

Stronger Together

Toward More Literate Communities



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Executive Summary

Purpose

In 2009, Dr. Charles Pascal released *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, which revolutionized the way we think about early development. It outlined an evidence-based vision and specific program recommendations designed to significantly support the physical and mental development of Ontario's children, with an emphasis on early literacy.

Stronger Together: Toward More Literate Communities acknowledges that innovative work and broadens the conversation to recognize the connections between adult literacy and children's literacy within a society, toward more literate communities. It starts by describing the family literacy environment in Ontario including service providers, programming and policy frameworks. Then gaps and opportunities to provide more progressive, effective and coordinated services are suggested, including the call for more Canadian data regarding the possible correlations between factors such as parents' educational achievement and involvement with their children's literacy development and success at school. Furthermore, common elements of effective programs, as well as the outcomes they should strive to achieve and measure are described. With these ideas in mind, significant intergenerational family literacy programs are highlighted from Hamilton (Ontario, Canada), the United States and the United Kingdom.

This report presents the research findings of a project led by Essential Skills Ontario and funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES), Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC).

Background

Family literacy refers to the development and use of literacy skills in a family's daily life, including how families: use literacy in their everyday tasks; help their children develop literacy skills; get involved in their children's education; and use literacy to maintain relationships with each other and with their communities. Family literacy programs provide meaningful opportunities for children, their parents/caregivers, and other family members to learn and grow together.

Since forming the Action for Family Literacy Ontario (AFLO) Working Group in 2003, Essential Skills Ontario (formerly Ontario Literacy Coalition) has engaged in a number of family literacy initiatives and research activities. The research by Essential Skills Ontario identified a number of findings, including:

- A need for more engaged partnerships between family literacy programs, and relevant community and government services.
- A need for more streamlined information and referral systems between programs, services and funders of early and adult literacy services.
- A need for more coordinated policies and funding.

Essential Skills Ontario recognizes that to address these issues, strategic engagement is required at a cross-ministerial level to better develop coordinated policy-making. This recognition was the impetus for this project.

Research Objectives

The following were key objectives of the project:

1. To identify gaps and opportunities for a more coordinated and integrated policy mandate for family literacy in Ontario.
2. To identify and describe promising approaches to an integrated family literacy system.

Methodology

To address these objectives, there were three main research activities: an environmental scan of existing family literacy programs; consultations with early years program providers and other experts; and a review of the scholarly research literature on the effectiveness of early and family literacy programs.

Findings

Describing Family Literacy Programs

The learning and teaching approach of a learning program has implications for the program's dimensions. The following are three key dimensions of family literacy programs:

1. How learning is conceptualized

- The key distinction is whether the program conceives of learning as *directly increasing literacy skill levels* (instructivist), or whether learning means *becoming increasingly familiar and comfortable with initiating and participating in literacy-enhancing activities in daily life* (constructivist).
- Family literacy programs generally adopt the latter conceptualization and focus on facilitating the emergence of knowledge and skills that support literacy acquisition, not on achieving prescribed learning standards.

2. The target audience

- There are two key distinctions with respect to target audience. The first relates to the target of the instruction. The second relates to the target audience in terms of intended outcomes. The target audience for family literacy programs can range from either the child only to both the child and the parent/caregiver learning for their own literacy development.
- In general, family literacy programs in Ontario target both parent and child for instruction, but the main target of intended outcomes is the child. Parents are engaged for the purpose of encouraging the literacy development of their child.

3. The pedagogical approach

- The pre-primary tradition and the social pedagogy tradition are the two broad categories of pedagogical traditions in education. The pre-primary tradition is focused on preparing children for school and learning goals are based on achieving competence levels deemed requisite for success in primary school (instructivist). The social pedagogy tradition is more focused on broad developmental goals and learning as well as ensuring quality of life, emphasizing holistic programming (constructivist).

- Most family literacy programs in Ontario appear to take an informal, somewhat structured approach to learning, whereby children and parents “learn by doing”, with some direct instruction from program administrators. Children often initiate and direct their own learning (instructivist, social pedagogical). Many child and family programs adopt an embedded and holistic approach to learning that often includes a wide variety of themes, from family literacy and numeracy to nutrition and personal hygiene.

Family Literacy in the Ontario Context: Providers, Programs and Policy Frameworks

As shown in the table below, there are four main categories of family literacy program providers in Ontario. Each provider is associated with a different funding source and policy framework. The four main providers are Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs), Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs), public libraries, and other community-based organizations.

Four Types of Family Literacy Program Providers in Ontario

Providers	Funding Source	Policy Framework
Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs)	Ministry of Children and Youth Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Start
Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs)	Ministry of Education (MEdu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and Numeracy • Best Start • Poverty Reduction
Public Libraries	Ministry of Culture via provincial library organizations, municipalities or public library boards. Other funding sources: municipal governments, private sector, library foundations, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vibrant Liveable Communities • Various others (depending on funding source)
Community-based Organizations	Municipal governments, provincial grants, federal grants, private sector, foundations, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Development (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada or HRSDC) • Literacy and Essential Skills (HRSDC) • Settlement (Citizenship and Immigration Canada) • Community Action Program for Children (Public Health Agency Canada) • Parents Reaching Out (MEdu) • Newcomer Settlement (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration) • Various regional/municipal policies

Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs)

offer a range of programs and activities for children and parents/ caregivers. Literacy and numeracy learning is intended to be embedded in the centre environment and in most centre activities. Most programs offered by OEYCs involve parent-child interaction. Children and parents are targeted for the purpose of learning literacy-enhancing strategies to be applied on the child. The centres offer a variety of programs that range in terms of their pedagogical approach. Some programming is more structured and formal, and may follow a learning plan that spans 4 to 10 weeks. Other activities are less structured and are more child-initiated and directed.

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs)

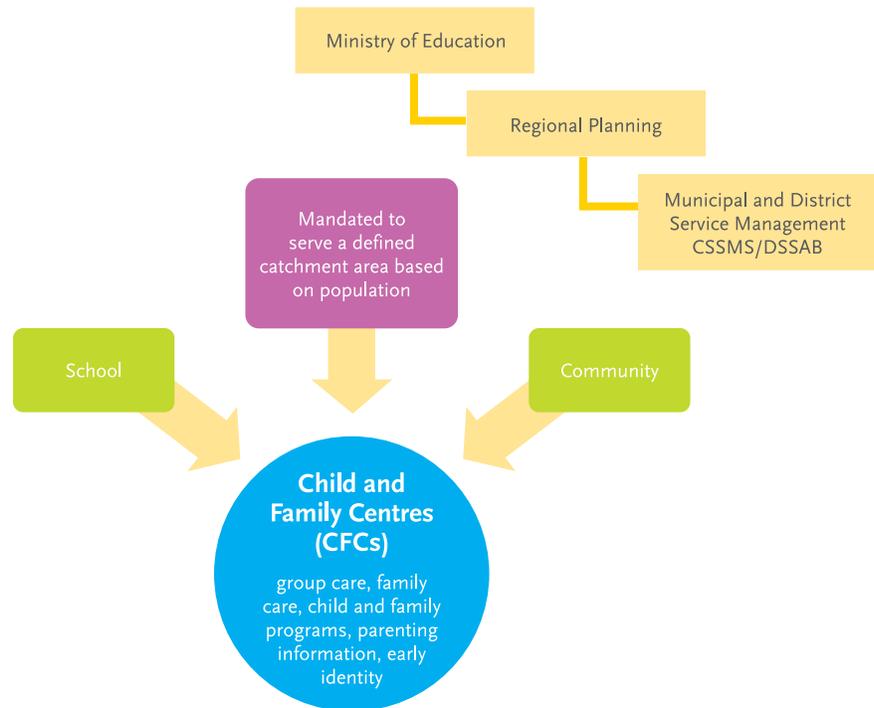
are school-based programs that operate for 20 hours a week, during the school day. They are located in urban high-needs neighbourhoods, however any family is eligible to access PFLC programs. PFLCs aim to foster a rich, flexible and barrier-free learning environment for children and their families. All

Child and Family Centres' Full Service Program Approach

activities are drop-in (there is never pre-registration), play-based, child-initiated and child-directed.

Public Libraries often offer reading and rhyming circles in which children and parents participate together in informal activities that involve little direct instruction from library staff.

Community-based Organizations refer to local agencies offering family literacy programs that receive grant funding from a variety of sources, such as the federal government, the provincial government, foundations, corporate donors, and private donations. These programs vary in their approaches to learning and teaching.



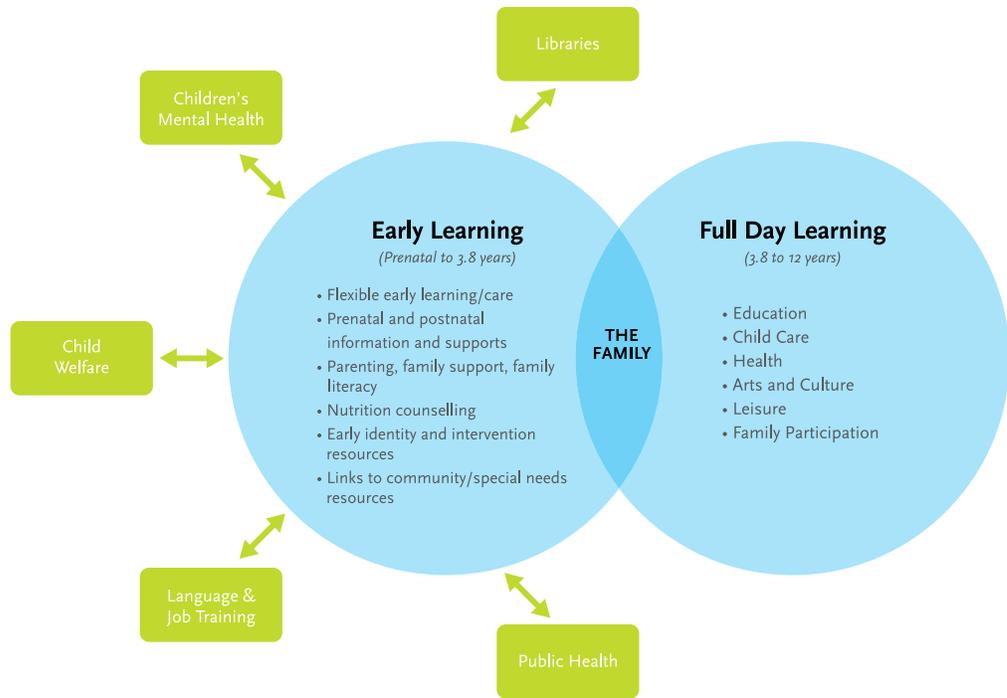
Gaps, Opportunities and A Promising Approach for Community-driven Family Services

Consultations with some providers from Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) and Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) revealed gaps in family literacy program provision in some regions. These gaps relate to coordination and integration with other early learning programs, and in addressing the literacy and essential skills needs of parents/caregivers. Meanwhile, the shift to an integrated network of community-driven and community-centred Child and Family Centres (CFCs) was recommended by Dr. Charles Pascal's 2009 Report to the Premier. The shift to this new delivery model would entail a consolidation and re-engineering of resources, governance and mandates of existing child care, family resource and early intervention services. This presents a major opportunity for strategic engagement in achieving a more cohesive family literacy policy mandate.

The City of Hamilton's Best Start Network has been working since 2006 to make Hamilton the "best place to raise a child". Their holistic approach to serving families in a community-driven manner provides a promising approach to an integrated and coordinated system of supports. The diagram on the following page depicts the model.

More information is required in order to obtain a better picture of the implications of this transition to the family literacy agenda. Further research could address the following questions: What would be the nature of family literacy programs in Child and Family Centres (CFCs)? Is there scope for coordinating and integrating with other community-based programs? How will the literacy needs of parents/caregivers be addressed by this new system of family supports? Are we maximizing opportunities to lever parent/caregiver involvement in their child's development as an avenue to engaging families in lifelong learning?

The Hamilton Early Years Model—
A Holistic Approach to Child and Family Support



Evidence from the Broader Research on the Societal Benefits of Family Learning Programs

Although there is very little rigorous research focusing specifically on family literacy programs that are intergenerational in nature, existing research points to the effectiveness of well-designed early learning interventions. As the much cited Perry Preschool evaluation suggests, (see Small-scale Programs on page 35 of this report) benefits may be broad and long-lasting and, when impacts at a societal level are considered, deliver a return on investment that is above the historical return to equity. In addition, the research highlights the critical role of parental engagement and demonstrates that interventions have the potential to improve the quality of this engagement. The research also shows that the more disadvantaged a family might be, the more barriers the parents are likely to face in supporting their child’s early learning and development. Complementary research shows that parents’ socio-economic circumstances have a direct effect on children’s outcomes. Taken together, this research provides strong motivation for thinking strategically about the integration of services for children and parents, and more broadly about assessing the value of their collective impact at community and societal levels.

Research found that:

- Parental/caregiver engagement plays a critical role in their children’s outcomes and effective interventions can improve the quality of this engagement;
- The more disadvantaged a family might be, the more barriers the parents/caregivers are likely to face in supporting their children’s early learning and development; and
- Parents’ socio-economic circumstances have a direct effect on their children’s outcomes

Looking Forward

We are left with some critical questions as we look to cultivate communities that are more literate: What does a parent specifically do that causes their child to adapt an attitude and the skills necessary for lifelong learning? And what longitudinal impacts does parental involvement have on their children’s socio-economic outcomes when they in turn become parents?

The intergenerational cycle of literacy needs to be considered in the broader context of societal well-being, and more statistically-valid research must inform our understanding of the connections between adults and their children’s literacy. Some may suggest that this is a difficult task, but other jurisdictions are engaged in longer-term cohort studies to begin analyzing the connections. *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* just released its first report of data collected about two cohorts of over 4,300 children aged 0 to 9 years per cohort, in three waves (every two years), which commenced in 2004. This information and data is helping to guide public policy across numerous government ministries, particularly as it relates to service delivery reform and the impacts of educational services to families. Ontario would benefit from a similar analysis.

Introduction

Purpose

In 2009, Dr. Charles Pascal released *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, which revolutionized the way we think about early development. It outlined an evidence-based vision and specific program recommendations designed to significantly support the physical and mental development of Ontario's children, with an emphasis on early literacy.

Stronger Together: Toward More Literate Communities acknowledges that innovative work and broadens the conversation to recognize the connections between adult literacy and children's literacy within a society, toward more literate communities. It starts by describing the family literacy environment in Ontario including service providers, programming and policy frameworks. Then gaps and opportunities to provide more progressive, effective and coordinated services are suggested. This includes the call for more Canadian data regarding the possible correlations between factors such as parents' educational achievement and involvement with their children's literacy development and success at school. Furthermore, common elements of effective programs, as well as the outcomes they should strive to achieve and measure are described. With these ideas in mind, significant intergenerational family literacy programs are highlighted from Hamilton (Ontario, Canada), the United States and the United Kingdom.

This report presents the research findings of a project led by Essential Skills Ontario and funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES), Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). The research component of the project was conducted by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) and was focused on the following objectives:

1. To identify gaps and opportunities for a more coordinated and integrated policy mandate for family literacy in Ontario.
2. To identify and describe promising approaches to an integrated family literacy system.

Background

Previous Research on Family Literacy

Family literacy refers to the development and use of literacy skills in a family's daily life, including how families: use literacy in their everyday tasks; help their children develop literacy skills; get involved in their children's education; and use literacy to maintain relationships with each other and with their communities. Family literacy programs start from the premise that the skills, knowledge and attitudes of adult family members are powerful influences on children's emergent literacy and school success and promote the development of closer, stronger relationships within families.

In response to growing awareness of the importance of family literacy, in 2002 Essential Skills Ontario (formerly Ontario Literacy Coalition) hosted a symposium entitled *Family Literacy Matters!* At the symposium, delegates charged the organization with setting up a provincial working group that would develop a vision for family literacy and initiate provincial action. As a response, the Action for Family Literacy Ontario (AFLO) Working Group was launched in 2003. AFLO's mandate is to work with family literacy stakeholders and lay the foundation needed to move the field forward.

Since AFLO was formed, Essential Skills Ontario has engaged in a number of initiatives including *Models of Best Practices for Integrated Family Literacy Programming* project, which explored models of intergenerational literacy programs. The goal was to identify models of practice that integrate adult literacy and children's literacy development and which could be promoted across the province. A key finding was that family literacy programs in Ontario often suffer from fragmented policies and a lack of consistent, ongoing funding and recognition.

Essential Skills Ontario identified a need for more engaged partnerships between family literacy programs and relevant community, public, and government services. Given the fragmented nature of family literacy programming in Ontario and the myriad of funding sources, we recognize that strategic engagement is required at a cross-ministerial level to better develop coordinated policy-making. The need for this strategic engagement was the impetus for this project.

The Family Literacy Policy Context in Ontario

Recent policy developments in Ontario may present an opportunity for family literacy programs to achieve a more cohesive and visible policy mandate at the provincial level. In 2004, motivated by a vision to make Ontario an international leader in achieving the social, intellectual, economic, physical and emotional potential of all its children, the Government of Ontario launched the Best Start Strategy.

Best Start aims to coordinate programs and services for young children into a coherent, responsive system (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning 2007). In 2007, the premier asked Dr. Charles Pascal to make recommendations on how to better realize Ontario's early childhood vision. In the 2009 Report to the Premier entitled *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, Dr. Pascal recommended an innovative approach that would create an integrated continuum of early learning, childcare and family supports for children from the prenatal period to adolescence. This approach would include a transition to full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds, as well as the creation of an integrated network of locally-managed Best Start Child and Family Centres (CFCs). CFCs would offer parents/caregivers a one-stop shop of programs and supports for their child's early development, including early literacy (Pascal 2009).

This may have significant implications for the family literacy policy and program landscape, as the shift to this new delivery model would entail a consolidation and re-engineering of resources, governance and mandates of existing early years programs. A re-thinking of the current system should precede the implementation of the Best Start Child and Family Centres, which may provide a prime opportunity for Essential Skills Ontario in terms of strategic engagement for the realization of a more cohesive and visible policy mandate for family literacy in Ontario.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

There were two key overarching research objectives of the project, as follows:

- 1. To identify gaps and opportunities for a more coordinated and integrated policy mandate for family literacy in Ontario.** Are there gaps in services and efficiency? Are there opportunities for creating information and referral systems that could move toward a culture of coordinated and integrated policy and program planning? What scope is there to achieve a more integrated and comprehensive approach to family literacy programming through the Best Start Child and Family Centre (CFC) initiative?

2. To identify and describe promising approaches to an integrated family literacy system. What are the most promising approaches to family literacy and what can we learn from these approaches? What is the evidence on the benefits of family learning programs? What are the impacts of high-quality, small-scale programs that target those most at-risk, and how do they compare to impacts found when programs are scaled up? How do the impacts translate into returns on investment? Is there an opportunity to lever parent/caregiver involvement in their child’s development as an avenue to engaging families in lifelong learning?

Methodology

Researchers engaged in three broad activities, as described below.

Environmental Scan

The environmental scan examined existing reports and other publicly available information sources with the purpose of mapping out the current systems of family literacy programs in Ontario. What is the current policy context related to family literacy in Ontario? What are the major programs, and what are the funding streams and policy frameworks underlying these programs? How is family literacy conceptualized in these programs and to what extent are programs coordinated and integrated?

To gather additional information and to fill in some of the knowledge gaps identified in the environmental scan, researchers attended the *2010 Summer Institute on Early Child Development*. The Summer Institute is a major educational event on early child development policy and practice that brings together educators, family practitioners and researchers for a forum on new ways of supporting children and families. The forum provided information on Ontario's Best Start initiative and as well as further details on policy development for the Best Start Child and Family Centres (CFCs).

Consultations with Providers and Advisors

To generate a deeper understanding of existing gaps and opportunities and to identify promising approaches, a range of practitioners and other experts were consulted. We interviewed approximately 20 participants in three broad categories of key informants: early childhood program providers, members of the community-based adult and family literacy network, and early learning advisors.

Literature Review

A review of the broader scholarly research on the effectiveness of family learning interventions in North America and the United Kingdom was conducted. In addition to children's cognitive outcomes, the review considered evidence on non-cognitive outcomes as well as a broad range of wider impacts.

The Findings

The findings are organized into four parts. First, family literacy programs are described using a number of dimensions. Next the analysis narrows to the specific context of Ontario and presents an overview of family literacy providers, programs, and policy frameworks within the province. Then gaps and opportunities for achieving an integrated family literacy system are identified. Finally evidence from the broader research on the outcomes of family learning programs is presented, highlighting the critical role that parents/caregivers play.

Describing Family Literacy Programs

About this Section

In this section we explore how family literacy programs approach learning and teaching. We discuss the most common categorization of learning and teaching approaches—instructivism and constructivism—and consider how these approaches have different implications for three key dimensions of family literacy programs: how learning is conceptualized; the target audience and the pedagogical approach.

This type of analysis is important, given the broad and often contested definitions of what constitutes or counts as a family literacy program. In addition, this analysis may provide a starting point for connecting existing literature and perspectives on family literacy to the current and visible Ontario Early Years framework. An understanding of these dimensions is useful for our later discussion of providers, programs and policies in Ontario.

Instructivism versus Constructivism

A program’s approach to teaching is based on underlying assumptions about how learning occurs. The approach taken will have implications for key features of the program such as the learning goals, curriculum, the classroom environment and the method of instruction. A common categorization of teaching approaches in the education literature is into one of either of two camps: instructivism (also known as objectivism) or constructivism (Brown 2009).

In the instructivist conception, knowledge is the objective and the teacher/instructor imparts given

(or objective) knowledge. Instructivism can be seen explicitly in instructional design models, in which the objectively existing knowledge (the instructional materials) serves as a stimulus for learning. In contrast, constructivism conceives learning not as the transmission of knowledge but rather the construction of meaning, where teaching provides the facilitation of this process (Brown 2009). Table 1 shows how the two approaches have different implications for key features of early learning programs, including family literacy programs. Our environmental scan found that most family literacy programs are largely constructivist in their approach.

TABLE 1:
A Comparison of Key Features of Objectivist/Instructivist and Constructivist Approaches

Source: Adapted from Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007, *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A Framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings*, Ministry of Children and Youth Services

Instructivist Approach	Constructivist Approach
Teacher initiated/directed	Child-initiated
Teacher-centred	Child-centred
Didactic/traditional	Play-based, progressive
Basic academic skills	Personal/social development
Product oriented	Process oriented
Formal/Structured	Informal/Emergent
Teacher imparts core knowledge	Children construct their own knowledge



The Concept of Learning in Family Literacy Programs

When considering family literacy programs, it is important to understand how a particular program conceptualizes learning – that is, what is considered to be ‘learning’ in the context of the program? There are two main ways in which a literacy program may conceive of learning. The distinction is whether the program conceives of learning as directly increasing literacy skills as measured by standard assessments and benchmarked against IALS levels, or whether learning means becoming increasingly familiar and comfortable with initiating and participating in literacy-enhancing activities in daily life (see Figure 1). The former conceptualization is product-oriented and therefore is aligned with the instructivist approach to learning. The latter conceptualization corresponds with the constructivist approach since it is more process-oriented and more focused on broad orientations than achieving prescribed outcomes.

FIGURE 1: Two Conceptualizations of Family Learning

Learning to participate
in literacy enhancing
activities with your child

Learning to directly increase
literacy skills level

Although publicly available information about family literacy programs does not explicitly describe how learning is conceptualized, our consultations with early years providers thus far indicate that family learning is usually conceptualized as the process by which parents and children become increasingly familiar and comfortable with initiating and participating in literacy-enhancing activities in their daily lives. The focus is generally on facilitating the emergence of knowledge and skills that support literacy acquisition, rather than on achieving prescribed learning standards.

Target Audience

Family literacy programs are characterized by their inclusion of both parent/caregiver and child, but a program’s target audience may vary from one program to another. There are two key distinctions with respect to target audience. The first relates to the target of the instructional content and materials. The second relates to the target audience in terms of intended program outcomes. Previous research has found that family literacy programs differ significantly in terms of who is considered the primary target audience in both respects. For instance, as Table 2 illustrates, some programs aim to facilitate literacy development in children only, while others aim to support literacy development in both children and parents/caregivers as learners in their own right. Programs that target both adult and child for literacy development are referred to as ‘intergenerational’ programs.

In programs where only the child’s literacy development is the intended outcome, instruction may be targeted to parents/caregivers, children or both. Programs may focus on the child alone as the receiver of knowledge and skills while parents/caregivers simply supervise, or they may focus on and work with the whole family. A family literacy program’s target audience for instruction is very much related to the pedagogical approach adopted. There are two broad pedagogical traditions: the pre-primary tradition (school

readiness) and the social pedagogy tradition. The pre-primary tradition is more traditional and didactic, and the child is the sole focus of learning. The social pedagogy tradition is less traditional, while child-centred focuses on and works with the whole family to achieve broad developmental goals for the child. We discuss these traditions in further detail in the next section.

Although to varying degrees, parents/caregivers are often a target of instruction in family literacy programs due to the widespread belief among family literacy advocates that the skills, knowledge and attitudes of adult family members are powerful influences on children’s emergent literacy and school success, and that parental involvement promotes the development of stronger family relationships. Therefore programming is often also directed to parents/caregivers to foster positive attitudes and practices among them which in turn is anticipated to positively influence the child’s literacy development process. In this sense, family literacy programs are inherently more aligned with the social pedagogical tradition.

Pedagogical Approach

Pedagogy refers to the method of teaching or instruction. According to John Bennett (2004), the two traditions described above—the pre-primary tradition and the social pedagogy tradition—are the two broad categories of pedagogical traditions commonly referred to in the education literature.

TABLE 2: Target Audience of Family Literacy Programs

Child only	Parent/caregiver involved in their child’s literacy		Parent engaged as adult learner
Parent/Caregiver	Child	Parent/Caregiver & Child	Intergenerational
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learns how to enhance child’s early literacy (Child does not participate) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates to enhance own early literacy (Parent/caregiver does not participate) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both participate together to enhance child’s early literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both participate together to each enhance own literacy

The pre-primary tradition is usually associated with the instructivist approach to teaching and learning, while the social pedagogy tradition is usually associated with the constructivist approach. As the name suggests, the pre-primary tradition is focused on preparing children for school, and learning goals are based on achieving competence levels deemed requisite for success in primary school. The social pedagogy tradition is less

concerned about achieving specific academic achievements and more focused on broad developmental goals and learning (see Table 3). It is important to understand, however, that the instructivist-constructivist and pre-primary-social pedagogy distinctions are ideals, and that in practice early learning programs will often incorporate aspects of both approaches and traditions.

TABLE 3: A Comparison of the Pre-primary Tradition and the Social Pedagogy Tradition

Feature	Pre-Primary Tradition	Social Pedagogy Tradition
The Early Childhood Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place for learning and instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viewed as a life space in which children, teachers, parents/caregivers learn together
Focus of Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning and skills, especially in areas useful for school readiness • Achieving detailed curriculum goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The whole child and his/her family • Achieving broad developmental goals and promoting a high quality of life
Pedagogical Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A mix of instruction, child-initiated activities and thematic work, generally managed by the teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence placed in the child's own learning strategies and areas of interest • Learning through relationships, play, and appropriate educator scaffolding
Language and Literacy Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competence in language, oral communication, phonemic and letter-word recognition and emergent literacy practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic programming focused on competence in language production and communication
Targets and Goals for Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prescribed targets, generally pertaining to cognitive development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad orientations and diffused goals
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning outcomes and assessment often required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developmental goals are set by negotiation between educator, parent and child • Goals are informally evaluated

Source: Adapted from Bennett, 2004.

Family Literacy in the Ontario Context:

Providers Programs & Policy Frameworks

About this Section

This section provides a brief overview of the current policy environment related to early learning in Ontario. Since Essential Skills Ontario (formerly Ontario Literacy Coalition) has already conducted extensive research in the past on the types and models of family literacy programs found in community organizations,¹ we focus more on the family literacy programs that are integral parts of provincial policy frameworks.

In Ontario, family literacy programs can be found in a number of settings and receive funding from a variety of government sources. The environmental scan identified four broad categories of family literacy program providers in Ontario (see Table 5 on page 22). Each provider receives funding from a different source and has a different underlying policy framework (see Figure 2 on page 23). This has resulted in a patchwork of programs with diverse program models, accountability structures and reporting requirements. This “patchwork” has made it difficult to assess program outcomes, including the extent to which programs meet local needs.

As a consequence, there is little knowledge about the extent to which public funds are allocated effectively, efficiently and equitably. The following sections discuss each category of providers in Ontario by describing their respective approaches to family literacy and early learning as well as their funding source(s) and underlying policy framework.

Ontario Early Years Centres

About the Program

The Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) are provincial programs providing sites across the province for children up to age six and their parents/caregivers to participate in a range of programs and activities. OEYC programs and services are free and universal in their service delivery approach, and are focused on helping all parents give their young children the best start in life. OEYCs offer four types of services: those that prepare individuals for parenting; those that assist parents in supporting their child’s emergent skills; those that allow parents to learn new parenting skills; and those that offer information and referral to other community programs.

Family literacy programming may vary from one OEYC to another. OEYCs appear to generally follow

the constructivist approach to learning, although some aspects are somewhat instructivist, such as some of their more structured and teacher-initiated and teacher-directed programming.

Approach to Learning and Teaching

Most programs offered by OEYCs involve parent-child interaction. Although both children and parents are targeted by the program, parents are targeted for the purpose of learning literacy-enhancing strategies to be applied on the child. Facilitating and supporting their child’s literacy development is therefore the outcome of interest in this case.

The centres offer a variety of programs that range in terms of their pedagogical approach. For example, some programming is more structured and more formal in that there may be

a requirement for pre-registration and that the program follows a learning plan that spans 4 to 10 weeks. Other programs are less structured and more informal in kind. These programs are typically drop-in programs that do not require pre-registration, and although they may have literacy and numeracy development as the underlying intention, learning is less teacher- or parent-initiated/directed. Instead, children themselves initiate and direct their own learning development based on their own interests. Tables 4a and 4b list examples of programs that follow structure and unstructured learning approaches.

It is important to highlight that OEYCs take an embedded approach to literacy and learning. This means that there is an attempt to support early literacy by creating an early literacy and learning environment that supports literacy in young children and their families. OEYCs try to achieve this by utilizing a tool called the Early Literacy Checklist, a part of which requires program providers to assess the extent to which early literacy is supported by the centre environment. The checklist requires them to consider the types and quantities of literacy-supporting materials they provide - such as phonemic awareness books, board games and literacy puzzles. It also requires reflection on such things as the written communications to family members, information provision and parent involvement in the development of literacy materials, activities and events.

Evaluation

With respect to assessing program provision, many OEYCs use the *Early Literacy Checklist*. The Early Literacy Checklist is a reflective self-assessment tool enabling programs to better evaluate the extent to which they support literacy in young children and within families, and to what extent they engage in community partnerships that support child and family

TABLE 4A: Examples of More Structured, More Formal Learning Programs Offered at Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs)

Structured, non-formal learning	Features
Early Bird Family Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-registration required • 10-week program • Involves discussions, adult/child interactions and printed outreach materials • Program follows curricular framework and program structure
Family Math Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-registration required • 6-week program • Each session focuses on a different math activity such as matching, sorting, counting, and measuring • Six different themes provide the context for the math activities • Follow up activities to be done at home are given each week
Get Set Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-registration required • 8-week program, two 2-hour classes per week • Features family time, parents only time, and children only time • Follows a curricular and teaching guide, and lesson plans

TABLE 4B: Examples of Unstructured, Informal Learning Programs Offered at Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs)

Unstructured, informal learning	Features
What's the Buzz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in (no registration) • One-time session • Interactive session focused on supporting early literacy in daily life • Involves creating hands-on activities to help child learn through play
Make and Take Literacy Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-registration required • One-time session • Families engage in hands-on literacy activities
Tumbling Tots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in (no registration) • One-time session • Families engage in fun gross-motor activities, then gather to sing songs, rhymes and tell stories

literacy. This checklist aims to help programs to determine both their strengths and gaps in promoting early literacy.

Some OEYCs use the *Early Development Instrument* (EDI) to identify gaps. The EDI is a behavioural checklist consisting of roughly 100 questions that was designed at the Offord Centre for Child Studies (OCCS) at McMaster University to measure readiness to learn at school of children between four and six years of age. It is intended to be used as a research tool (not to be interpreted at an individual level for diagnostic purposes). Many OEYCs also administer parent/caregiver feedback/evaluation forms at the end of each program, as well as surveys related to service delivery. Children as individual learners are never assessed in the program.

The provincial government has recently developed an outcomes index, which builds on existing data collection instruments like the Early Development Instrument and the work of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) to more broadly measure and monitor child, family, community and social outcomes as well as broader system functioning outcomes. The index aims to allow for transparent reporting of these outcomes at the community, regional and provincial level to mark progress and point to continuous improvement efforts both locally and provincially. Developing an outcomes index represents a major undertaking that will provide a critical element of the provincial framework (Ministry of Children and Youth Services 2010a).

Funding and Policy Frameworks

As indicated in Figure 2, OEYCs currently receive funding from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS). This ministry currently funds over 100 main Ontario Early Years Centres, along with their satellite centres (Ministry of Children and Youth Services 2010b). Some municipalities directly operate OEYCs and most municipalities include OEYCs in their child care service planning. OEYC contracts are directly managed by MCYS regional offices.

The OEYCs are a key initiative within the provincial Best Start Strategy. Best Start was first announced in November 2004, and is a cross-ministerial 10-year plan designed to give Ontario's children the best start in life.² Best Start is intended to be a seamless system of early development services ranging from newborn and infant screening, to hearing programs to speech and language therapy. Services also include quality childcare, public health and parenting programs that aim to assist parents in helping their children to be successful in school. Best Start is community-driven and may look different in various communities (e.g. rural, urban, francophone and Aboriginal). With guidance from the province, each community decides how best to organize and integrate services to meet the needs of its population.

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres

About the Program

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) are free school-based programs for parents and their children from birth to six years of age that operate for 20 hours a week during the school day. They are closed evenings, weekends, Professional Activity or P.A. days (in some school boards) and most are closed during the school summer holiday. PFLCs aim to help prepare children for starting school and encourage families to be a part of their children's learning. They are staffed by school board employees who have an Early Childhood Education (ECE) certificate or equivalent, and are located in elementary schools in urban high-needs neighbourhoods. However, any family is eligible to access PFLC programs.

PFLCs were first established in 1981 by the Toronto District School Board in five Toronto inner city schools. Since 2007, PFLCs have been funded by the Ministry of Education. There are currently 155 centres in 17 school boards across Ontario. PFLCs aim to foster a rich, flexible and barrier-free learning environment for children and their families/caregivers. All activities are drop-in (there

is never pre-registration), play-based, child-initiated and child-directed. Parents/caregivers are encouraged to be actively engaged and to understand their child's development. Program participants, child or their parents/caregivers, are never individually assessed.

A key benefit of PFLCs is that they help engage parents/caregivers with the school system, as the Centres are integrated into the life of the school. This can be particularly important for new Canadians who may be unfamiliar with the school system, and for whom English may not be their first language.

The quality of life of families is also a main concern, and families are able to receive information and support from PFLC staff in accessing community resources that may or may not be directly related to early learning, such as legal services, employment services and settlement services. PFLCs therefore appear to be very much aligned with the constructivist approach to learning and the social pedagogical tradition, perhaps more so than Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs).

Approach to Learning and Teaching

A main feature of the PFLC Program is its commitment to offering core program components across sites. The manner in which these components are delivered is adjusted to respond to unique neighbourhood needs. These five core components are: learning through play, parent engagement, family literacy and numeracy, a quality early learning environment, and access to community resources. The approach to learning in PFLCs appears to be very much aligned with the constructivist approach in that learning and teaching is play-based, and largely child-initiated and child-directed, with parents/caregivers participating. Programs are emergent, play-based and maintain early literacy development as an underlying intention. There is never pre-registration, as all programs and activities are drop-ins. Similar to OEYCs, embedded early

literacy learning as a program intention is also a key part of PFLCs.

A PFLC is envisioned as a welcoming place for families, and the PFLC Program sees the parents/caregivers as a child's first and most important teacher. To encourage parents/caregivers to be actively engaged with their child, each Centre has only one staff member, called the Parent Worker, compelling parents/caregivers to step up and get involved. Role modelling for parents is an important part of the Parent Worker's role. The Parent Worker aims to empower parents/caregivers by offering them information as they engage in play with their child so as to enable parents/caregivers to understand the child's learning development.

Learning materials are a key feature of PFLCs to help promote literacy and numeracy. These materials can be easily replicated in the home for parent-child activities, at little or no cost. For example, parent-child play with a set of colourful buttons and an egg carton can teach concepts such as counting and sorting.

PFLCs are also committed to honouring families' first language. Families are encouraged to read books in their native language since there is a belief that literacy skills are transferable from one language to another.

There is also evidence of some programming that may directly support parent/caregiver literacy development. A key example is the Hot Lunch program, which is currently only offered in 20 PFLCs in the Toronto District School Board. In this program, parents/caregivers read the supermarket specials in the newspaper, write up a grocery list, do the shopping, and make a meal that they will eat with their child at the centre. The parents/caregivers then use the recipes to write a recipe book, and enjoy the opportunity to share cultural recipes with each other.

Evaluation

Data related to program outcomes is collected using the Early Development Instrument (EDI). PFLCs in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) also have a formal, multi-year evaluation plan developed in 1999 to assess immediate and long-term outcomes of PFLCs on children and their parents/caregivers. A findings report, released in 2005 using data from the late 1990s, reported that participation in 10 downtown Toronto PFLCs is associated with better preparation for Junior Kindergarten.

The study was significantly expanded in 2009 to include all 51 TDSB PFLCs and 24% of students in the 2008-2009 cohort. Similar to the initial study, this expanded study found that participation in PFLCs is associated with better preparation for Senior Kindergarten and Grade 1.³

Funding and Policy Frameworks

As Figure 2 (page 23) shows, the Ministry of Education (MEdu) channels funding through district school boards to fund Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs). PFLC planning (e.g. resources, programming, etc.) is currently the responsibility of the school board. Site locations are determined in consultation with MEdu, the Best Start Networks and other stakeholders.

The Parenting and Family Literacy Centre (PFLC) initiative is part of the MEdu's Literacy and Numeracy Strategy, which is focused on helping students establish a solid foundation in reading, writing and math by age 12. These Centres are also considered a part of the province's Best Start Strategy although our scan found little evidence of coordination with Early Years Centres or other programs associated with Best Start in some regions. PFLCs are also related to the province's Poverty Reduction Strategy, which aims to break the generational cycle of poverty. PFLCs are a part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy because they aim to support early learning and subsequent school success, which in turn is anticipated to lead to success later on in life.

Public Libraries

About the Program

Many public libraries also offer family literacy programs. For example, Toronto Public Library has established a Ready for Reading program, which provides child-parent reading programs at most library locations. Story times are offered to encourage a lifelong love of reading, build reading readiness in children and show parents/caregivers how to help their children prepare for reading.

Approach to Learning and Teaching

Public libraries are not early learning centres, so it is not entirely appropriate to apply the instructivist/constructivist and pre-primary/social pedagogy analyses, but it appears that public library reading and rhyming circles in which children and parents participate together are very informal activities that involve little direct instruction from library staff, and thus seem to be aligned with the constructivist approach to learning and the social pedagogical teaching tradition.

Evaluation

Libraries using grant funding to run family literacy programs are required to collect outcomes data such as changes in library usage among target



groups, which is then reported to the funding agency (e.g. the Southern Ontario Library Service or the Ontario Library Service North).

Funding and Policy Frameworks

Libraries receive operating funds from the Ministry of Culture's Public Library Operating Grants Program (Ministry of Culture 2006) via library boards, municipalities and sometimes directly (for example, First Nations libraries). Project funding is provided through the Southern Ontario Library Service (SOLS) and the Ontario Library Service - North (OLSN), which are agencies under the oversight of the Minister of Culture that are mandated to deliver programs on behalf of the ministry. For example, SOLS offers grants to libraries for learning and literacy resources to address the needs of under-served groups identified by the library (such as newcomers, children, youth and youth at-risk, seniors, job seekers, marginalized communities, etc.). Funds under this granting program can be used, for example, to establish Early Literacy Stations and literacy centres, and to create promotional/informational materials for targeted groups to introduce new resources and services.

Strengthening public libraries as community hubs of literacy, lifelong learning and access to information is an ongoing initiative within the Ministry of Culture's Vibrant Liveable Communities Strategy (Ministry of Culture 2009). This strategy involves working with municipalities and innovative organizations to leverage Ontario's cultural resources and enhance the prosperity, vitality and sustainability of its communities. The ministry seeks to adopt new technologies and innovations to secure the role of libraries as community hubs of learning and literacy.

Libraries are accountable to their funding agencies (e.g. SOLS, OLSN, library foundations or other funding organizations) for ensuring quality program performance. For instance, SOLS' grant program for learning and literacy for target groups requires funding recipients to report on program

performance outcomes such as changes in library usage among target groups.

Community-based Organizations

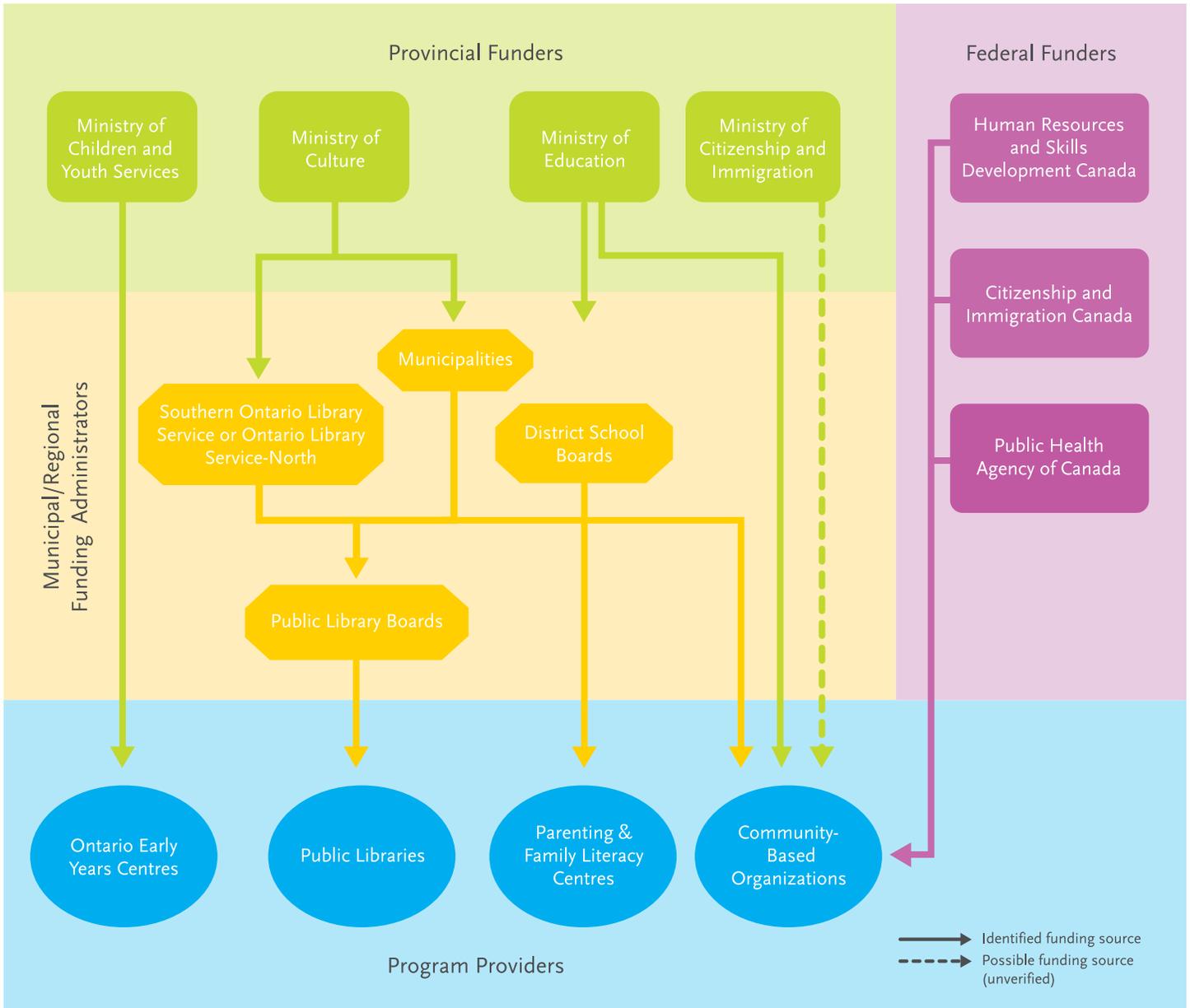
About the Programs

Finally, there is a multitude of community-based organizations offering family literacy programs that receive grant funding from a variety of sources, such as the federal government, the provincial government, foundations, corporate donors and individual donors. Due to the variety of programs in this provider category, we do not attempt to analyze in any detail the teaching approaches adopted, but in general, most community-based family literacy programs in our scan appear to have the goal of supporting early literacy development by teaching literacy-enhancing practices to families and not to directly increase literacy skill levels as measured by standard assessments. Much of the past research by Essential Skills Ontario (formerly Ontario Literacy Coalition) on family literacy program models provides information on programs in this category.⁴

TABLE 5: Four Types of Family Literacy Program Providers in Ontario

Providers	Funding Source	Policy Framework	Key Features
Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs)	Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Best Start 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child and parent/caregiver engage in play-based activities to support child’s emergent literacy • Learning can be structured, unstructured/informal and embedded in environment • Holistic approach • Managed by MCYS regional offices
Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs)	Ministry of Education (MEdu)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy and Numeracy • Best Start • Poverty Reduction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Located in ‘higher-risk’ neighbourhoods • Child and parent/caregiver engage in play-based activities to support child’s emergent literacy • Learning is unstructured/informal and embedded in environment • Holistic approach • Managed and overseen by district school boards
Public Libraries	Ministry of Culture via provincial library organizations, municipalities or public library boards. Other funding sources: private sector, library foundations, municipal governments, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vibrant Liveable Communities • Various other policies (depending on funding source) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and parents/caregivers gather together to recite rhymes, read books, and tell stories • Unstructured/informal activities • Managed by local library boards or local governments
Community-based Organizations	Municipal governments, provincial grants, federal grants, private sector, foundations, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigration Canada • Community Action Program for Children (Public Health Agency Canada) • Parents Reaching Out (MEdu) • Newcomer Settlement (Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration) • Various regional/municipal policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various

FIGURE 2: Current Pathways of Government Funding for Family Literacy Programs



Funding and Policy Frameworks

About this Section

The following is a list of potential federal, provincial, and municipal funding sources that community-based programs may draw upon. We also include a description of each source's policy framework.

Federal Funding

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

The Community Development and Partnerships Directorate within Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) aims to strengthen the capacity and effectiveness of communities and the non-profit sector to contribute to the well-being of children and families, seniors and other vulnerable populations. The Directorate is responsible for administering strategic investment programs that seek to facilitate the advancement of solutions to social and economic challenges affecting vulnerable populations in Canada (HRSDC 2010a). Family literacy programs may receive funding from the Directorate's Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP), which offers project funding to non-profit organizations, including those that serve children and families. Based on a list of eligibility requirements (HRSDC 2010b), it appears that SDPP funding is targeted to projects that serve to inform research and policy development, and build non-profit sector capacity. Innovative family literacy projects that are framed as a component of an initiative to assist vulnerable families may also receive funding from this source; however, since project funding is meant for research and policy development purposes, funding from this source is likely to be limited to projects that involve implementing a new and unique approach to family literacy, so as to provide a new research opportunity for the department.

An examination of the 2009 list of approved projects reveals only one family literacy project, the

Canadian division of Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), as a recipient of SDPP funding. HIPPY teaches parents how to prepare their 3- to 5-year-olds for school. Through early intervention, the program seeks to help low-income families ensure enhanced success for their children headed to kindergarten, and to enable parents to play a key role in their learning process. In September of 2009, HRSDC granted \$336,782 to assist the organization in expanding its services.

The Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) with HRSDC's Skills and Employment Branch is focused on improving the literacy and essential skills of adult Canadians by providing expertise, funding for innovative projects and a wide range of learning tools and other resources (HRSDC 2010c). OLES provides program grants and contributions; undertakes research, analysis and evaluation to build knowledge and expertise; develops and disseminates tools, and enters into partnerships with other government departments, provincial and territorial governments and non-profit organizations. OLES may provide funding for research and demonstration projects related to family literacy.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Under its Integration Program, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) provides a range of settlement services to newcomers across Canada, which make up the department's Settlement Program. CIC works with service provider organizations in provinces and territories across Canada to offer support and services for newcomers that will assist in their settlement and



long-term integration into Canada (CIC 2010). Most services are designed and delivered by service provider organizations across Canada. CIC puts out Calls for Proposals to non-governmental organizations, non-profit corporations, community groups, municipalities, businesses, educational institutions, umbrella organizations and individuals to submit proposals for funding. These initiatives support settlement and integration objectives, that may include settlement programs with a family literacy component. For example, a 2009 government news release indicates that HIPPY Canada (described above) received \$3,150,544 in funding from CIC in 2009 (CIC 2009). A list of service provider organizations could not be located, therefore it could not be determined if other family literacy programs in Canada receive funding from this source.

Public Health Agency of Canada

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) administers the Community Action Program for

Children (CAPC). The CAPC is a community-based initiative that provides long-term funding to community groups to establish and deliver services that meet the needs of children at risk from birth to six years of age (PHAC 2010). CAPC projects provide parents with support and information related to raising their children. Programs include family resources centres, parenting classes, parent-child groups and home visiting. CAPC is managed jointly by the federal government and provincial/territorial governments through provincially based Joint Management Committees (JMC), with representatives from provincial/territorial ministries and representatives from community organizations. The JMCs determine how best to address provincial/territorial priorities and allocate CAPC funds. The following are some examples of family literacy programs that receive CAPC funding.

- **Step By Step** – this program is delivered by the Cabbagetown Youth Centre in Toronto's

St. Jamestown area. Infants and toddlers, along with their parents/caregivers, participate in creative sensory experiences and activity centres enhancing parent-toddler interaction. Simple games are introduced to teach social routines and support language development; informal discussion is shared; and a literacy circle is formed where participants read aloud and sing songs and rhymes.

- **Growing Up Healthy Downtown (GUHD)** – this initiative offers a variety of programs such as: a school readiness program for children aged 3 to 5 years that contains a parent workshop component; early learning drop-in programs for parents, caregivers and children ages 0-6; a parent education and support program that offers workshops on a wide range of topics; and a Family Learning Program for pre-school children and their parents/caregivers to enhance early reading, writing, math and creative skills. Various GUHD programs are offered at different locations throughout the city.
- **Catulpa Tamarac Child & Family Services** – this Barrie organization offers several family literacy programs. For example, in the Young Parent Supper Club, young parents and their children prepare and share a meal together. Other examples are Connect with Your Baby, You and Your Toddler, Preparing for Kindergarten and Success in Kindergarten.

Additional examples of Ontario family literacy programs that receive CAPC funding include: the Brighter Futures/Ontario Early Years program, provided by Child and Family Services of Timmins and District in Timmins; Family and Community Action Program of Durham Region in Ajax; and the GBNWA Brighter Futures Program, provided by the Georgian Bay Native Women’s Association in Midland.

Provincial Funding

Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration

The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration’s (MCI) Newcomer Settlement Program offers funding to a network of non-profit community agencies across the province to facilitate the social and economic integration of newcomers to Ontario (MCI 2010). These agencies deliver programs and services that aim to assist newcomers settle and become fully involved in, and contribute to, Ontario and Canadian society.

Funding is available for organizations that help newcomers settle, learn English or French, access training and prepare for licensure in regulated professions, find employment, and access community programs and services. While the ministry provides funding to adult literacy programs for immigrants, we were unable to determine if this includes family literacy programs with a parent focus.

Ministry of Education

Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grants are available from the Ministry of Education (MEdu). School councils of publicly funded schools in Ontario can apply for Parents Reaching Out Grants for School Councils. Parent organizations, Parent Involvement Committees (PICs), school boards, non-profit organizations and post-secondary institutions working in partnership with parents can apply for Parents Reaching Out Grants for Regional/Provincial Initiatives (MEdu 2010).

School council projects support school-based initiatives focused on engaging parents who may experience challenges in becoming involved in their children’s education due to language barriers, recent immigration, poverty, newness to Ontario’s school system, or other factors. For example, C.C. Carrothers Public School in London held a series of breakfast and read sessions for parents and children with local authors entitled “Books for Breakfast”. This initiative provided parents with a forum to discuss ways to build and enhance literacy skills and foster a love of reading with their children.

Regional/Provincial projects are designed to enhance parent involvement on a regional or province-wide basis, and must fall under at least one of the following categories: Parents as Partners, Creating a Welcoming School Board and School Environment for all Parents, Skill-building Opportunities for Parents and Enhancing Communication between School and Parents. For example, the initiative Family Ties: Parents Supporting Student Success, delivered by the Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington, is a family literacy program for marginalized parents (low literate and second language) to learn together with their children to foster success in school and lifelong learning among family members.

The Ministry of Education (MEdu)'s Parent Engagement Office was created in 2006 to develop and implement parent engagement initiatives such as Parents Reaching Out (PRO) Grants. PRO grants support MEdu's Parent Engagement Policy for Ontario Schools (2010), as an essential component of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009). MEdu's parent engagement policies and initiatives are grounded in a vision that acknowledges the importance of parents both as valued partners and active participants in their children's education (MEdu 2005). Beginning in 2008-2009, as part of the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy, a portion of the PRO Grant Initiative was refocused to help school councils target barriers that are known to be experienced by parents in low socio-economic areas (e.g. childcare, transportation and language). Since 2006, the Government has awarded almost 9,000 PRO grants to school councils and almost 300 regional/provincial grants.

Regional/Municipal Funding

Municipalities and regional municipalities may also provide funding for family literacy programs. Funding arrangements and accountability frameworks may differ between municipalities. One example of a municipality that funds family

literacy is the City of Toronto. The City of Toronto's Children Services Division administers Family Support Programs whereby the city enters into service contracts with community agencies to provide services to children and families such as lending library, drop-in programs, playgroups and workshops/seminars (City of Toronto 2010a). In terms of assessment, performance measures are mainly output-based (City of Toronto 2010b). An example of a program receiving funding from this source is the Family Resource Centre of the Central Eglinton Community Centre, which offers children and parents/caregivers drop-in programs and story time for preschoolers.

The City of Toronto may also provide family literacy funds through the Access, Equity and Human Rights (AEHR) Community Partnership and Investment Program (CPIP), which invests in strategic partnerships with community-based organizations to respond to a range of access, equity and human rights issues, including barriers to literacy (City of Toronto 2010c).

Gaps, Opportunities and a Promising Community-driven Approach for Family Literacy Services

Current Gaps in Family Literacy Program Provision

The environmental scan and consultations with some providers from Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) and Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) revealed gaps in family literacy program provision. These gaps relate to coordination and integration with other early learning programs, and in addressing the literacy skill needs of parents/caregivers. A key issue is the extent to which family literacy programs are currently coordinated or integrated. As discussed, there is currently little integration in this area—there are various providers with various funding sources and policy frameworks. While some regions are highly coordinated, others are not. Consultations with parents, caregivers, service providers and administrators conducted by the province to inform the development of the Child and Family Centre (CFC) policy framework revealed that both parents and service providers alike have difficulty navigating the current set of programs and services due to its complexity.

In particular, providers have difficulty referring families to appropriate services because they lack awareness of available services in the community or they are not familiar with the correct process required to access these services (Ministry of Children and Youth Services 2010). Moreover, our scan revealed that most family literacy programs in Ontario are focused primarily on encouraging the early literacy development of children. And while some OEYCs and PFLCs may refer parents/caregivers to adult literacy agencies in the community, most do not. This lack of consistency may suggest an absence of a province-wide guideline or protocol for addressing parents/caregiver needs, whether these are literacy-related or not.

Opportunities for a Cohesive and Integrated Family Literacy System: Ontario's *Best Start* Initiative and Recommendations of the Pascal Report

Best Start Strategy

The current dynamic policy context surrounding children and family programs in Ontario may provide a significant opportunity for the promotion of an integrated and coordinated approach to family literacy programs. Motivated by a vision to make Ontario an international leader in achieving the social, intellectual, economic, physical and emotional potential of all its children, in 2004 the Government of Ontario launched the Best Start Strategy. Best Start aims to transform and consolidate programs and services for young children (from birth to entry into Grade 1) into a coherent, responsive system (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning 2007, 3).

However, despite this vision there is still a “chaotic mix” with respect to the current provision of children and family programs in Ontario. As the Pascal report concluded in 2009, the Best Start Strategy is at risk of stalling at the level of “improving coordination” rather than a fully integrated system of children and family supports (Pascal 2009, 15). To address this, the Government has recently launched a major concerted effort in this area.

Previous research commissioned by Essential Skills Ontario and Action for Family Literacy Ontario (AFLO) indicates that the disorder of family programs across the province also applies specifically to family literacy programs. For instance, a 2005 province-wide survey on the state of family literacy programs in Ontario found that components of family literacy intervention

are currently undertaken in a variety of settings and programs, and that these interventions are often not as integrated or coordinated as may be optimal (Falcigno cited in AFLO 2006, 5).

In Ontario, family literacy programs can be found in a number of settings and receive funding from a variety of government sources. The provision of family literacy programs by an array of organizations receiving funds from different sources has resulted in a patchwork of programs with diverse program models, accountability structures and reporting requirements. This “patchwork” has made it difficult to assess program outcomes including the extent to which programs meet local needs. As a consequence, there is little knowledge about the extent to which public funds are allocated effectively, efficiently and equitably.

The Pascal Report

In 2007, the premier asked Dr. Charles Pascal to make recommendations on how to better realize Ontario’s early childhood vision. In his 2009 Report to the Premier entitled *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, Dr. Pascal makes several bold recommendations to enable Ontario to move beyond the Best Start Strategy of service coordination towards a more innovative approach that would create an integrated continuum of early learning, childcare and family supports for children from the prenatal period to adolescence (Pascal 2009, 14).

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, the report recommends that this Early Years Policy Framework include a full-day early learning component for 4- and 5-year-olds to be delivered by district school boards, as well as the creation of an integrated network of Best Start Child and Family Centres, for which it was recommended that municipalities be mandated to plan, develop,

support and monitor (Pascal 2009, 14). This second recommendation—the creation of an integrated network of Best Start Child and Family Centres—may have significant implications for the family literacy policy and program landscape.

Child and Family Centres

In his advice to government, Pascal recommended that the Best Start Child and Family Centres (CFCs) be targeted to the youngest learners and would be responsible for the provision of a variety of children and family programs and services, offering parents and caregivers a one-stop shop of supports for their child’s early development (Pascal 2009, 14). In other words, CFCs will be responsible for a full range of services for young children (prenatal to 3.8 years) and their families in designated areas. It is anticipated that every neighbourhood will have access to a CFC that offers one-stop access to a *full suite of programs, services and supports* for children and their families, however a list of services to be offered has not yet been defined. This “one-stop” approach is captured in Figure 3 on the next page.

The shift to this new delivery model would entail a consolidation and re-engineering of resources, governance, and mandates of existing child care, family resource and early intervention services such as OEYCs, PFLCs, family resource programs, and family literacy coordinators (Pascal 2009, 20). A re-thinking of the current system should precede the implementation of the Best Start Child and Family Centres (CFCs), which may provide a tremendous opportunity for family literacy programs to achieve a more cohesive and visible policy mandate at the provincial level.

CFCs are intended to provide high-quality, accessible and flexible services and programs. They are to reflect the unique needs of individual families and neighbourhoods, and there will

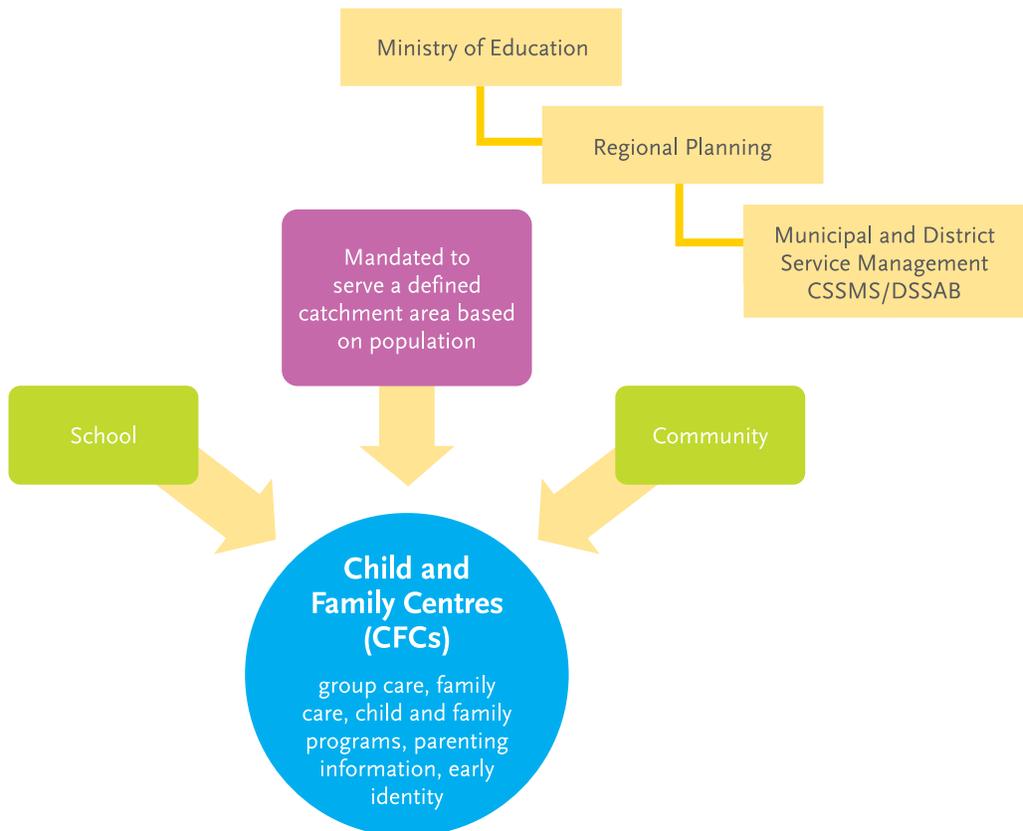
be strategies in place to reach traditionally excluded populations within the CFC’s universal framework. A key function of the CFCs will be to promote meaningful parent participation. Through CFC programs, families will be linked to both community programs, such as libraries, parks and recreation, and to intervention programs such as social services, children’s mental health programs, and access to housing, language and job training.

CFCs are expected to consolidate the existing multitude of services and resources within a mandated, *full service program approach*. Each CFC is to be linked to a neighbourhood of schools (which includes all school boards in the area), and is overseen by one employer with one consolidated budget. CFCs may operate out of a single or multiple locations.

Although policy development is still underway, municipalities are anticipated to be the systems managers for CFCs, while the province is to enforce a provincial accountability framework with targets, timelines and quality standards. Municipalities would facilitate the re-engineering of affected service providers into CFCs, and would restructure the governance framework and merge the staffing and functions of the Ontario Early Years Centres, child care centres, family child care agencies, school board-operated parenting programs and family resource and information programs. Early Years Data Analysis Coordinators (DACs) would also move to municipalities to support service planning and accountability.

Municipalities would be responsible for regional planning with school boards, public health and

FIGURE 3: Child and Family Centres’ Full Service Program Approach





community representatives. They would provide oversight, funding, quality and professional development for a network of community CFCs. School boards would continue to receive their funding directly from the Ministry of Education (MEdu). Municipalities would also receive their funding for children's services from MEdu, rather than the Ministry of Children and Youth Services (MCYS). However, confirmation of the municipal role for planning and governance is still pending. Pascal's team is working with MCYS to sort out governance and planning issues as they develop the provincial framework.

Is there scope for coordinating and integrating with other community programs?

The CFC approach aims to encourage coordination with other community programs and services. Since CFCs are intended to be flexible and to reflect neighbourhood needs, planning authorities may be receptive to including family literacy programs with an adult learning component within their CFCs' suite of programs in neighbourhoods that demonstrate a clear need for such programs. Further research should address the question of the extent to which the CFC approach will provide a bridge or platform to adult education programs, and more broadly address the question of how child and family centres and adult education program providers can coordinate or integrate

their services to achieve superior outcomes for children, their families and the wider community.

A Promising Community-driven Approach —The Hamilton Early Years Model

Despite the many gaps that may exist in family literacy programs in some regions, other regions appear to have promising approaches to family services. One such region is the City of Hamilton. The City of Hamilton's efforts to establish a coordinated and integrated network of child and family services that can support the full range of needs of various families appears to be quite successful. Based on a focus group with Hamilton OEYC directors and other early childhood providers, we identified three key promising features of the Hamilton early years model: a regional early years strategy that underpins multiple local policy initiatives, family-centred planning and family-centred service provision.

A Regional, Community-driven Strategy: Making Hamilton the "Best Place to Raise a Child"

Like most regions across the province, Hamilton has a Best Start Network of early childhood providers that develops strategies to ensure

that children in Hamilton get the best start in life. This network appears to be highly effective at coordinating family supports in the city, and members share a common goal to support Hamilton families and to put their needs at the core of all decisions. A focus group with Hamilton’s OEYCs directors and other early childhood providers, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services revealed that Hamilton is not characterized by program silos and turf conflicts, as may be the case in other regions. Hamilton has an explicit regional strategy to “make Hamilton the best place to raise a child”. In fact, this aspiration is a key part of the “Vision of the City of Hamilton” (Hamilton Best Start Network 2009, 4). This goal was established in 2006 and began as a link to the city’s poverty reduction strategy. It now underpins a variety of community efforts, such as job creation and human services planning. Collaboration and integration of services are the cornerstones of this vision (Hamilton Best Start Network 2009, 9). It may be the case that this collective aspiration has encouraged the various providers to rally around this common goal.

Family-centered Planning

The second promising feature of Hamilton’s approach to children and family supports is its practice of family-centred planning. Families and their needs are the focus of policy and planning for early learning and other types of family services.

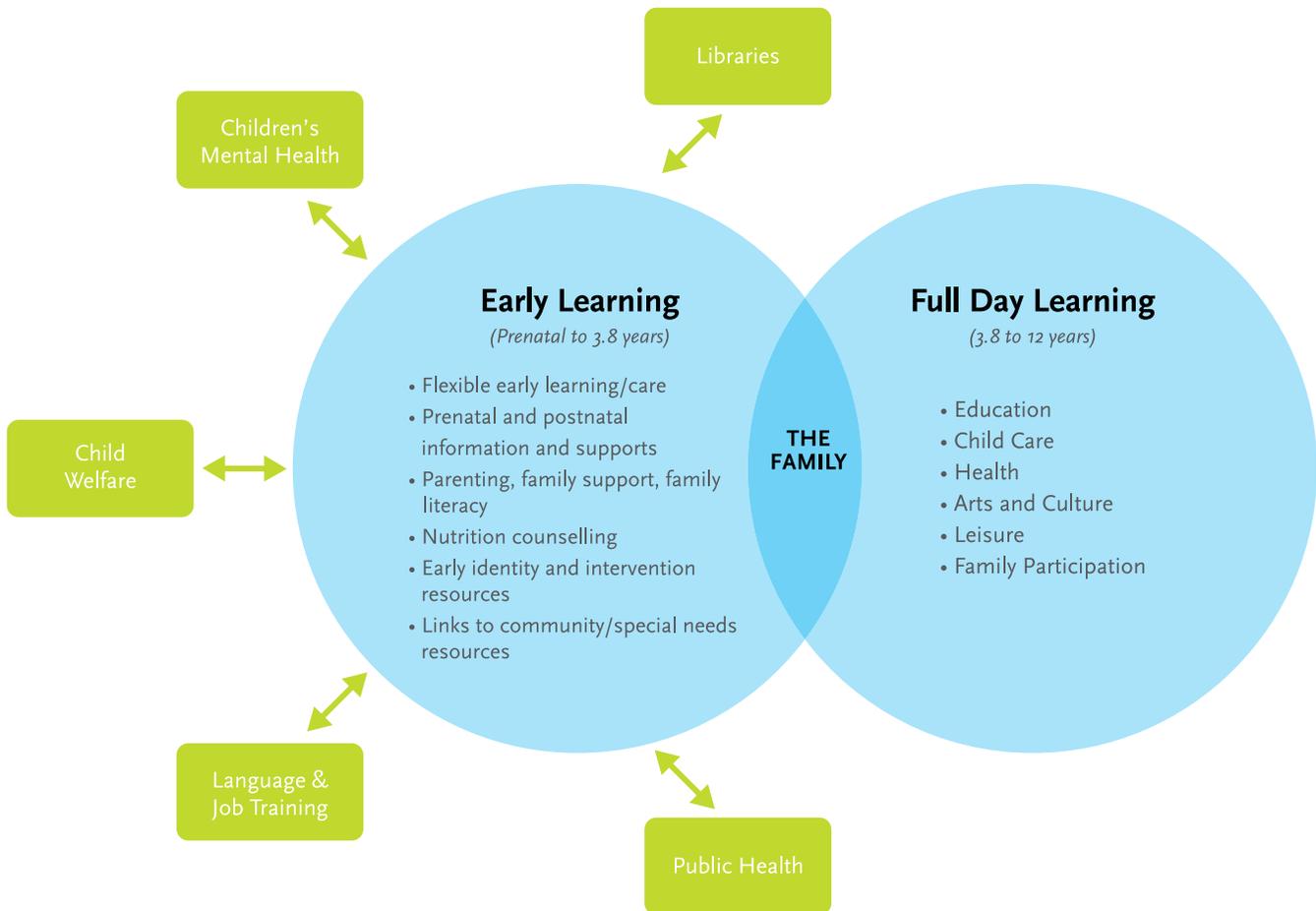
In practice, this means such things as analyzing the geographic concentration of family need and responding to those needs. It also entails seeking and responding to feedback from families. For instance, OEYCs in Hamilton are encouraged to provide feedback formally through surveys or informally through discussions with program providers. Hamilton Best Start also aims to move beyond parent consultation by collaborating with parents and supporting them in their endeavours to provide their children with the best possible start in life (Hamilton Best Start Network 2009, 5).

A major theme in our focus group with Hamilton providers was how the city’s system of family and child supports demonstrates a cultural shift away from thinking in program silos toward a family-centred approach. Rather than compete for funding, various organizations work together to coordinate services, collaborate on projects and initiatives, and exchange knowledge to achieve broad goals. In his visit to Hamilton shortly after the release of the Pascal Report, Dr. Charles Pascal identified the presence of ‘reciprocal mentoring’ between teachers, early childhood educators and parents. Providers of early learning are committed to creating a body of expertise that is larger than the sum of its parts, and work seamlessly back and forth (Pascal cited in Hamilton Best Start Network 2009, 9). Community partners view themselves as part of an integrated system of supports for Hamilton families (Hamilton Best Start Network 2009, 5).

TABLE 6: Examples of More Structured, Non-formal Learning Programs Offered in OEYCs

Structured Early Learning Programs	Unstructured Early Learning Programs
Connect with Your Baby	Baby Games
Family Math Program	Learning Through Play
Early Bird Family Literacy	Letter/Language and Sound
Getting Ready for K	Read Together/Talk Together
Lullabies to Literacy	Story Time Make and Take

FIGURE 4: The Hamilton Early Years Model—a Holistic Approach to Child and Family Support



Family-centered Service Provision

A third promising quality of the Hamilton model is its commitment to family-centered service provision, which is a key objective of the Child and Family Centre (CFC) model proposed by Dr. Pascal. Although many Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) and Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLC) in other regions also aim to achieve this, Hamilton is a leader in this respect. Extensive communication and coordination among providers gives families a variety of program options from which to choose. OEYC in Hamilton offer a comprehensive menu of programs with local variation and flexibility to be responsive to individual family needs. Programs vary in terms of target of instruction and pedagogical approach (see Table 5 on page 22), although unstructured, informal learning that is embedded in the program

environment and activities was identified by the focus group participants as a powerful approach. The Hamilton network and the programs offered by individual members are based on a holistic view of child and family development (see Figure 4), and providers make extensive use of tools and resources (e.g. Early Literacy Checklist, Early Literacy Specialists) to ensure that learning is embedded in the program environment and in child and child-family interaction. While Hamilton providers aim to be responsive to the families they currently serve, they are always engaging in targeted outreach strategies for vulnerable and harder-to-reach groups. The Hamilton network even reaches out to caregivers and engages them through a variety of mechanisms including at-home support.

Findings from Broader Research on the Societal Benefits of Family Learning Programs

About this Section

As we consider promising approaches identified in our environmental scan and consultations, it is also important to consider the broader evaluation literature on the effectiveness of family literacy and early learning programs. In this section we provide a review of the existing evidence on the efficacy of family learning programs, drawing on the findings of rigorous studies from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Evidence on Early Learning and Family Literacy Programs

Much of the evidence on family literacy programs is of relatively poor quality (Desforges and Abouchar, 2003). Samples are typically very small and data is often collected only post-program with no reference to relevant comparison groups. While some studies do use standardized outcome measures, often their design does not allow for credible conclusions about causal impact or about the magnitude of this impact. In their meta-analysis of the effectiveness of family literacy programs and practices, Brooks et al. (2008) state that the impact of intergenerational learning in particular compared to other program designs remains largely unexplored. In fact, we are not aware of any studies that attempt to isolate the value-add of this design. Generally speech, early learning and family literacy interventions can be divided into three types, according to their scale and how they are targeted:

Small-scale programs are delivered locally and usually target those most at-risk. Evaluations of these types of programs often use experimental methodology (with a randomly assigned control group acting as a counterfactual) to allow for a rigorous examination of program impacts. Several of these programs have continued to follow participants through their adult lives, allowing not only for tests of sustained impacts (on a wide range of outcomes such as employment, income,

health, involvement in criminal activity, etc.) but also cost-benefit analyses that attempt to monetize these impacts to examine the public and private returns on investment. Results have generally found that these kinds of interventions produce meaningful, lasting effects for participants and yield a high rate of return on investment for society as a whole.

Larger-scale programs are usually delivered on a national scale broadly targeting low-income families. Average per-child costs of larger-scale programs are also generally much lower than those of small-scale programs.⁵ While most evaluations have been purely observational, a few have used random assignment methodology to make more robust inferences about program impacts. These studies have yielded mixed results. It is worth noting that because these programs are more broadly targeted than smaller-scale programs, parents and children in the control groups are often able to access other available programs, which make comparison between the intervention group and the control group more difficult. Moreover, larger-scale programs are often more vulnerable to variation in implementation quality across delivery agencies.

Universal programs serve not only the disadvantaged, but also children from high socioeconomic status (SES) families. By definition, these are very large scale programs. Use of

randomization is rare, and most evaluations rely on 'natural experiments' -i.e. attempts to infer outcomes that arise as a result of policy changes or program introductions.

Small-scale programs

There have been several evaluations of model programs (mostly in the United States) that serve relatively small numbers of children and involve intensive services delivered by well-trained and supervised staff, with high teacher-to-child ratios (Almond and Currie 2010). These kinds of interventions provide a solid core of evidence that small-scale, high-quality interventions can have long-lasting effects on outcomes such as educational attainment, academic achievement, earnings, teenage pregnancy and criminal activity. Though interestingly, effects on cognitive test scores are rarely sustained. These results suggest these programs work primarily by supporting the development of non-cognitive skills, such as perseverance, self-regulation and working with others (Heckman, Stixrud and Urzua 2006).

Two interventions—the Carolina Abecedarian Project and the HighScope Perry Preschool Program—stand out because they randomly assigned children to treatment and control groups, had low dropout rates and were able to follow the vast majority of participants well into adulthood. The Abecedarian Project, initiated in 1972 with 111 children, provided daily, year-round educational child care and high-quality preschool from birth to age 5 to children from very disadvantaged backgrounds, most raised by single mothers with less than a high school education, reporting no earned income and 98% of whom were African-American. Teacher-to-child ratios ranged from 1:3 for infants to 1:6 for 5-year-olds (Campbell and Ramey 1994). The average annual per-child cost of the Carolina Abecedarian Project was about \$13,900 (in 2002 US dollars).

The Perry Preschool Program involved 123 disadvantaged, low-IQ African-American children whose parents lacked schooling and skilled jobs. The intervention began at age 3 and lasted for two years, during which children in the program group attended a daily 2.5 hour preschool program, with small class sizes, state-certified teachers and weekly home visits by teachers to children and their parents. The average annual per-child cost of the program was about \$17,760 (2006 USD). The Perry Preschool children faced significant disadvantage. Among those in the control group, only 15 percent scored above the 10th percentile on an achievement test at age 14, 45 percent graduated high school on time, more than half had been arrested by age 19, and only 40 percent earned \$20,000 or more as adults. In contrast, in the treatment group, 49 percent scored above the 10th percentile on an achievement test at age 14, 65 percent graduated high school on time, 31 percent had been arrested by age 19, and 60 percent earned \$20,000 or more as adults (Schweinhart 2004).

From a cost/benefit perspective, there is some evidence that these kinds of targeted interventions represent a form of educational investment that yields high public and private returns. Private returns estimate the quality of life a child who participates in such programs can expect to have as an adult (for example, as a result of increased earnings and employment benefits), while public returns estimate the contributions to society a child who receives interventions will make as an adult (e.g. more efficient education, less grade repetition, greater tax revenues, fewer income transfers, less criminal activity). Some estimates of the economic return to the Perry Preschool Program have been as high as \$8.74 for every dollar invested, or a 16 percent annualized rate of return (Rolnick and Grunewald 2003).

In a recent re-analysis that accounts for some compromises in the original random assignment

protocol and errors in the statistical methodology used to estimate program impacts, Heckman et al. (2010) estimate an annual rate of return of seven to ten percent. Even this conservative estimate represents a very impressive return on investment—for example, Heckman et al. note that it is higher than the historical return on equities. Estimates of the rate of return for the Abecedarian Project have been impressive as well (Masse and Barnett 2002), but there are questions as to whether and under what conditions these kinds of outcomes can be reproduced on a larger scale (Mervis 2011).

Large-scale Programs

Attempts to scale up interventions, such as the United States (US) program Head Start, offer some opportunities to address questions on whether the impacts observed in smaller-scale programs can be replicated and generalized. Table 6 provides a summary of the evidence for these types of programs.

Head Start

The Head Start program is a federally funded and administered US program that was created in 1965. It is a nine-month to year-long program serving children from three to five years of age. The program aims to promote school readiness and provide comprehensive child development services to low-income children, their families and communities (DHHS 2010). Educational, health, nutritional, social and other services are provided to children and families. The program engages parents in their children’s learning and helps them in making progress toward their educational, literacy and employment goals, although parent involvement is not a program requirement (GAO 2002).

The Head Start Impact Study was a randomized trial of 5,000 children conducted across 84 nationally representative delivery agencies. Newly entering 3- and 4-year-old children applying for 2002 admission to Head Start were randomly assigned to either a Head Start group that had access to Head Start program services, or to a

control group that could enroll in other available community services but not Head Start. These impacts reflect the effect of Head Start relative to other options available to low-income children. The study examines two cohorts of children (newly entering 3- and 4-year-olds) in four key program domains: (1) cognitive development, (2) social-emotional development, (3) health status and services, and (4) parenting practices.

Overall, the study found some short-term impacts for children in the program group, but these were rarely sustained beyond the first grade. Cognitive outcomes were measured in three ways: (1) direct assessments of language and literacy skills, and math skills; (2) teacher reports; and (3) parent reports. For both cohorts, the annual impact estimates show that Head Start resulted in cognitive skills gains while the children were in Head Start, but these early gains were not sustained as the children developed and moved into the early school years.

Socio-emotional outcomes were measured using reports of parents and teachers. For the 4-year-olds, the study found only limited evidence of an impact of Head Start on children’s social-emotional development, with no impacts identified in the Head Start year or in kindergarten, and only limited and mixed impacts reported at the end of first grade. For the 3-year-olds, there is more evidence of an impact of Head Start on children’s social-emotional development. For this cohort, parents reported strong evidence of reduced hyperactive behaviour and reduced total problem behavior during the Head Start year. At the end of first grade, parents reported more positive and closer relationships with their children.

Health outcomes were measured based on parent reports and included measures of the receipt of healthcare services and measures of child’s health status. For the 4-year-old cohort, the study found statistically significant impacts on child health insurance coverage at the end of kindergarten and first grade (difference of four percentage

points), and an impact on child health status in kindergarten (difference of five percentage points). For the 3-year-olds there was an impact on child health insurance coverage in kindergarten only. Both cohorts showed strong evidence of increased receipt of dental care - a difference of 15 percentage points at the end of the Head Start year for the four-year old cohort, and differences of 17 and 10 percentage points at the end of the Head Start year and again at the end of age four respectively, for the 3-year-old cohort.

Parenting practices measures were based on both parent and teacher reports and included the following categories of outcomes: (1) disciplinary practices, (2) educational supports, (3) safety practices, and (4) parenting styles. The study found that for the 3-year-old cohort, there were positive impacts on spanking and time out in kindergarten and on use of time-out and authoritarian parenting at the end of the first grade. For the 4-year-old cohort, there were no significant parenting practices impacts in kindergarten or the first grade.

Early Head Start

In 1994, as part of the Head Start program, the United States Congress established Early Head Start to ensure that infants and toddlers were served in greater numbers. Early Head Start is a comprehensive, two-generation program that focuses on enhancing children's development while strengthening families. The programs are designed to serve low-income pregnant women and families, with infants and toddlers up to age three and who use many strategies to provide a wide range of services. All programs are required to provide high-quality, comprehensive child development services delivered through home visits, child care, case management, parenting education, healthcare and referrals and family support. Programs formally select a program mode—home-based, centre-based or a combination of the two (a “mixed” approach)—after completing a community resources and needs assessment.

The program was evaluated in 1995 through a randomized trial of 3,001 families in 17 programs. Study participants were assessed at 14, 24 and 36 months after birth (GAO 2002). Interviews with primary caregivers, child assessments and observations of parent-child interactions were completed when children were three years of age. Caregivers were diverse in race, ethnicity, language and other characteristics.

In the area of cognitive development, the study found Early Head Start children scored higher on average than the control group on a widely-used standardized assessment—the Bayley Scales of Infant Development (with a score called the Mental Development Index or MDI), and that they were less likely than the control group (27 percent vs. 32 percent) to score in the “at-risk” range (under 85 on the MDI). Early Head Start children had larger vocabularies than control children, as measured by a widely-used standardized assessment—the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (PPVT-III). A smaller percentage of Early Head Start children scored in the lower, at-risk range (Mathematica 2002).

Measures of social-emotional development were completed in a variety of ways, including parent reports and videotaped observations of semi-structured parent-child play. In the domain of social-emotional development, Early Head Start children had lower levels of aggressive behaviour problems, higher levels of sustained attention with objects in a play situation, a greater degree of engagement of their parents and less negativity toward their parents (Mathematica 2002).

Parenting outcomes were evaluated using videotaped observations of parent-child interactions (coded on a number of dimensions), detailed observations of home environments (using the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment or HOME) and parent reports. The study found that Early Head Start parents showed greater kindness and supportiveness towards their children, showed less detachment,

reported more time spent in play with their child, provided more stimulating home environments, provided more support for language and learning, were more likely to read daily to their children (57 percent vs. 52 percent), were less likely to spank their children (47 percent vs. 54 percent) and reported a greater repertoire of discipline strategies than control group parents (Mathematica 2002).

The program also demonstrated impacts on parent self-sufficiency by the time parents had been enrolled for 28 months (on average). Most Early Head Start programs indicated that they helped parents complete education or training programs as needed. These included vocational education programs, GED and high school and specialized training programs. Early Head Start parents were more likely than control parents to participate in an education or job training program: 60 percent of Early Head Start parents vs. 51 percent of the control parents ever participated in such a program during first 28 months in the program. Early Head Start parents were slightly more likely to have been employed at some point during the evaluation period (87 percent vs. 83 percent). Early Head Start families also delayed subsequent child bearing (23 percent vs. 27 percent) (Mathematica 2002).

Subgroup analyses found that Early Head Start impacts were broad-based in that they were not concentrated in just a few groups of families and children – families and children in 24 of the 27 subgroups experienced some favourable program impacts on child development, parenting and family self-sufficiency. However, three groups had notably larger impacts: children and parents in families who enrolled when the mother was pregnant showed stronger impacts, African-American children and families, and families who had a moderate number of demographic risk factors (three out of five). However, those with the highest number of demographic risk factors (4 or 5) did not appear to benefit from Early Head Start and showed unfavourable impacts in



child vocabulary and some aspects of negative parenting behaviour (Mathematica 2002).

The study also looked at how impacts differed across program approaches. While all program approaches were found to have had positive impacts, mixed-approach programs had the broadest range of impacts, with positive impacts on child language, social-emotional development, as well as several aspects of parenting and on self-sufficiency activities. Centre-based programs tended to have impacts on children in cognitive and some aspects of social-emotional development. Centre-based programs also appeared to reduce physical punishment and to some extent enhance learning environments in the home. Home-based programs had more impacts on parenting and children's social-emotional development and on self-sufficiency activities (Mathematica 2002).

Mathematica later conducted two follow-up assessments: two years after the end of the program (when children were about five years old), and again after seven years (five years after the second follow-up, when children were about

10 years old). Two years after the end of the program, prior to entering kindergarten, positive impacts of the program remained in the areas of children's social-emotional outcomes, parenting and parent well-being (Vogel et al. 2010). Interestingly, children who experienced Early Head Start followed by formal early childhood education experience (centre-based child care, state pre-kindergarten, or Head Start), tended to have the best overall outcomes, with benefits in social-emotional outcomes and parenting associated with Early Head Start and academic skills associated with formal care experiences at ages three and four (Vogel et al. 2010).

When the children were about 10 years old data was collected from 1,632 sample members that were similar to the full sample on baseline characteristics. Results showed that overall, the only remaining statistically significant impact was on a social-emotional outcomes (Vogel et al. 2010), Interestingly this finding is consistent with one of the key findings of the Perry Preschool program. While initial cognitive gains were not sustained, participants did experience greater socio-emotional well-being long after the program ended. It is also worth noting that impacts differed by subgroup. Even at the Grade Five follow up, two sub groups—African-Americans, and those who participated in home-based Early Head Start programs—achieved sustained impacts in a much broader range of outcomes (Vogel et al., 2010).

Chicago School District's Child-Parent Center Program

Another attempt to upscale, but on a more local level, the ongoing Chicago School District's Child-Parent Center program has yielded results more similar to those of programs like Perry Preschool and the Abecedarian project (Reynolds et al. 2011). This is despite the fact that impacts were assessed in relation to comparison group members who were drawn from non-participating schools that offered full-day kindergarten and other intervention strategies for at-risk children in low-income communities. In fact, 15 percent

of comparison group members attended Head Start preschool. Proponents of the Child-Parent Center program attribute its success to several key features it shares with smaller-scale programs, including coordinated service delivery with a single administrative system, high-quality long-duration interventions delivered by well-trained and compensated teachers, and comprehensive family services that encourage parental involvement.

Even Start

Even Start is a national, state-administered United States family literacy program. The program began in 1989 as a demonstration program which provided school districts with discretionary grants for family literacy projects for about four years. Similar to Head Start, Even Start targets disadvantaged populations, seeking to improve their educational outcomes, although unlike Head Start, parent involvement is a central feature of the program (GAO 2002). To participate in Even Start, the parent or parents must be eligible for participation in adult education and literacy activities under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act. This means that at least one parent must not be enrolled in school and must lack a high school diploma or its equivalent or lack the basic skills necessary to function in society (GAO 2002).

The program was evaluated based on a subset of five Even Start projects that ran between 1992-1993 with about 200 families that were randomly assigned to be in Even Start or in a control group. Outcome data was collected on program and control group children and adults prior to entering Even Start, and at nine months and 18 months after entering.

Children in the in-depth study were assessed on school readiness using the PreSchool Inventory (PSI) measure, receptive vocabulary using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), emergent literacy skills using the Children's Emergent Literacy Test (CELT) which was a measure developed by Abt Associates specifically for the evaluation, and correlates of child effects. Based

on their analysis of data from the in-depth study, the authors found that while the children that participated in Even Start did well in the early stages, they were no better in the long run than the control group on measures of emergent literacy, vocabulary or school readiness.

The evaluation measured the effects of Even Start on the literacy skills of parents in the following areas: functional literacy levels as measured using Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS); attainment of the General Educational Development (GED), as measured by the percentage of Even Start adults who obtained their GED certificate; and participation in reading and writing activities in the home, as reported by parents. In terms of functional literacy, adults in Even Start gained an average of 3.7 points on the CASAS, compared to 3.6 points for adults in the control group. Both of these gains were statistically significant. However, the gains for the Even Start adults were not appreciably larger than those of the control group, although the Even Start group consistently scored at a higher level than the control group.

The study found that Even Start adults were more likely than adults in the control group to be taking Adult Basic Education (ABE) or GED classes. Among Even Start adults, 41 percent reported participating in a GED class in the year prior to the second post-test, compared with 15 percent of the control group, and 27 percent of Even Start adults were involved in ABE classes, compared with nine percent of the control group. Both of these differences were statistically significant.

A follow-up evaluation studied Even Start's effectiveness in 18 projects that ran from 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. A total of 463 families participated in the study—309 families were randomly assigned to participate in Even Start and 154 were assigned to a control group that could avail themselves of any educational services to which they were entitled, but they could not participate in Even Start. The analysis for the

EDS report relied on a comparison of pre-test data collected at the beginning of the school year with post-test data collected at the end of the same school year (nine months after pre-test), from Even Start and control group families who participated in the study.

Again, they found that while Even Start children and parents made gains, they did not gain more than children and parents in the control group. Interestingly, about one-third of the control group also received early childhood education or adult education services.

It should be noted, however, that the studies found that the average Even Start family received a low level of intervention services, both in terms of duration in months and total hours of participation relative to their needs, the goals of the program, and the amount of instruction received by children in other programs that have generated large effects on child development. Even Start children who participated more intensively in early childhood education scored higher on standardized literacy measures. Further, parents who participated more intensively in parenting education had children who scored higher on standardized literacy measures. On the other hand, there is no relationship between the amount of time that parents participated in adult education or parenting education and their scores on literacy outcomes.

A third study, released in 2004 based on follow-up data collected about nine months after the post-test (and 18 months after the pre-test) found nearly identical results to the nine month follow-up: while Even Start children and parents made gains on literacy assessments and other measures, they did not gain more than children and parents in the control group (Ricciuti et al. 2004).

Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) Project

The Raising Early Achievement in Literacy (REAL) project was created in 1995 in the United Kingdom at the University of Sheffield to promote pre-school

TABLE 7: Evidence from Random Control Trials of Four Large-scale Early/Childhood/Family Literacy Interventions

Program	Description	Study design	Child outcomes			Parent outcomes	
			Cognitive	Socio-emotional	Wider outcomes	Parenting	Parent's literacy
Head Start (United States 2002-2006)	Federally funded and administered program Targets low income families with children from 3-year-olds to 5-year-olds to promote school readiness	Randomized control trial for two cohorts – 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds	Yes for both cohorts, but not sustained at Grade 1	Yes for the 3-year-old cohort Only limited evidence for the 4-year-old cohort	Yes for both cohorts with parents reporting better health status and access to insurance	Yes for the 3-year-old cohort but not for the 4-year-old cohort	N/A
Early Head Start (United States 1995-1998; 2000; 2007) Mathematica, 2002; DHHS, 2006; Vogel et al., 2010	National, state-administered program for parents with low literacy and their children from birth to age 7 Promote early literacy and improved educational outcomes for children and parents	Randomized control trial	Yes, greater literacy, impacts sustained after 2 years but not after 7 years except for some subgroups	Yes, impacts sustained after 2 years and 7 years, especially for some subgroups	Yes, impacts on health outcomes were small	Yes, and impacts sustained after 2 years	Yes, more likely to participate in an education or job training program and more likely to be employed during the study
Even Start (United States 1992-1993; 1999-2001; 2001-2002)	Federally funded and administered program Targets low income pregnant women and families with infants and toddlers up to age 3	Randomized control trial	Statistically significant gains for participants <i>and</i> control group but no significant difference between the groups; similar findings at follow-up	N/A	N/A	Statistically significant gains for participants <i>and</i> control group but no significant difference between the groups; similar findings at follow-up	Statistically significant gains for participants <i>and</i> control group but no significant difference between the groups; similar findings at follow-up
Raising Early Achievement Literacy or REAL (United Kingdom 1997-2002)	An 18-month pilot project targeted to families with children ages 3 to 5 years in areas of Sheffield where literacy levels were low	Randomized control trial	Statistically significant gains but not sustained by age 7, except for children whose mothers had no formal qualifications	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

children’s literacy through work with parents, particularly parents of children likely to have difficulties in the early years of school. REAL offers adults as well as children the chance to develop their literacy and learning. REAL project had five components: home visits by pre-school teachers, provision of resources (especially books), group activities, special events (such as library visits) and communication by mail between teachers and children. Teachers were funded for release one half-day per week to work with families in the program. The program is based on a framework which suggests four ways in which parents can help their children’s literacy development. These four concepts were formulated into what has become known as the ORIM (Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction and Modelling of early literacy) Framework:

FIGURE 5: ORIM Framework for Early Literacy Development Devised by Hannon (1995)

The ORIM framework
Opportunities for children’s literacy development (trips, visits, shopping, materials for writing, drawing, books, opportunities for play)
Recognition of literacy practices (explicitly valuing what children do, and listening to them talking, playing and writing)
Interaction with children to develop their literacy (such as spelling out words children want to write, looking at letter/sound names, helping children spell a word)
Modeling of own literacy practices (reading signs, directions, instructions, packaging, print in the environment, writing notes, letters, shopping lists, reading newspapers)

The program was implemented and evaluated between 1997 and 2002. The evaluation was a randomized control trial with a sample of 176 families with 3-year-old children from deprived areas. The researchers first identified closely similar pairs of, respectively, families and children, then allocated one member of each pair randomly

to their experimental group, and the other to the control group.

Children were assessed before and after the program with two different instruments—the Sheffield Early Literacy Development Profile (SELDP) and the British Picture Vocabulary Scale (BPVS). An analysis of the difference in means showed that by the age of five program children were ahead on the SELDP (effect size 0.41). The program children also showed a significant improvement in the number of letters that they were able to recognize (effect size 0.30), however these literacy gains were not generally sustained by age seven, with the exception of children whose mothers had no formal qualifications. Children at age seven whose mothers had no formal qualifications showed an effect size of 0.42 (Nutbrown, Hannon and Morgan 2005).

In general, the evidence shows that though a broad range of educational interventions can have meaningful, long-lasting effects on children’s outcomes, more experimentation is needed to i) identify key program features (including parental involvement) that yield the highest payoffs, and ii) the extent to which program benefits can be generalized (Baker 2011 and Barnett 2011).

Moving Forward: An Ecological Framework

As we consider promising approaches for family literacy programs, it is worth emphasizing the critical role that parents/caregivers play in shaping their children’s outcomes. Parents matter not only in terms of their engagement with their children’s learning, but also through their socio-economic circumstances. Indeed, much of the work in this area is based on an ecological framework that sees ‘family, school, community and broader society, as well as the children’s own attributes, as contributing to a child’s development in complex interacting ways over time’ (Sanson, Nicholson, Ungerer, Zubrick and Wilson 2002). In this section we highlight these connections because

despite strong evidence, program silos continue to exist not only between the various Early Years programs, but also between Early Years programs and workforce programs designed to improve the labour market prospects of adults.

It is well-established that the adults who surround the child during the first five years will have a determinative influence on the child's development. For example, adults' level of motivation and abilities for literacy activities (including reading, writing and play activities) have a profound influence on children's exposure to and interest in literacy (Burns et al, 2003; Millard and Waese 2007). Furthermore, the way in which the parent interacts with their child during literacy activities influences the child's reading success (Saint-Laurent and Giasson 2005). Several studies confirm that the quality and the frequency of family literacy activities have a positive impact on the child's academic success, which in turn will greatly influence the child's future learning, his or her personal development and his or her participation in society (Lemelin and Boivin 2007; Phillips et al. 2006).

Parental engagement is critical but material circumstances matter as well. Hundreds of studies have already established a relationship between family socio-economic status and a wide range of child outcomes including health status, school readiness, academic achievement and social-emotional behaviour. Insufficient family income affects child development in numerous ways: poor nutrition, fewer learning situations, instability of the place of residence, attendance at schools with fewer resources, family violence, etc. (for example, see Duncan and Brooks-Gunn 1997). Studies also tend to demonstrate that the negative effects of low income on a child's cognitive development and academic achievement are greater during the pre-school period than at any other time (Dearing et al. 2006).

Recent Canadian data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) reveal that though non-trivial numbers of

children from high socio-economic backgrounds face early developmental deficits, these kinds of deficits are less likely to persist for children of high socio-economic status (SES) than for low SES children (Baker 2011). For example, 43 percent of children who scored in the bottom quintile of cognitive ability at age 0 to 3 also score at the bottom quintile of cognitive ability at the ages of 12 to 15 if they are from a bottom quintile SES family. In contrast, 90 percent of high SES children who score at the bottom quintile of cognitive ability at age 0 to 3 have transitioned out of the bottom quintile of cognitive ability by age 12 to 15. This result implies that high SES provides various types of compensatory mechanisms (more resources, less stress, higher quality parental engagement, etc.) that facilitate the overcoming of deficits.

Numerous studies also demonstrate that parents' level of education is an important factor in a child's success (for a review of this evidence, see Haveman and Wolfe 1995). Results from several recent studies suggest that this relationship is likely causal for a range of desirable outcomes including, school readiness, academic achievement, and educational attainment (Black, Devereux and Salvanes 2004; Currie and Morretti 2003; Neiss and Rowe 2000; Oreopoulos, Page and Stevens 2006).

However, exactly how parental education influences child development has been less well studied. Klebanov and colleagues (1994) have shown that a mother's education and family income are important factors when it comes to the existence of a physical environment conducive to learning, and that parents' education attainment alone is an important factor in child achievement. A series of studies by Davis-Kean (2005) concludes that parental education affects child development not only through the parents' social success, but also through their beliefs and their behaviours toward their child. As such, level of education has an importance to child development that extends beyond the socio-economic context with which it is often associated.

Thus the research literature suggests not only that parental practices plays a key role in shaping their children's development, but also that disadvantaged parents face more barriers in engaging in these practices. Complementary research shows that parents' socio-economic circumstances have a direct effect (net of engagement) on children's outcomes.

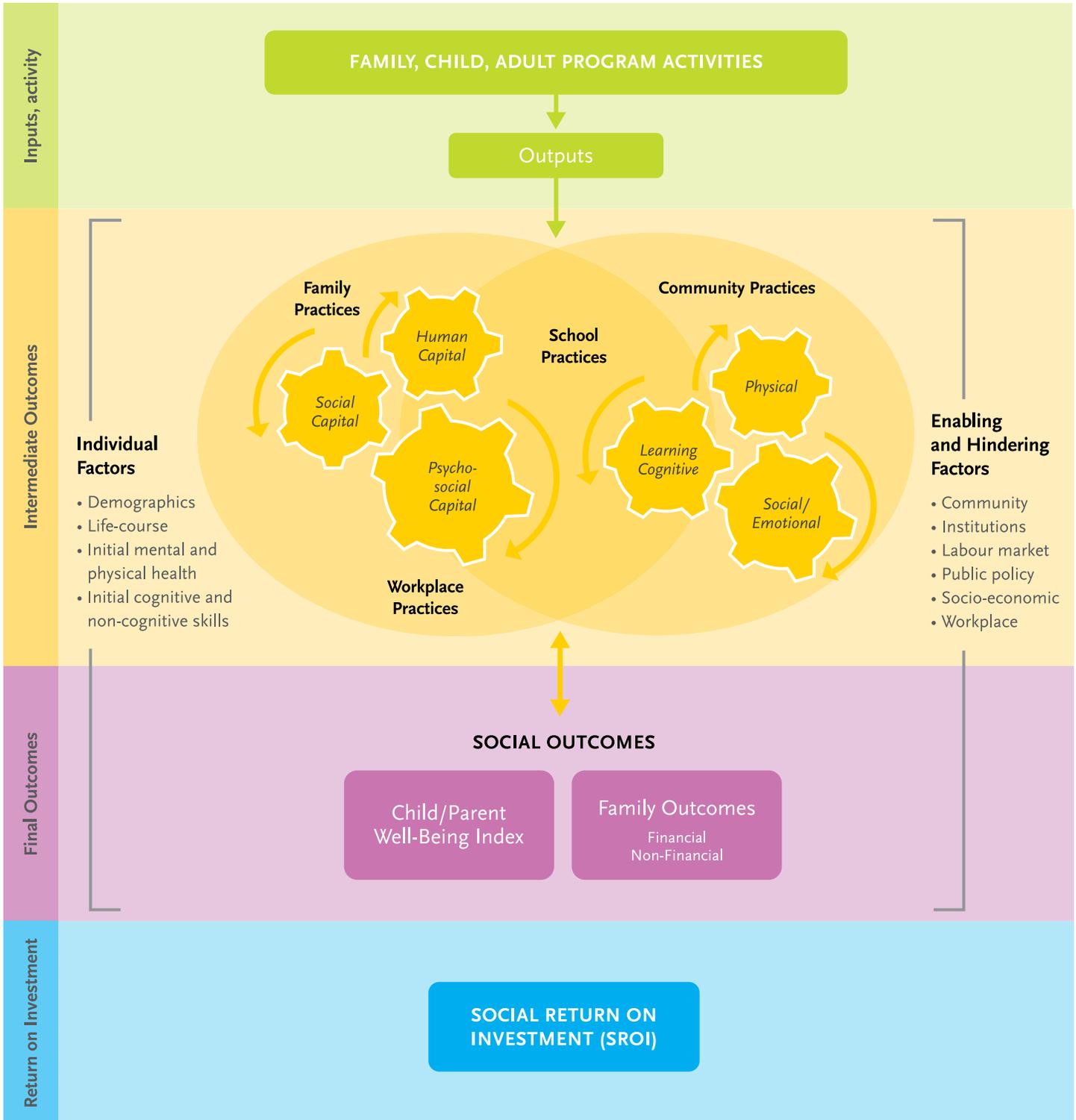
One interpretation of this evidence is that Ontario's social, educational and labour market policy goals are closely connected and mutually reinforcing. In an optimal environment child, adult, and family literacy programming would work in concert to produce a host of reinforcing outcomes in the context of families and communities, which ultimately lead to long-term outcomes for children, their families and broader society.

Figure 6 provides a broad conceptual framework for specifying these interconnections and understanding a wide range of outcomes that may be associated with an integrated approach. Note that this

framework is closely aligned with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development that views child development as influenced by environmental systems, ranging from proximal contexts of direct interaction with people, to broad-based contexts of culture, institutions and public policy all occurring over time.⁷

Figure 6 is meant to be viewed top-down and begins with inputs, the learning activity and learning outputs, moves toward intermediate outcomes for children and parents and ultimately to final outcomes which can be measured to estimate the return on investment for governments and other stakeholders. Surrounding the model is a range of possible individual factors and structural factors that may mediate or moderate outcomes at each stage of the process. The model should be interpreted dynamically, as the relationships among learning, competence formation and outcomes are likely non-linear and reciprocal.

FIGURE 6: Conceptual Framework for Understanding Wide Range of Outcomes for Child, Family and Adult Programs



Looking Forward

Family literacy programs in Ontario are provided by multiple types of organizations, receive funding from various sources, and fall under different policy frameworks. This has resulted in a patchwork of programs with diverse program models, accountability structures and reporting requirements, and has made it difficult to assess program outcomes, including the extent to which programs meet local needs. There is consequently little knowledge as to whether public funds are allocated effectively, efficiently and equitably.

Through Ontario's Best Start Strategy, regions across the province are being encouraged to address this disorder by coordinating and integrating their services. The 2009 report by Dr. Pascal recommends an integrated network of Child and Family Centres (CFCs) which will offer a continuum of early learning, childcare and family supports. Some regions in Ontario are already on their way to achieving this by engaging in promising approaches for coordination and integration in family services, and are proving themselves to be provincial leaders.

The transition to the CFC system will require a consolidation of existing services and a full service program approach, providing a major opportunity to encourage the adoption of such promising approaches across the entire province. However, since many family literacy programs are not part of the Best Start policy framework—namely community-based organizations that receive grant funding from federal, provincial, local and other sources—there is a need to ensure that the CFC approach will be inclusive of these organizations in some way. It is this need that suggests a leadership opportunity for federal and provincial governments to promote dialogue and build expertise on how to embed and align family literacy programming in order to cultivate communities that are more literate.

In addition, opportunities exist with respect to the link between child and parent outcomes. As discussed in the previous section, the research suggests not only that parent practices play a key role in shaping child development, but also that disadvantaged parents face more barriers in engaging in these practices. Complementary research shows that parents' socio-economic circumstances have a direct effect (net of engagement) on children's outcomes. One interpretation of this evidence is that Ontario's social, educational and labour market policy goals are closely connected and mutually reinforcing. In an optimal environment child, adult, and family literacy programming would work in concert to produce a host of reinforcing outcomes in the context of families and communities, which ultimately lead to long-term outcomes for children, their families, their communities and broader society.

This research provides strong motivation for thinking strategically about the integration of services for children and parents. This requires thinking beyond traditional program silos of children's programs, adult programs, and family programs towards thinking more broadly about the outcome of more literate communities. So, we are left with some critical questions as we look to more literate communities: what does a parent/caregiver specifically do that causes their child to adopt an attitude and to develop the skills necessary for lifelong learning? And what longitudinal impacts does parental/caregiver involvement have on their children's socio-economic outcomes when they in turn become parents?

The intergenerational cycle of literacy needs to be considered in the broader context of societal well-being, and more statistically-valid research must inform our understanding of the connections between adults and their children's literacy. Some may suggest that this is a difficult task, but other jurisdictions are engaged in longer-term cohort studies to begin analyzing the connections. *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* just released its first report of data collected about two cohorts of over 4,300 children aged 0 to 9 years per cohort, in three waves (every two years), which

commenced in 2004. This information and data is helping to guide public policy across numerous government ministries, particularly as it relates to service delivery reform and the impacts of educational services to families. Ontario would benefit from a similar analysis.

So, we are left with some critical questions as we look to more literate communities:

What does a parent/caregiver specifically do that causes their child to adopt an attitude and to develop the skills necessary for lifelong learning?

What longitudinal impacts does parental/caregiver involvement have on their children's socio-economic outcomes when they in turn become parents?

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For instance, see *Family Literacy Kit: A Comparison of Popular Program Models*, by Ontario Literacy Coalition and Kingston Literacy & Skills, and *Making the Connections: Family Literacy, Adult Literacy, and Early Childhood Development*, 2003, by Ontario Literacy Coalition and Kingston Literacy & Skills.
- ² According to the 2009 Pascal report, several ministries currently participate in the Best Start Strategy, including the Ministry of Health Promotion, the Ministry of Community and Social Services, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and the Ministry of Education (p. 20).
- ³ The Toronto District School Board compared EDI scores and Grade 1 report cards of a cohort of 549 students that had participated in PFLCs according to PFLC registration records from one of the 51 PFLC host schools to non-participants in host schools, as well as to students in other TDSB schools. All PFLCs were represented in the sample. All students sampled were born in 2002 and were attending Senior Kindergarten at the time of sampling. The findings of this study confirmed earlier findings that PFLC users are less likely to have low EDI scores than non-users in PFLC host schools, and even less likely than students in other schools on some indicators (recall that PFLCs are placed in high-risk neighbourhoods). These results were reported to be sustained to Grade 1.
- ⁴ For example, see *Family Literacy Kit: A Comparison of Popular Program Models*, by the Ontario Literacy Coalition and Kingston Literacy & Skills, and *Making the Connections: Family Literacy, Adult Literacy, and Early Childhood Development*, 2003, by the Ontario Literacy Coalition and Kingston Literacy & Skills.
- ⁵ The average annual per-child cost of two small-scale programs, the Carolina Abecedarian Project and the Perry Preschool Program was about \$13,900 (in 2002 USD) and \$17,760 (2006 USD), respectively. By comparison, in 2010, over 900,000 children were enrolled in the larger-scale, national Head Start program in the US at a cost of \$7,600 per child (DHHS 2010b).
- ⁶ It is noteworthy that a much larger percentage of Even Start adults than control group adults (47 percent vs. 26 percent) reported that they participated in adult education prior to the pretest, an unexpected finding given adults were randomly assigned. The authors hypothesize that for some adults, the pretest may have actually been administered after Even Start adult education instruction had begun, and that it might also explain higher scores among Even Start adults than control group adults at the pretest.
- ⁷ Bronfenbrenner's five systems are the: microsystem - immediate environment (family, school, type of childcare, peers, neighbourhood); mesosystem- interactions among the immediate environments (e.g., between home and school); exosystem- external environment that indirectly affects the child (such as the parents' work); macrosystem - broader cultural context (western culture versus eastern, national economy, political culture, subculture); and chronosystem: Structure of the events affecting the environment and life transitions.

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