

## **PEI Child: A Digital Learning Commons for Early Child Professionals**

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### Background

The [PEI Child](#) site is a digital learning commons developed by the Research in Early Child Development (RECD) Initiative research team in partnership with the [PEI Children’s Secretariat \(PEI CS\)](#). The PEI CS is a group of community and government representatives working across sectors, communities, and departments as a collective voice to improve outcomes for children up to age eight. It is a "network of networks" that links with other existing networks and coalitions who are working on behalf of young children and their families. The PEI Child site was originally proposed as a space for early childhood development (ECD) professionals to learn, discuss, and collaborate via a digital commons—an online collaborative learning space. In this commons, early childhood development professionals could find current research on topics in their field, engage in conversations with other professionals, and access tools to help them further their work and broaden their expertise.

The PEI Children’s Secretariat initiated discussion on the need for PEI Child based on feedback and existing needs of their network members, and requested that the RECD implement this project. Subsequently, work began in July 2009 with the addition of the site’s project manager/developer to the RECD team.

### PEI Child Objectives

Consultations with the PEI CS were held prior to designing the site to:

- a) identify the needs of the groups, networks, and organizations that have an impact on early childhood development in PEI; and
- b) propose a digital media approach to addressing these needs.

It was determined that the primary audience should be early childhood professionals. This group would include educators, students, researchers, networks, and the PEI CS. The site would not aim to provide services for the general public given the broad scope of this type of development, although parents would have limited access to relevant content. Additionally, there was an understanding that the purpose of the site was to communicate the RECD framework (2009) and to develop community tools to learn, share, collect, inform, and collaborate.

### Site Process & Implementation

The process of conceptualizing and designing such a collaborative online learning space is not an easy one. The following processes outlines a few of the steps undertaken to ensure that PEI

Child met the needs of its stakeholders and maintained a professional design/implementation schedule.

- In the early stages of development, a needs chart was designed—the chart details the layers (groups, networks, and organizations) that have an impact on ECD in Prince Edward Island and their core needs as they relate individually and as a community (Appendix A).
- A site map (Appendix B) and wireframe (Appendix C) were designed to help visualize the site—the site-map illustrated the basic organization and user pathways through the proposed site.
- User feedback and testing began in December 2009 after the prototype of the site was completed. The prototype met the bulk of the requirements, with the exception of the searchable RSS feeds which was moved to a future phase due to technological hurdles.



### Site Features

The site is based on a Web 2.0 model with “interactive information sharing, interoperability, user-centered design, and collaboration” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web\\_2.0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0)). The front page of the site reveals various conversations that are happening online, displays up-to-date feeds from various ECD journals and news sources, and provides group meeting spaces and tools for members wishing to learn and collaborate on the site. A small, interactive multimedia movie highlights the RECD concept of “the child” and allows the user to explore the layers of influence.

The online learning commons offers community tools to learn, share, collect, inform, and collaborate. Originally, these tools were organized into three main content sections: Learn, Discuss, and Collaborate. These sections later evolved into: Research, Projects, and Community.

**Research:** This section features the knowledge translation suite with e-learning posts and links, screencasts, webinars, and podcasts. It also includes advanced search tools, a list of reviewed third party research tools and links to help conduct, facilitate, organize, and communicate research.

**Projects:** This section houses information on ECD projects, mapping projects, and reports, and offers a detailed understanding of research methodologies and practices.

**Community:** This section features community tools such as an events calendar, network and project profiles, online forums, and access to tools for project management, communication, and visualization.

In addition to these core sections, the site intends to provide intelligent, searchable journal and news RSS feeds, a subscription-based monthly newsletter, a real-time twitter feed, content sharing widgets and an easy-to-use administration interface for content authors and editors to keep the site content fresh and up-to-date.

### Training for PEI Child

Two training sessions on using the PEI Child site were conducted for members of the PEI CS at the start of 2010. The first was a full-team session held during the last week in January. It covered basic tasks such as creating an event and a forum post. The second session, attended by two members of the PEI CS, was held the first week in February and covered some of the more advanced tasks, as well as administrative tasks that would enable them to manage users and groups, as well as content.

These sessions were met with positive reactions from the attendees, who provided valuable feedback, as well as validation, on the design and content of the site. From observing and listening to the members of the PEI CS, it was evident that future one-on-one training sessions would be key to enabling users to become comfortable with the site and to developing a firm understanding of where the site's online processes and functionality fit with the organization's offline processes and functionality.

### Next Steps: Phase II

With further development in a resting state, it is down to the members of the Children's Secretariat and ECD researchers and networks to start using the site. The move to Alpha 1.0 is based on funding and adoption of the site as a tool that can help ECD professionals in their daily work.

In anticipation of the continuation of the project into Alpha 1.0, the RECD team has developed a set of functional requirements for this next phase. These, in combination with feedback from end-users and stakeholders, would drive the second phase of the PEI Child project.

### Functional Requirements for PEI Child: Alpha 1.0

#### *News & Journal Feeds*

- Offer searchable feeds

- Allow users to save and categorize their content in a “My Favourites” folder
- Migrate to a more intelligent and user-friendly RSS aggregator technology

#### *Calendar*

- Improved integration of the calendar
- Enable group-specific calendars

#### *Forums*

- Enable more advanced moderation on forums
- Enable notification of new content added to thread

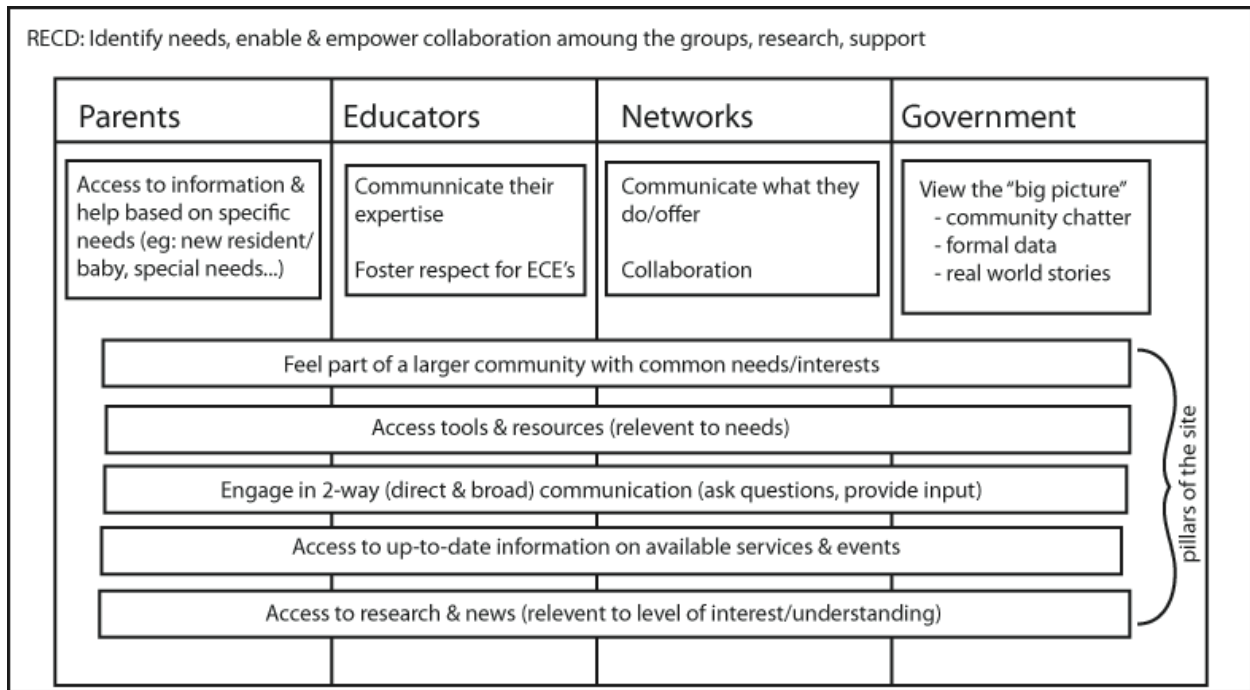
#### *Enhanced Collaboration*

- Ability to manage projects, chat and send messages within the site



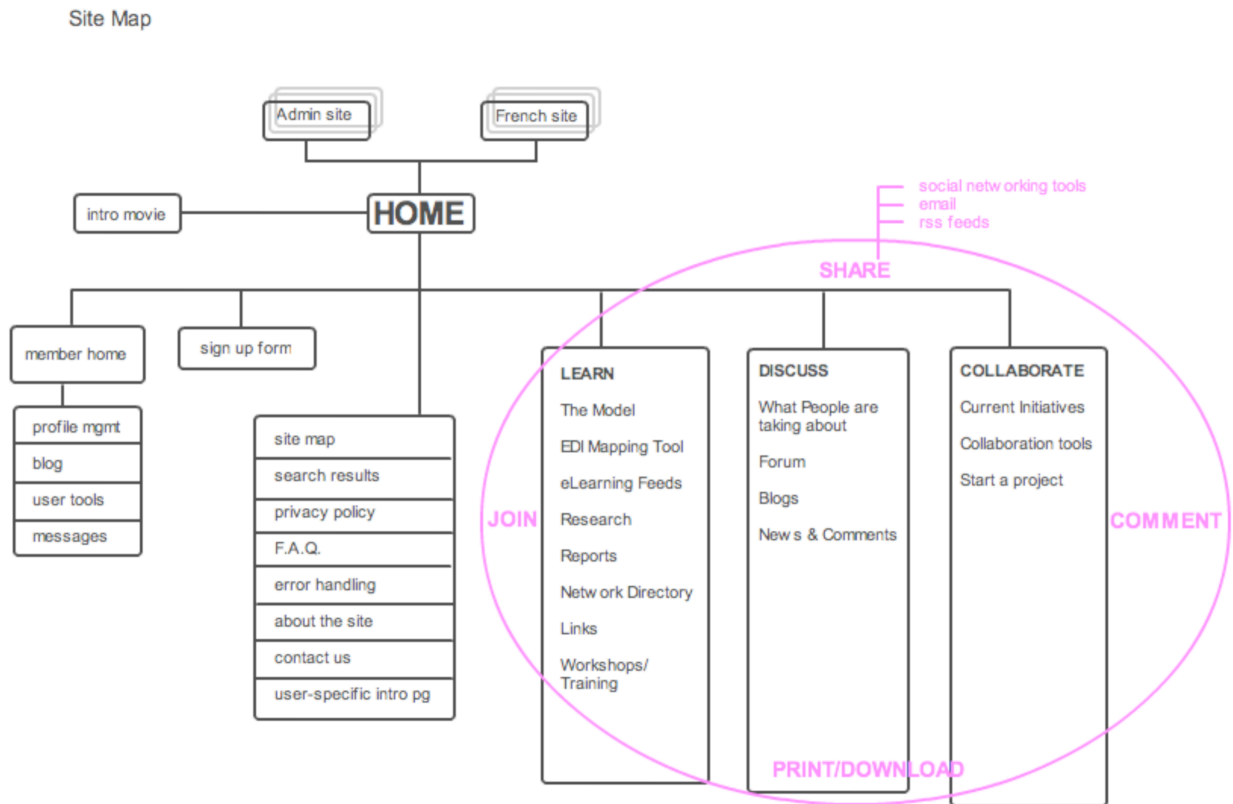
## Appendix A

### Needs Chart for PEI Child



## Appendix B

### Site Map for PEI Child



## Appendix C

### Wireframe for PEI Child

