. In response to the lack of qualified applicants, 62.6% of centre directors reported hiring a less qualified applicant (Flanagan, Beach, & Varmuza, 2013).
In the current study, directors offered mixed feelings about offering before and after school/extended day programs as an ideal or solid solution to their concerns about program viability. Directors saw these programs as potentially driving additional staffing challenges, especially given the difficulties of recruiting and retaining qualified staff for split shifts in rural areas; CMSMs were cognizant of these challenges. Directors opined that working split shift schedules is not a suitable or desirable career choice for most staff.

CMSMs and directors gave their perspectives on how rural childcare operators are managing the impacts of FDK. CMSMs commented that in response to recent changes to the childcare sector, directors are taking advantage of funding opportunities to maintain their centre’s viability. Although rural childcare centres did not list this as one of their adaptive strategies, they acknowledged that funding was being made available to them by their service managers. CMSMs commented that centre directors are emphasizing providing additional support and benefits for their staff. Centre directors also gave similar reports on their strategies to combat staffing challenges. Most centre directors are advocating for increased staff wages; some are offering benefits and retirement saving plans to their staff; still others have introduced staff appreciation activities and events. Some childcare directors in the current study also heightened the importance of staff development and training.

Additionally, centre directors are promoting the value of licensed, quality child care in their local communities both as a way of advertising their services and as a means of raising the profile of the ECE field. In a number of cases, these practices have been encouraged by CMSMs that prompted directors to develop marketing as a business strategy to remain viable. This was a dominant theme among centre directors, many of whom explained that in this period of transition, they have had to create awareness of the licensed childcare sector more than ever. Centre directors utilized different media such as television, community newspapers and magazines, post boards and word of mouth. Besides marketing, CMSMs noticed that some rural childcare centres are reducing their fees in order to remain competitive with the informal childcare sector. Centre directors reported the opposite, although it was a minor theme. Some childcare centre directors are increasing parents’ fees in order to maintain their centres and their capacity to attract and retain qualified staff. Clearly, without additional public funding, the
trade-offs between charging parents higher fees vs. maintaining staff salaries and some savings in a time of transition and uncertainty are very difficult. Nonetheless, there are growing concerns that both the limited number of infant/toddler spaces and increased parent fees to cover higher costs could put enormous pressure on parents by making childcare even more unaffordable for them (Friendly, 2011). CMSMs noticed that parents often resort to informal care; increasing parent fees may push some parents to the informal childcare sector.

CMSMs commented on the various actions they have undertaken to aid rural childcare centres. Collectively, they affirmed their commitment to maintaining a high-quality, and inclusive early learning and care sector throughout their local area in a time of dramatic system change. CMSMs reported giving rural childcare centres some form of financial consideration and continue to do so. In addition to providing additional funding, they have assisted centre directors by providing access to information about business planning to maintain viability. Directors acknowledged the support of CMSMs through funding and commended their CMSMs for being proactive in addressing rural issues. Several of the CMSMs reported that they included rural childcare directors on planning committees that guide a more efficient delivery of programs to children and families and were being proactive about steps to support rural programs. The inclusion of rural voices on those committees enables rural directors to voice their opinions on rural issues. On the other hand, some CMSMs reported not having any plans tailored specifically to rural childcare. Some centre directors also felt that rural issues were not considered during the implementation of FDK and are still not being considered. They opined that policies such as FDK are generally not made with the needs of rural communities in mind. In interviews, most CMSMs recognized the importance of rural childcare and commended operators’ flexibility in meeting seasonal needs and providing a unique service to the families they serve. On their part, rural centre directors are trying to maintain flexibility and take advantage of new opportunities, where it is feasible to do so. Those opportunities may include offering before and after school programs/extended day programs in some areas and/or more infant and toddler spaces, including options that are considerate of parents’ irregular schedules or seasonal fluctuations. In general, CMSMs seemed to be aware of rural issues, and also were appreciative of the difficulties many programs are facing.
6.3 Implications of this Research

The report, *With Our Best Future in Mind* identified the various roles of municipalities in the introduction of FDK, including service planning to ensure high quality service provision and support for child care services and school boards during the period of significant system change. CMSMs are expected to work with school boards to develop plans for the implementation of FDK. Similarly, CMSMs are charged with managing and resourcing Best Start Child and Family Centres to provide comprehensive programs and supports to children and families ranging from prenatal supports to nutrition counselling to early learning and care to early intervention and care (Pascal, 2009). Furthermore, municipalities are responsible for ensuring the flow of funds to school boards and Best Start Child and Family Centres. Finally, CMSMs are expected to retain responsibility for integrating programs and evaluating them (Pascal, 2009). The roles outlined in the Pascal report were articulated by CMSMs in this study, most of whom mentioned taking on broader responsibilities, developing partnerships with school boards, and supporting service providers to adapt to a different system. Most CMSMs interviewed in this study indicated that recent changes in responsibilities had increased the complexity of their work and added to their workload. Supporting rural child care operators is, thus, only one facet of their increasingly complex roles. Specific to childcare, one of the roles of the municipalities includes helping childcare operators merge with public schools. CMSMs can provide transitional funding and capital funding that will be used to restructure buildings and transform spaces. The Pascal report cites an example where a school that has a childcare centre, parenting and family literacy centre or an Ontario Early Years centre all co-located within it would merge into a Best Start Child and Family Centre providing one-stop access for children and families. Findings from the present study showed that while centre directors were cognizant of the benefits of this consolidation, it raises complex and difficult issues in rural settings. For example, co-locating with a school was not seen as an ideal fit for some centre directors who felt that the setting would not be ideal for running a childcare centre due to location, age or other factors; for that reason a stand-alone centre was preferred. Some operators of stand-alone centres were fortunate to receive funding to restructure their buildings, while others were still waiting and hoping. Privately operated (for-profit) centres reported not being able to access such resources. Original plans that envisioned additional funds to allow Best Start Child and Family Centres serving younger children to attract
and retain qualified staff have not materialized; there has been little policy development and limited new funding to support the development and viability of centres that serve more children less than four years of age. Findings from this study show that rural childcare centres have had difficulty attracting qualified ECEs to begin with and those who have intentions of raising staff wages lack sufficient funding to match what is being offered by the school board. The bottom line for centre directors is that more funding is required.

Childcare centre directors proclaimed that they are not baby sitters; they are a part of the early childhood education and care system the Ministry of Education is responsible for and should be treated as such. Supporting this claim is an explanation from the OECD that care and education are inseparable terms and that quality services for children provide both (Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada [CCAAC], 2011). Childcare directors explained that the objectives of FDK were already in place in high quality licensed centres; they had been offering an integrated program of learning and play and did not see the need for the implementation of FDK. Several directors felt that funds directed towards the school boards to implement FDK would have been better spent on the childcare system. Some directors talked about rebranding their centre names to include an early learning component while others are enlightening the community about their early learning and care programs. These directors are sensitive to perceptions that childcare is associated with just “supervision or care” for children, rather than a well-designed program that offers developmentally appropriate learning experiences, rendering it less of a priority to the Ministry of Education.

While the majority of centre directors expressed concerns over the impacts of the implementation of FDK, some centre directors seemed more optimistic and expressed less concern about it. It is important to note from the outset, that because FDK had not yet been fully implemented in a number of areas where study childcare centres are located, some had an advantage by having more time to plan. Having established that, some centre directors who had not yet been directly impacted by the introduction of FDK still expressed concern about the impending challenges they saw ahead. Responses from some of these directors indicate that they are taking a proactive approach to dealing with anticipated issues, including planning for the replacement of children who would be lost to FDK upon implementation. Others have started
promoting their centres and emphasizing the importance of licensed childcare in the community. Furthermore, a number of these directors took business resilience courses offered by the CMSM or recruited board members with financial expertise. They mentioned drawing up budgets and strategically planning ahead. Another similarity among those directors who had fewer concerns was that they all had considerable support from their CMSMs. Some directors also acknowledged being more fortunate than other centres when it came to attracting funding from the municipality.

There were also some centre directors who reported not being concerned about staffing challenges. These directors offered some sort of benefit package to their staff and were trying to stay competitive by increasing staff wages. To some directors, loyalty was important and they strove to show appreciation to their staff. These directors mentioned having lower staff turnover compared to other centre directors. One of the directors mentioned that the majority of the staff who had worked in that centre had been there for 10 to 15 years. These directors also mentioned investing in professional development and training for their staff. All centre directors that reported fewer staffing challenges had also reported improving their staff wages and offering good working conditions to staff. Not all of them offered benefits, but there were plans in place for this. Knowledge about these strategies is helpful in understanding ways to retain staff.

6.4 Recommendations

The introduction of FDK in Ontario is undoubtedly a positive initiative, especially if it achieves the goal of providing universal access to affordable, high quality early learning to all four and five year olds. Nonetheless, the childcare sector has been hugely impacted by its introduction. This study pays particular attention to the rural childcare sector which already had a struggling childcare system. Recommendations presented here were taken from the literature on how best to prevent the collapse of the childcare sector, paying specific attention to the unique circumstances that characterize rural childcare. One of the key concerns of centre directors is that while childcare and kindergarten are both under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, they are not treated equally. As was mentioned in the literature review, kindergarten is publicly funded,
while childcare is funded through parents’ fees and limited subsidies. Centre directors in this study call for equal treatment of both kindergarten programs and licensed child care services.

According to many studies, the ECEC field would benefit from a base funding model, rather than individual payments and fee subsidies for parents (Arruda & Diniz, 2012; Friendly, 2011). A publicly funded model would make access to ECEC more uniform. A “fund the program” approach as described by Friendly (2011) involves providing base funding to childcare to support the operating costs of the program. In Québec for example, a combination of public funds and a flat parent fee covers expenses related to the facility, administrative costs for a specified number of spaces, and expenses made per child per age group. Arruda & Diniz envisioned that using the “funding the program” approach, the full operating budget for a childcare program would be paid by local municipal service managers” pg. 10. Because licensed rural childcare centres face unique needs, funding that is specific to rural programs would be better used by centres to address their needs. Some directors in this study mentioned that the drop in enrollments of 4 and 5 year olds affected their centre’s viability because they would not be able to afford the increased operating costs that would result from serving mostly younger children. A base fund that covers the operating cost of rural programs will lessen the burden of financial uncertainty caused by fluctuating enrollments, which was a common theme from centre participants.

Furthermore, CMSMs can ease the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified ECEs in rural childcare centres by helping directors offer equitable wages, benefits and better working conditions. OMSSA (2012) recommends an integrated approach to ECEs’ work hours where a week of employment is split between hours in an extended day program and hours in FDK and childcare centres. This would be beneficial for the childcare sector as it would reduce the need to compete with school boards for registered ECEs who would be receiving equal wages. On the other hand, ECEs could remain in their respective programs (childcare, extended day or FDK) but receive equal hourly rates. Incentives should also be given to encourage ECEs to work in rural centres because most CMSMs and directors agree that it can be more challenging to attract and retain qualified staff in rural areas than in urban areas.
Additionally, rural childcare centres faced with fluctuating enrolments and staffing challenges in age-segregated groups can operate mixed-age groupings (Doherty, 1994). Mixed-age grouping involves providing early learning and care for a group of children of different ages (infants, toddlers, preschoolers) in the same learning space. Doherty (1994) argues that this approach would benefit childcare programs in rural areas, which compared to more populated urban areas, have fewer population of children. It is also an effective strategy for centres with insufficient budgets to hire staff to cater to separate age groups.
References


Asthana, S., & Halliday, J. (2004). What can rural agencies do to address the additional costs of rural services? A typology of rural service innovation. Health & Social Care in the Community, 12 (6), 457–465


Musson, P., Gordon, R., & Davis, A. (2012, December 18). [Memorandum to the chief administrative officers, general managers/commissioners, children’s service managers,


Appendix A: Research Description

Managing the Impacts of Full Day Kindergarten on Rural Childcare Centres in Ontario

The introduction of FDK in Ontario has generally been seen as a positive step. OMSSA called it a necessity and tendered their support towards its full implementation across Ontario by 2014. However the implementation process raises many concerns, particularly in rural communities that may be apprehensive about the impacts of FDK on already existing issues such as limited access to licensed spaces and difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified staff. It has been noted that FDK only magnifies these existing problems and may put rural programs at greater risk. Childcare has multifaceted benefits in rural communities. It enables parental employment especially for mothers; moreover appropriate childcare is a health and safety issue in rural areas. It is therefore imperative that issues related to rural childcare are critically explored.

The aims of this study are two-fold. First, we wish to learn how CMSMs are responding to recent system changes in their roles as service planners and system managers, particularly in planning for and supporting rural early learning and childcare services. Secondly, we wish to obtain rural childcare directors’ perceptions of the challenges presented by FDK and to learn how these challenges are being addressed in rural childcare centres. We also hope to learn what centre directors have found to be helpful supports to date, and what rural directors think could be done by CMSMs and the provincial government to better support rural childcare centres in terms of funding and service plans.

Skype and/or telephone interviews will be conducted with CMSMs and will include questions about how their roles as service planners and providers have been affected by the introduction of FDK and how plans for the transition to FDK have been tailored to the unique circumstances of rural communities. Similarly, interviews will be conducted with centre directors that will include questions about the impacts, if any, of FDK on their program and the strategies they are using to maintain the centres in the face of any challenges. Further, rural child care centre directors will be asked what they feel CMSMs might do to assist them and to sustain child care in rural communities.
The information obtained from this study will contribute to knowledge about the unique needs of rural childcare programs in Ontario and inform decision making at the municipal, provincial and federal levels of government.

** For further information, please contact Professor Donna Lero at dlero@uoguelph.ca or by telephone at 519 824-4120, ext. 53914.
Appendix B: Consent form for CMSMs

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY RELATIONS AND APPLIED NUTRITION
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences

April 15, 2013

Consent to Participate in Research Study

Study Title: Managing the Impacts of Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) on Rural Childcare Centres in Ontario

Dear Consolidated Municipal Service Manager:

My name is Ogochukwu Udenigwe, an M.Sc. candidate in the Department of Family Relations and Human Development at the University of Guelph. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Donna Lero on managing the effects of full day kindergarten in rural childcare centres. This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study which concerns understanding the perspectives of Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) on how their roles as service planners and providers have been affected by the introduction of FDK. As well, I am interested in understanding the involvement of CMSMs in rural affairs, particularly, the rural early learning and childcare system.

Procedure
The research will be carried out by conducting telephone interviews with CMSMs by both myself and my supervisor, Dr. Lero and would last for about 30-40 minutes. To ensure the accuracy of your input, I would ask your permission to audio record and take notes during the interview and use verbatim quotations in the results. (Quotes will not be attributed to individuals or to their CMSM.)

The interview will include questions about how your roles as service planners and providers have been affected by the introduction of FDK and the extent to which plans for the transition to FDK have been tailored to the unique circumstances of rural communities. Finally, in your capacity as municipal service
managers, I will seek your opinion of how you have responded to the needs of the childcare programs in rural communities in your region.

We will also seek your assistance in identifying two or more rural childcare centres in your municipality/service region which we can contact in order to further understand the unique challenges and strategies adapted by programs in rural areas during the period of transition to FDK.

Confidentiality
All information you provide will be considered confidential unless otherwise agreed to and the data collected will be kept in a secure location with limited access to only my supervisor and myself. The study records will be confidentially disposed of in 5 years’ time. Your name will not appear in any thesis or publications resulting from this study unless you provide express consent to be identified/acknowledged and have reviewed the thesis text and approved the use of the information.

Rights
Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. You may decline to answer any of the questions you do not wish to answer. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, simply by letting us know your decision.

Benefits
There is no direct benefit to you from your participation in this study; however, as a CMSM you play an important role in the management of the children’s services system, and your input and opinions are most valuable. The results of this study will be presented to the Ontario Municipal Social Service Association (OMSSA) and to government policy makers in order to share knowledge about the circumstances of early childhood education and child care in rural areas.

Compensation
There is no compensation for your time, but directors of rural child care programs who participate will each receive a $50 gift certificate. After the data have been analyzed, you will receive a copy of the executive summary. If you would be interested in greater detail, an electronic copy (e.g., PDF) of the entire thesis can be made available to you.

Questions
I assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research at the University of Guelph. If you have any questions regarding the use and safety of human subjects in this research study please contact Sandra Auld, University of Guelph Research Ethics Officer, 519-824-4120, ext. 56606, sauil@uoguelph.ca. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr Donna Lero at 1-519-824-4120 ext. 53914 or by email to dlero@uoguelph.ca.

CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below and return to dlero@uoguelph.ca or fax to (519) 766-0691 within the next few days.

____________________________
Participant’s Name (please print)

____________________________   ______________
Participant’s Signature   Date
Appendix C: Consent Form for Centre Directors

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY RELATIONS AND APPLIED NUTRITION
College of Social and Applied Human Sciences

May 20, 2013

Consent to Participate in Research Study

Study Title: Managing the Impacts of Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) on Rural Childcare Centres in Ontario

Dear Center Director/Supervisor:

My name is Ogochukwu Udenigwe, an M.Sc. candidate in the Department of Family Relations and Human Development at the University of Guelph. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Donna Lero on managing the effects of full day kindergarten in rural childcare centres. This letter is an invitation to participate in a research study which concerns understanding directors’ perceptions of the challenges presented by FDK and to learn how these challenges are being addressed in rural childcare centres. We also hope to learn what centre directors have found to be helpful supports to date, and what rural directors think could be done by CMSMs and the provincial government to better support rural childcare centres in terms of funding and service plans.

Procedure
The research will be carried out by conducting telephone interviews with Centre Directors by both myself and my supervisor, Dr. Lero and would last for about 30-40 minutes. To ensure the accuracy of your input, I would ask your permission to audio record and take notes during the interview and use verbatim quotations in the results. (Quotes will not be attributed to individuals or to their CMSM.)

The interview questions will include questions about the impact, if any, of FDK on your program and the strategies used to maintain the centres in the face of any challenges. Furthermore, there will be questions regarding your perceptions on the responsiveness of CMSMs and appropriate improvements, if any.
Confidentiality
All information you provide will be considered confidential and the data collected will be kept in a secure location with limited access to only my supervisor and myself. The study records will be confidentially disposed of in 5 years’ time. Your name will not appear in any thesis or publications resulting from this study unless you provide express consent to be identified/acknowledged and have reviewed the thesis text and approved the use of the information.

Rights
Participation in the interview is entirely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to participation in this study. You may decline to answer any of the questions you do not wish to answer. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time, without any negative consequences, simply by letting us know your decision.

Benefits
There is no direct benefit to you from your participation in this study; however, as a Center Director/Supervisor you play an important role in the provision of early childhood education and care, and your input and opinions are most valuable. The results of this study will be presented to the Ontario Municipal Social Service Association (OMSSA) and to government policy makers in order to share knowledge about the circumstances of early childhood education and child care in rural areas.

Compensation
Directors of rural child care programs who participate will each receive a $50 gift certificate. After the data have been analyzed, you will receive a copy of the executive summary. If you would be interested in greater detail, an electronic copy (e.g., PDF) of the entire thesis can be made available to you.

Questions
I assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research at the University of Guelph. If you have any questions regarding the use and safety of human subjects in this research study please contact Sandra Auld, University of Guelph Research Ethics Officer, 519-824-4120, ext. 56606, or at sauld@uoguelph.ca. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr Donna Lero at 1-519-824-4120 ext. 53914 or by email to dlero@uoguelph.ca.

*******************************************************************
CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below, then scan and return to dlero@uoguelph.ca or fax to (519) 766-0691 within the next few days.

____________________________________
Participant's Name (please print)

____________________________________   ______
Participant's Signature                    Date
Appendix D: Questions for Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM)

1. How has your role as service planners and providers have been affected by the introduction of FDK?

2. The recent OMSSA report (*Moving forward, hand in hand*) explains that OMSSA supports the transition to Full Day Kindergarten across Ontario. To what extent have implementation plans been made and/or tailored to rural communities in your area?

3. What have you learned are the implications of the transition to FDK in rural childcare centres? How do they differ (if at all) from their urban counterparts? What specific impacts have you observed so far (positive and negative)?

4. Considering the transition to FDK, what adaptive strategies have you seen in rural communities?

5. Please comment on any specific actions your CMSM has undertaken or is planning to take to aid rural childcare centres and rural communities in the near future.
Appendix E: Questions for Centre Directors/Supervisors

1. Please provide a brief description of your childcare centre(s) in terms of:
   Number of children; Age range/age groups
   Number of staff
   Location - stand alone? In or near a school? Co-located with other services?
   Operation – Privately owned? Non-profit? Municipally operated?
   How long it has been in operation?

2. What do you consider to be the three most pressing problems facing your childcare centre in the past year?

3. To what extent has FDK been implemented in your region?

4. Has the implementation or anticipated implementation of FDK impacted your program in any way?

5. Have you experienced the following in the past year or do you anticipate the following in the next year:
   a. A change in enrolment patterns? (more or fewer children, more infants and toddlers/fewer children age 4 or 5)
   b. A change in staffing patterns?
   c. Challenges recruiting or retaining early childhood educators
   d. Closing rooms in your centre?
   e. Combining with another centre or moving to a school?
   f. A change in ownership at your centre?
   g. Starting to offer extended care at a local school

6. What (other) strategies have you used (or expect to use) to maintain the centre in the face of the challenges related to the implementation of FDK and system change in child care?
   a. What strategies have you adopted to increase centre viability?
b. What strategies (if any) have you adopted or are considering to address staffing challenges?

7. In your opinion, how has your municipal/regional government responded to the implementation of FDK?
   a. Do you feel there has been any response that has been specific to the rural communities?
   b. Do you think they could be doing more to respond to your needs and/or to the needs of child care in rural communities?
### Appendix F: Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAP</td>
<td>Canada Assistance Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMSMS</td>
<td>Consolidated Municipal Service Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSSABS</td>
<td>District Social Service Administration Boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Educators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECEC</td>
<td>Early Childhood Education And Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELCC</td>
<td>Early Learning And Child Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDK</td>
<td>Full Day Kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OMSSA</td>
<td>Ontario Municipal Social Service Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROMA</td>
<td>Rural Ontario Municipal Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIF</td>
<td>Vanier Institute Of The Family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>