

**Partnership Framework for
Integrated Family Literacy Planning**

RESEARCH FINDINGS

November 2010

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Purpose

This report presents the preliminary findings of the *Partnership Framework for Integrated Family Literacy Planning* project. The project is led by the Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC) and funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). The research component of the project is being undertaken by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC).

1.2 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 and other family members and caregivers to learn and grow together.

Since the formation of the OLC-led Action for Family Literacy Ontario (AFLO) working group in 2003, the OLC has engaged in a number of Family Literacy initiatives and research activities. The OLC's research found that: family literacy programs in Ontario often suffer from a lack of consistent, ongoing funding and recognition, and fragmented policies; there is a need for more engaged partnerships between family literacy programs and relevant community and government services; family literacy programs need better exposure and sustainable funding that firmly plants them as viable learning systems; and there is a need for a more streamlined knowledge exchange system between programs, services, and funders. The OLC recognizes that to address these issues, *strategic engagement* is required at a policy and cross-ministerial level. This recognition was the impetus for the *Partnership Framework for Integrated Family Literacy Planning* project.

2. Research Objectives

The following are key objectives of the *Partnership for Integrated Family Literacy Planning*:

- 1. Map out the existing family literacy system(s) in Ontario and identify pathways critical to family literacy programs and services.**
- 2. Identify gaps and opportunities for a more coordinated and integrated policy mandate for family literacy in Ontario.**
- 3. Identify and describe promising approaches of family literacy program provision.**

Are we missing an opportunity to lever parent/caregiver involvement in their child's development as an avenue to engage families in lifelong learning? To what extent can family literacy practices be "built in" to programs with broader policy mandates? What are the most promising approaches to family literacy and what can we learn from these approaches?

3. Methodology

The findings of the research conducted to date come from three main research activities: an environmental scan of existing family literacy studies and publicly available information sources, such as government reports and government and service provider websites; attendance at the 2010 Annual Summer Institute on Early Child Development (held at George Brown College in Toronto); and consultations with early years program providers, leading practitioners, and policy advisors.

4. Findings

4.1 Describing Family Literacy Programs

The most common categorization of learning and teaching approaches is to distinguish them as *instructivist* or *constructivist*. Table A lists some of the key differences between these two approaches. Family literacy programs are generally more or less constructivist in their approach.

Table A: Comparison of Key Features of Instructivist and Constructivist Approaches

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

Source: Adapted from Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007.

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 primarily the child or the caregiver or both the child and the caregiver.
- 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, and ensuring quality of life. The social pedagogical approach emphasizes holistic programming (constructivist).
- Most family literacy programs in Ontario appear to take an informal, minimally structured approach to learning, whereby children and parents “learn by doing”, with minimal direct instruction from program administrators and 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 to personal hygiene.

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

As shown in Table B, there are four main categories of providers of family literacy programs 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.

Table B: Four main providers of family literacy programs in Ontario

Providers	Funding Source	Policy Framework
Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs)	Ministry of Children and Youth Services	Best Start
Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs)	Ministry of Education	Literacy and Numeracy Best Start Poverty Reduction
Public Libraries	Ministry of Culture via municipalities or public library boards	Vibrant Liveable Communities
Community-based Organizations	Municipalities, provincial grants, HRSDC, CIC, PHAC, private sector, foundations, etc.	Social Development (HRSDC) Literacy and Essential Skills (HRSDC) Settlement (CIC) Community Action Program for Children (PHAC) Parents Reaching Out (MEdu) Newcomer Settlement (MCI)? 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 their child. The centres offer a variety of programs that range in terms of their pedagogical approach. Some programming is more structured and less informal 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 four hours during the school day. They are targeted to families with children who are at risk of academic failure. However, any family is eligible to access PFLC programs and services. 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.

Public Libraries often offer reading and rhyming circles in which children and parents participate together in very 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 individuals. These programs vary in their approaches to learning and teaching.

4.3 Gaps, Opportunities and Promising Approaches for Family Literacy

Consultations with some Early Years providers from OEYCs and PFLCs revealed several gaps in family literacy program provision in some regions. These gaps relate to coordination and integration with other early learning programs, and addressing the literacy skills needs of parents/caregivers. Further consultation is required to determine the extent to which these findings are generalizable across other regions.

Meanwhile, the shift to an integrated network of Child and Family Centres (CFCs) recommended by Dr. Charles Pascal's 2009 Report to the Premier presents a major opportunity for the family literacy agenda. 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, which presents a major opportunity for strategic engagement for achieving a more cohesive family literacy policy mandate. More information is required in order to obtain a better picture of the implications of this transition to the family literacy agenda. We move forward in the research process with three key questions: What would be the nature of family literacy programs in CFCs? Is there scope for coordinating and integrating with other community-based programs? How will parents'/caregivers' literacy needs be addressed by this new system of family supports?

5. Conclusion

Family literacy programs in Ontario are provided by multiple types of organizations, receive funding from various sources and fall under different policy frameworks, which has resulted in a patchwork of programs with diverse program models, accountability structures and reporting requirements. This makes it difficult to assess program outcomes including the extent to which programs meet local needs, providing little knowledge about the extent to which public funds are allocated effectively, efficiently, and equitably. Ontario's Best Start strategy and its plan to shift to an increasingly coordinated and integrated system of child and families supports through CFCs may correct some of this chaos. 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. There is therefore a leadership opportunity for the Federal Government to promote dialogue and build expertise on how to embed and align family literacy in order to create more literate communities.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose

This report presents the preliminary findings for the research component of the *Partnership Framework for Integrated Family Literacy Planning* project. The project is led by the Ontario Literacy Coalition (OLC) and funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). The research component of the project is being undertaken by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) and has three objectives:

1. Map out the existing family literacy system(s) in Ontario and identify pathways critical to family literacy programs and services.
2. Identify gaps and opportunities for a more coordinated and integrated policy mandate for family literacy in Ontario.
3. Identify promising approaches of integrated family literacy program provision.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 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 the OLC hosted a symposium entitled *Family Literacy Matters!* At the symposium, delegates charged the OLC 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 to lay the foundation needed to move the field forward.

Since the AFLO was formed, the OLC 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 that could be promoted across the province. A key finding was that family literacy programs in Ontario often suffer from a lack of consistent, ongoing funding and recognition, as well as fragmented policies.

The OLC identified a need for more engaged partnerships between family literacy programs and relevant community, public, and government services, and that family literacy programs need better exposure and sustainable funding in order to position them as viable learning systems. Given the fragmented nature of literacy programming in Ontario, the OLC recognizes that *strategic engagement* is required at a policy and cross-ministerial level. The need for this strategic engagement was the impetus for the *Partnership Framework for Integrated Family Literacy Planning* 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.

The Best Start strategy aims to coordinate programs and services for young children into a coherent, responsive system.¹ 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 recommends an innovative approach that would create an integrated continuum of early learning, childcare, and family supports for children from the prenatal period to adolescence.² This approach would include a transition to full-day learning for four- and five-year-olds, as well as the creation of an integrated network of locally-managed Best Start Child and Family Centres (CFCs).³ CFCs would offer parents and caregivers a one-stop shop of programs and supports for their child's early development.

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 must precede the implementation of the Best Start Child and Family Centres, which may provide a prime opportunity for the OLC in terms of strategic engagement for the realization of a more cohesive and visible policy mandate for family literacy in Ontario.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

There are three key overarching research objectives of the Partnership for Integrated Family Literacy Planning project, as follows:

- 1. Map out the existing family literacy system(s) in Ontario and identify pathways critical to family literacy programs and services.** 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 and learning conceptualized in these programs? To what extent are programs coordinated and integrated? What would be the nature of family literacy programs in the proposed Child and Family Centres (CFCs)? To what extent will parents'/caregivers' literacy needs be addressed by this new system of family supports?
- 2. 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 knowledge exchange 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 CFC strategy?

¹ Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings*, 2007, 3.

² Pascal, 2009, 14.

³ Ibid.

- 3. Identify and describe promising approaches of family literacy program provision.** Is there an opportunity to lever parent/caregiver involvement in their child’s development as an avenue to engage families in lifelong learning? To what extent can family literacy practices be “built in” to programs with broader policy mandates? How can we support bridging and partnerships among adult-centred literacy programs and child-centred literacy programs so that they can network and develop a joint programming and referral protocol? What are the most promising approaches to family literacy and what can we learn from these approaches?

3. METHODOLOGY

The findings of the research conducted to date come from three main research activities: an environmental scan of existing family literacy studies and publicly available information sources; participation in the annual George Brown Summer Institute on Early Child Development; and consultations with program providers and policy advisors and other experts in the areas of child and/or adult literacy. Each of these research activities is described below.

Environmental scan - The environmental scan examined existing studies and publicly available information sources to address several key questions 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 and learning conceptualized in these programs; and to what extent are programs coordinated and integrated.

Summer Institute on Early Child Development - To gather additional information and to fill in some of the knowledge gaps identified in the environmental scan, SRDC attended the 2010 Summer Institute on Early Child Development. The Summer Institute is a major educational event on early child development policy and practice held annually that brings together educators, family practitioners, and researchers for a forum on new ways of supporting children and families. This year it was hosted by George Brown College on June 3rd, 2010. The forum provided information on Ontario’s Best Start initiative and provided further detail on policy development for the Best Start Child and Family Centres (CFCs).

Consultations with Providers, Practitioners, and Advisors - Consultations with key contacts will provide a better understanding of existing gaps and opportunities and will help identify promising approaches to family literacy provision. We will interview approximately 20 to 30 participants in three broad categories of key informants: Early Years program providers, members of the community-based adult and family literacy network, and early learning advisors.

- **Early Years Program Providers:** Includes family literacy coordinators in the two major provincially funded Early Years programs (the Ontario Early Years Centres and the Parenting and Family Literacy Centres) as well as programs delivered by public libraries.
- **Community-based Adult and Family Literacy Network:** Includes providers of community-based adult literacy and family literacy programs that are not funded through the province’s Best Start strategy.
- **Learning and Literacy Policy Advisors:** Includes experts and advisors that are playing a leading, guiding, or influencing role in learning and literacy in Ontario. Examples of such informants are: senior government officials and advisors in the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Children and

Youth Services, and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; Municipal Systems Managers; leading practitioners; and expert advisors of the Best Start strategy.

We are currently in the preliminary stages of this consultation process. We have conducted interviews with several Early Years program providers, representing approximately a quarter of all participants with which we wish to consult. Therefore, the findings presented in this report are mainly from the environmental scan and George Brown Summer Institute. Further consultations will be held over the following months to continue to gather information on gaps, opportunities, and promising approaches to family literacy program provision in the Ontario context.

4. FINDINGS

Preliminary findings are organized into three parts. In Section 3.1, we start broadly by describing family literacy programs, and discuss how they may vary on a number of dimensions. In Section 3.2, the analysis narrows to the specific context of Ontario, and we present an overview of family literacy providers, programs, and policy frameworks within the province. Finally, in Section 3.3 we identify gaps and opportunities for achieving an integrated family literacy system.

4.1 Describing Family Literacy Programs

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.

4.1.1 Instructivism versus Constructivism

A program's approach to teaching is based on underlying assumptions about how learning occurs, and 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.⁴

In the instructivist conception, knowledge is 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 the learners. In contrast, constructivism conceives learning not as the transmission of knowledge but rather

⁴ Gordon Brown, 2009, "The Ontological Turn in Education: The Place of the Learning Environment" in the *Journal of Critical Realism*, 8(1): 5-34.

the construction of meaning, and teaching as the facilitation of this process.⁵ 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

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

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.

4.1.2 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.

Although publically 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, not on achieving prescribed learning standards.

⁵ Gordon Brown, 2009, “The Ontological Turn in Education: The Place of the Learning Environment” in the *Journal of Critical Realism*, 8(1): 5-34.

Figure 1: Two Conceptualizations of Family Learning



4.1.3 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 term 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 Figure 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, children or both. Programs may focus on the child alone as the receiver of knowledge and skills while parents 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, and 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/caregiver so as to foster positive attitudes and practices among them which in turn are 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.

Figure 2: Target Audience of Family Literacy Programs

Parents/caregiver involved in child’s literacy			Parent engaged as adult learner
Parent/Caregiver	Child	Parent/Caregiver and 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

4.1.4 Pedagogical Approach

Pedagogy refers to the method of teaching or instruction. According to John Bennett⁶ (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. 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 2). 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.

⁶ John Bennett, 2004, *Curriculum issues in national policy-making*. Keynote address: Paris, OECD/Malta EECERA.

Table 2: 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"> • Pre-scribed 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.

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

This section provides a brief overview of the current policy environment related to early learning in Ontario. Since the OLC has already conducted extensive research in the past on the types and models of family literacy programs found in community organizations⁷, 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 3). Each provider receives funding from a different source and has a different underlying policy framework (see Figure 4). This has resulted in a patchwork

⁷ For instance, see *Family Literacy Kit: A Comparison of Popular Program Models*, by the OLC and Kingston Literacy, and *Making the Connections: Family Literacy, Adult Literacy, and Early Childhood Development*, 2003, by the OLC and Kingston Literacy.

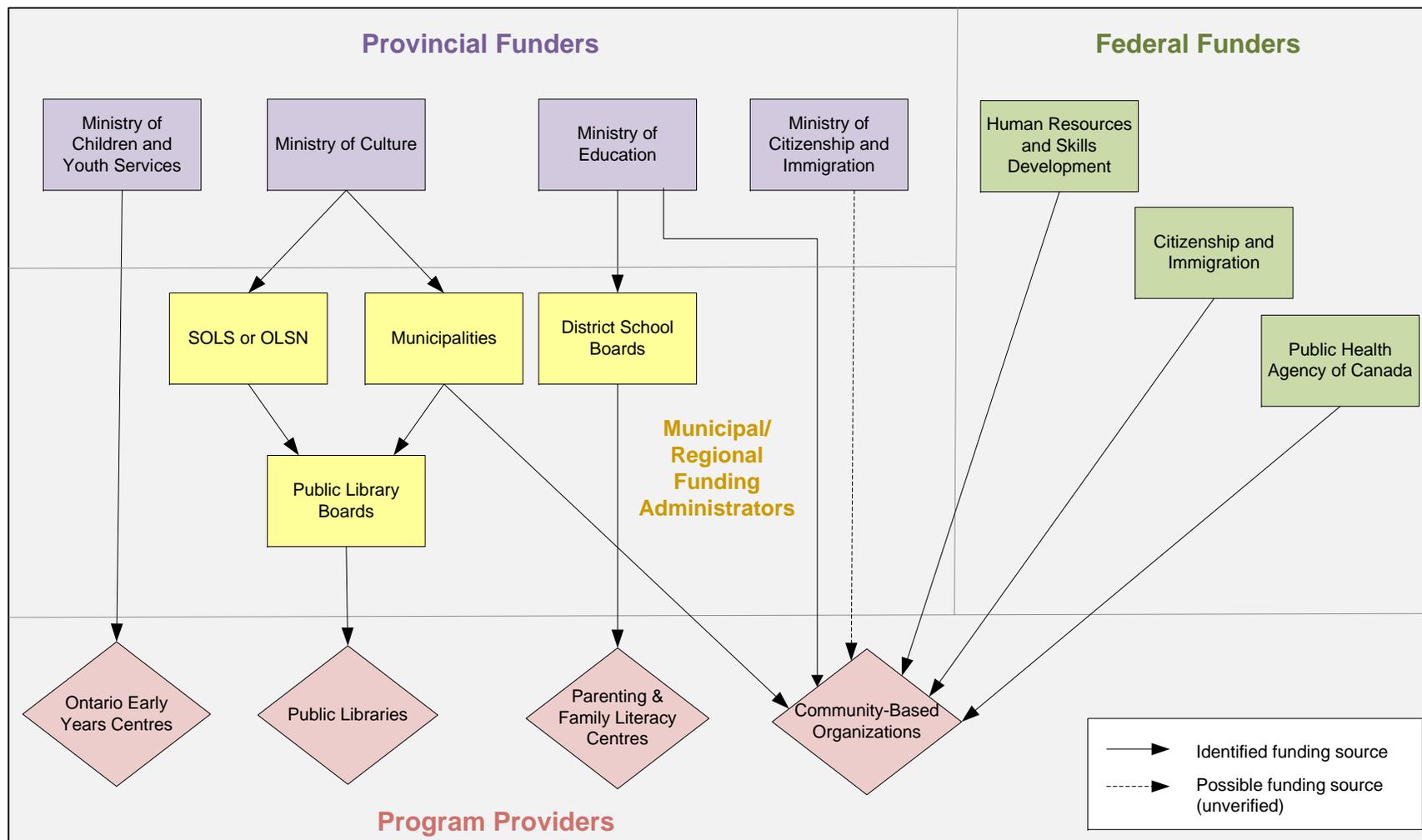
of programs with diverse program models, accountability structures and reporting requirements. This “patchwork” has made it difficult to assess program outcomes including the extent to which programs meet local needs.

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 provider in Ontario by describing their respective approach to family literacy and early learning as well as their funding source(s) and underlying policy framework.

Table 3: Four main providers of family literacy programs in Ontario

Providers	Funding Source	Policy Framework	Key Features
Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs)	Ministry of Children and Youth Services	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 Consolidated Municipal System Managers
Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs)	Ministry of Education	Literacy and Numeracy Best Start Poverty Reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 SOLS/OLSN, municipalities or public library boards; Municipal governments	Vibrant Liveable Communities	<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	Municipalities, provincial grants, HRSDC, CIC, PHAC, private sector, foundations, etc.	Social Development (HRSDC) Literacy and Essential Skills (HRSDC) Settlement (CIC) Community Action Program for Children (PHAC) Parents Reaching Out (MEdu) Newcomer Settlement (MCI) ? Various regional/municipal policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various

Figure 4: Current Pathways of Government Funding for Family Literacy Programs



4.2.1 Ontario Early Years Centres

About the Program

The Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) are a provincial program 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 their child. Facilitating and supporting the 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 less informal in that there may be a requirement for pre-registration and 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 unstructured and more structured learning approaches.

Table 4a: Examples of more structured, non-formal learning programs offered in 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

Structured, non-formal learning	Features
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 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 hand-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

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 in supporting child and family literacy. This checklist aims to help programs to determine both their strengths and gaps in promoting early literacy. We anticipate that further consultation with OEYC providers and Early Years policy advisors will provide more information about how this checklist is used.

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), McMaster University, to measure readiness to learn at school of children between 4 and 6 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. Future consultations with Early Years providers and policy advisors will seek out further information on assessment issues in OEYCs, specifically what evaluation tools and measures are used as a program requirement.

Funding and Policy Frameworks

As indicated in Figure 4, OEYCs currently receive funding from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. This ministry currently funds over 100 main Ontario Early Years Centres along with satellite centres.⁸ Consolidated Municipal System Managers (CMSM's), which are local planning and management groups established by the provincial government, are responsible for funding allocation.

The OEYCs are a key initiative within the provincial Best Start strategy. The Best Start strategy 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.⁹ Best Start is intended to be a seamless system of services, with 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 so 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 its population's needs.

Questions still remain with respect to the reporting requirements of centres (including whether these are intended to assess program outputs or outcomes), and the government's benchmark of success. Further information on the OEYC accountability framework will be collected in future consultations with Early Years policy advisors.

4.2.2 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres

About the Program

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLCs) are school-based programs for parents and their children from birth to six years of age that operate for four hours during the school day. They are closed evenings, weekends, PA days, and 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 located in elementary schools and are targeted to families with children who are at risk of academic failure. However, any family is eligible to access PFLC programs and services. PFLCs were first established in

⁸ Ministry of Children and Youth Service. *Frequently Asked Questions*, 2010. URL: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/topics/earlychildhood/oeyc/questions/index.aspx>.

⁹ 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).

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 more than 140 centres in 15 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, with minimal instruction and interference from the staff. Learners are never individually assessed. 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 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 OEYCs.

Approach to Learning and Teaching

A key 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 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 watching and participating. Programs are mainly unstructured and informal, yet 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 literacy learning as a program intention is also a key part of PFLCs.

The PFLC is envisioned as a welcoming place for families, and the PFLC program sees the parents as a child's first and most important teacher. To encourage parents/caregivers to be actively engaged with their child, PFLCs have only one worker, called the Parent Worker. The inability of the lone Parent Worker to be with all children at all times is intentional, as this compels parents/caregivers to step up and get involved. Role modelling for parents is an important part of Parent Worker's role. The Parent Worker aims to empower parents/caregivers by casually providing them with information as they engage in play with their child so as to enable parents/caregivers to understand the child's learning development. 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.

Evaluation

Data related to program outcomes is collected using the *Early Development Instrument (EDI)*, although at this stage in the research process we do not know how often this data collection exercise occurs. Future interviews with PFLC providers and ministry advisors will aim to fill this knowledge gap.

PFLCs also have a formal, multi-year evaluation plan developed in 1999 to assess immediate and long-term outcomes of PFLCs on students and their parents. A findings report (released in 2005) on the immediate outcomes associated with PFLC participation in 10 downtown Toronto PFLC sites using data from late 1990s reported that participation in PFLCs is associated with better preparation for Kindergarten. Findings based on 2008-2009 data from all PFLCs in the Toronto District School Board confirmed these findings.¹⁰

Funding and Policy Frameworks

As Figure 4 shows, the Ministry of Education channels funding through district school boards to fund the Parenting and Family Literacy Centres. PFLC planning (e.g. location, resources, programming, etc.) is currently the responsibility of the school board.

The Parenting and Family Literacy Centres (PFLC) initiative is part of the Ministry'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 suggested 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, 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 in life. PFLCs target academically at-risk neighbourhoods, a condition that is very often associated with low socioeconomic status.

4.2.3 Public Libraries

About the Program

Many public libraries also offer family literacy programs. For example, Toronto Public Libraries 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 and caregivers how to help their children prepare for reading.

¹⁰ 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 at-risk neighbourhoods). These results were reported to be sustained to Grade 1.

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 output data such as changes in library usage among target groups, which is then reported to the funding agency (the Southern Ontario Library Service or the Ontario Library Service North – see below).

Funding and Policy Frameworks

Libraries receive operating funds from the Ministry of Culture's Public Library Operating Grants Program¹¹ 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, literacy centres, and promotional/informational materials to 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.¹² 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.

It appears that libraries are accountable to the SOLS and OLSN for ensuring quality program performance. For instance, SOLS's grant program for learning and literacy for target groups requires funding recipients to report to the SOLS on program performance outcomes such as changes in library usage among target groups.

4.2.4 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

¹¹ Ministry of Culture, *Libraries*, 2006. URL: <http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/library/index.html>.

¹² Ministry of Culture, *Results-based Plan Briefing Book 2009-10*, 2009, 21-22. URL: http://www.culture.gov.on.ca/english/about/MCL_Briefing_Book_2009_10.doc.pdf.

government, foundations, corporate donors, and individuals. 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, not to directly increase literacy skill levels as measured by standard assessments. Much of the OLC's past research on family literacy program models provides information on programs in this category.¹³

Funding and Policy Frameworks

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 wellbeing 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.¹⁴ 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 requirements¹⁵, 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 (HIPPPY), as a recipient of SDPP funding. HIPPPY teaches parents how to prepare their 3-5 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

¹³ For example, see *Family Literacy Kit: A Comparison of Popular Program Models*, by the OLC and Kingston Literacy, and *Making the Connections: Family Literacy, Adult Literacy, and Early Childhood Development*, 2003, by the OLC and Kingston Literacy.

¹⁴ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, "Community Partnerships: Helping Canadians through community development and partnerships", 2010. URL: http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/community_partnerships/index.shtml.

¹⁵ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, "Social Development Partnerships: Children and Families," 2010. URL: http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/community_partnerships/sdpp/index.shtml.

for innovative projects and a wide range of learning tools and other resources.¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ 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 which support settlement and integration objectives, which may offer funding opportunities to settlement programs with a family literacy component. For example, a 2009 government news release indicates that HIPPIY Canada (described above) received \$3,150,544 in funding from CIC in 2009.¹⁸ 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 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.¹⁹ 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 JMC's 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

¹⁶ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, "Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES)," 2010. URL: http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/oles/olesindex_en.shtml.

¹⁷ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Strategic Outcomes and Program Activity Architecture," 2010. URL: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/paa/activity-05.asp>.

¹⁸ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Government of Canada invests in innovative family literacy program", 2009. URL: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/department/media/releases/2009/2009-09-10.asp>.

¹⁹ Public Health Agency of Canada, "Community Action Program for Children," 2010. URL: http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/dca-dea/programs-mes/capc_goals-eng.php.

discussion is shared; and a literacy circle is formed where participants read aloud and sing songs and rhymes.

- Growing Up Healthy Downtown – 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 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.²⁰ 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) Regional/Provincial Grants are available from the Ministry of Education and are offered to parent organizations, school boards, non-profit organizations, volunteer-sector associations, or post-secondary institutions working in partnership with parents.²¹ These 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, welcoming school board and school environment for all parents, or skill-building opportunities for parents. For example, the program 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

²⁰ Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, *Grants and Funding for Organizations*, 2010. URL: <http://www.citizenship.gov.on.ca/english/grantsandfunding/index.shtml>.

²¹ Ministry of Education, *Parents Reaching Out Grants*, 2010. URL: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/schools.html>.

learn together with their children to foster success in school and lifelong learning among family members.

The PROs are a part of the ministry's Parent Involvement Policy. The Parent Involvement Policy was first announced in December 2005, and aims to facilitate parent participation in their children's education and future success by creating condition, attitudes and supports for parents to engage in their child's education. The provincial Parent Engagement Office was created in January 2006 to support provincial efforts to foster effective parent involvement in the school system.²²

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.²³ In terms of assessment, performance measures are mainly output-based.²⁴ 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.²⁵

4.3 Gaps and Opportunities for Family Literacy

The following sections provide our preliminary findings on current gaps in the family literacy system in Ontario, focusing mainly on the Ontario Early Years Centres and the Parenting and Family Literacy Centres. We then present a brief overview of the current policy environment related to early learning in Ontario, and state our findings so far on current opportunities for achieving a more integrated family literacy system. Future consultations with additional program providers, such as adult literacy providers and other community-based family literacy providers, as well as Early Years experts and advisors may add further information related to gaps and opportunities for family literacy.

4.3.1 Current Gaps in Family Literacy Program Provision

Consultations with some Early Years providers from OEYCs and PFLCs revealed several gaps in family literacy program provision in some regions. These gaps relate to coordination and integration

²² Ministry of Education. "Parents Gain Voice In Education To Ensure Student Success," Ontario Newsroom, 2005. URL: http://ogov.newswire.ca/ontario/GPOE/2005/12/01/c2238.html?lmatch=&lang=_e.html.

²³ City of Toronto, "Family Support Programs," 2010. URL: <http://www.toronto.ca/children/famresource.htm>.

²⁴ City of Toronto, *User Guidelines 2010 Budget Submissions – Family Support Programs*. URL: http://www.toronto.ca/children/pdf/guide_bud_frc_10.pdf.

²⁵ City of Toronto, *Access, Equity and Human Rights (AEHR) Community Partnership and Investment Program (CPIP)*, 2010. URL: <http://www.toronto.ca/diversity/grants/index.htm>.

with other early learning programs, and addressing the literacy skills needs of parents/caregivers. Further consultation is required to determine the extent to which these findings are generalizable across other regions.

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. For example one OEYC provider stated that although the staff at her centre is somewhat aware of the curriculum in local schools and makes referrals to local public libraries, there remains a need for further coordination with community and school programs. PFLCs are better positioned to be aware of school curriculum since they are located within the school, but the degree to which they are coordinated with other family services in practice is less clear. More information on this issue will be gathered through further consultation with family and adult literacy service providers.

Moreover, the current family literacy program environment reveals a gap in addressing the literacy needs of parents/caregivers. Most family literacy programs in Ontario are focused 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, others 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. More information on the extent to which Early Years programs refer clients to adult literacy centres, and the degree of coordination that currently exists between family and adult literacy providers will be collected from consultations with additional Early Years providers, and adult literacy providers.

4.3.2 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. The Best Start strategy aims to transform and consolidate programs and services for young children (from birth to entry into Grade 1) into a coherent, responsive system.²⁶

However, despite this vision there is a “chaotic mix” with respect to the current provision of children and family programs in Ontario, and 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.²⁷ Previous research commissioned by the OLC and Action for Family Literacy Ontario indicates that this same chaos in family programs in general 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

²⁶ Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A framework for Ontario early childhood settings*, 2007, 3.

²⁷ Charles E. Pascal, *With Our Best Interest in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, 2009, 15.

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.²⁸

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 the 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.²⁹

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, this Early Years Policy Framework would include a full-day early learning component for four- and five-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.³⁰ 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

According to Pascal, Best Start Child and Family Centres (CFCs) would 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.³¹ 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 5 below.

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.³² A re-thinking of the current system must precede the implementation of the Best Start Family Centres, which may provide a

²⁸ Kim Falcigno, *The State of Family Literacy Programs in Ontario: Results of a Provincial Survey*, Ontario Literacy Coalition, 2006, cited in Action for Family Literacy Ontario, *Family Literacy in Ontario: Putting it on the Map!*, 2006, 5.

²⁹ Pascal, 2009, 14.

³⁰ Ibid.

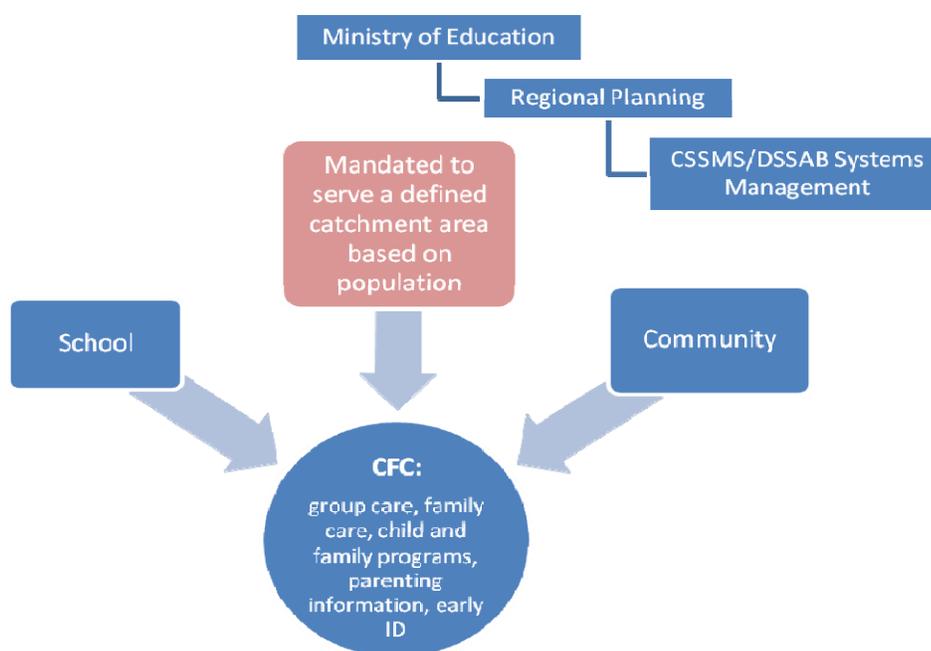
³¹ Ibid.

³² Pascal, 2009, 20.

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. Services 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.

Figure 5 – Child and Family Centres' full service program approach



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.

As recommended by the Pascal Report, municipalities are anticipated to be the Systems Managers for CFCs, although the province will enforce a provincial accountability framework with targets, timelines, and quality standards. Municipalities would facilitate the re-engineering of effected 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. Data Analysis Coordinators (DACs) will also move to municipalities to support service planning and accountability.

Municipalities would be responsible for regional planning, with school boards, public health and 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 MEdu. Municipalities would also receive their funding for children's services from MEdu, rather than 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.

Implications for Family Literacy

While we suggest that the shift to the CFC approach and the reconsolidation and re-engineering process it implies is a major opportunity for strategic engagement with early learning officials, more information is required in order to obtain a better picture of the implications of this transition to the family literacy agenda. Given the above developments, we have three key questions related to the implications for family literacy that will guide our research on the gaps and opportunities for family literacy: first, what would be the nature of family literacy programs in CFCs? Second, is there scope for coordinating and integrating with other community-based programs? And third, how will parents'/caregivers' literacy needs be addressed by this new system of family supports? Consultations with Early Years providers and policy advisors in the future months may be able to provide further information on these issues.

What would family literacy programs in CFCs be like?

In regards to the first question, we know that OEYCs and PFLCs, among other family programs, will be integrated into the CFC system, and that OEYCs and PFLCs take different approaches to family literacy program delivery and teaching methods. We do not yet know which aspects of each program will be maintained since the Early Years policy framework is still being developed by Dr. Pascal and his team. For instance: PFLCs target at-risk neighbourhoods, while OEYCs do not target any neighbourhood type in particular as a rule; PFLCs operate only four hours during the school day and follow the school calendar, while OEYCs are open year round; PFLCs have a core set of program components that are consistent across sites, while OEYCs do not appear to have this level of consistency; activities in PFLCs are entirely unstructured and play-based, while OEYCs include both unstructured and more structured types of non-formal learning programs; and while local planning, funding allocation and management of OEYCs is conducted by Consolidated Municipal System Managers (CMSMs), PFLCs are overseen and managed by school boards. CFCs will need to consolidate and reconcile these key differences, which has implications for the delivery, instructional approach, management and oversight of family literacy programs, raising the question of the nature of family literacy programs that will be offered at CFCs.

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

A second question relates to the extent to which there are opportunities for integrating other types of family literacy programs into the CFC model other than those already part of the provincial Best Start policy framework, such as public library programs and community-based programs funded by other provincial ministries or other levels of government. The CFC approach aims to encourage coordination with other community programs and services, but it is not yet known how the provincial framework will seek to achieve this coordination and integration, or what this will look like in practice.

How will parents'/caregivers' literacy needs be addressed by this new system of family supports?

A third question is how will the CFC approach address the needs of parents/caregivers as adult learners. The Summer Institute on Early Child Development did not provide any discussion of adult learning, which raises questions regarding the extent to which parents/caregivers will be engaged as learners in their own right. To what extent is there scope for the CFCs to offer literacy programs that promote adult literacy skills development? Or will the CFCs focus primarily on enhancing parent/caregiver involvement in their children's literacy development? If the latter approach is taken, to what extent is there scope for CFCs to provide a seamless bridge or platform to adult literacy programs? How can family literacy and adult literacy program providers coordinate or integrate their services? We will seek out information on these issues in our meetings with Early Years advisors and relevant advisors in MTCU.

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. Adult literacy programming in CFCs could potentially be rationalized as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which is led by MCYS and aims to break the poverty cycle. Further research must be done to explore whether this is a desired and feasible option.

4.3.3 Promising Approaches – 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 literacy. 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 Years providers, we have so far 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. We intend to gather more insight on the Hamilton model in a meeting with City of Hamilton researchers and advisors.

A Regional Strategy: Making Hamilton the “Best Place to Raise a Child”

Like most regions across the province, Hamilton has a Best Start network of Early Years 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 Hamilton, and members share a common goal to support Hamilton families and to put their needs at the center of all decisions. A focus group with Hamilton's OEYC directors and other Early Years providers, as well as representative 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.³³ This goal was established in 2006 and began as linked 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.³⁴ It may be the case that this collective aspiration has encouraged the various providers to rally around this common goal.

³³ *Hamilton Best Start: Your guide to early learning and care in Hamilton*, 2009/2010, p. 4.

³⁴ *Hamilton Best Start: Your guide to early learning and care in Hamilton*, 2009/2010, p. 9.

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 the best possible start in life.³⁵ Further consultations with family literacy and adult literacy providers in Hamilton will be used to gather additional information on whether and how parents’/caregivers’ needs, including skills needs, are considered and addressed.

A major theme in our focus group with Hamilton providers was how Hamilton’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 in the form of coordinating services, collaborating 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 in Hamilton. 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.³⁶ Community partners view themselves as part of an integrated system of supports for Hamilton families.³⁷

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 CFC model proposed by Dr. Pascal. Although many OEYCs and PFLCs 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. OEYCs 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), 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 6), 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.

³⁵ *Hamilton Best Start: Your guide to early learning and care in Hamilton*, 2009/2010, p. 5.

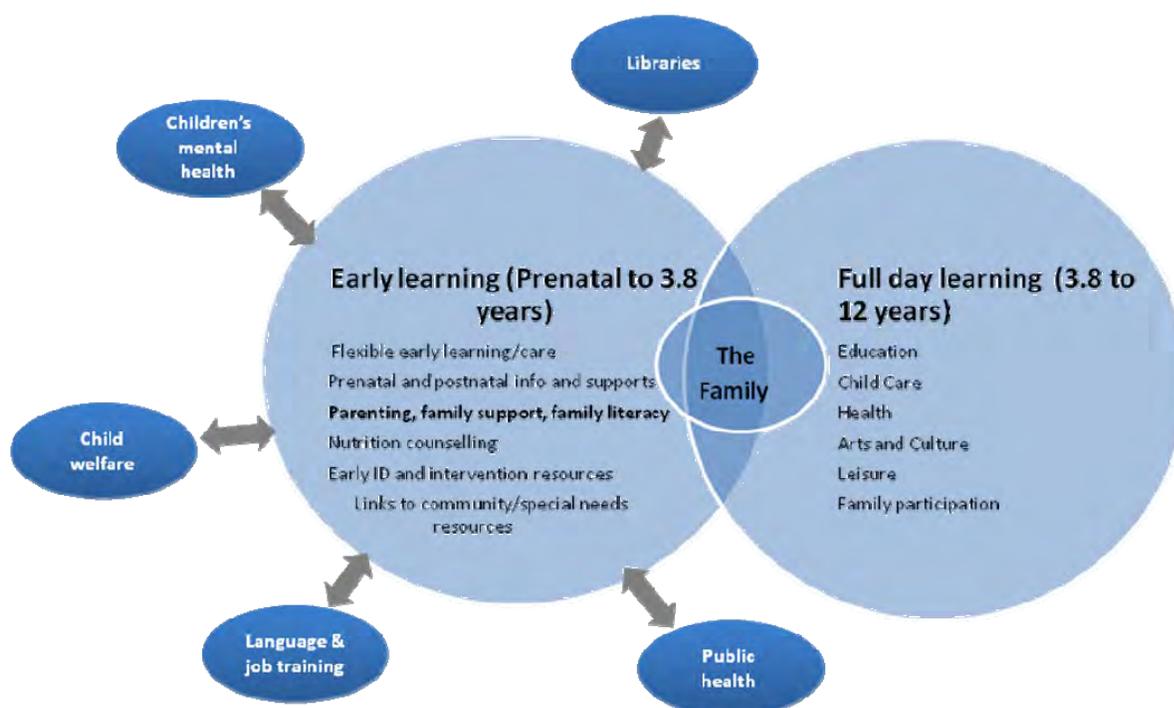
³⁶ Charles Pascal on the Hamilton Early Years system, from *Hamilton Best Start: Your guide to early learning and care in Hamilton*, 2009/2010, p. 9.

³⁷ *Hamilton Best Start: Your guide to early learning and care in Hamilton*, 2009/2010, p. 5.

Table 5: Examples of Family Literacy programs offered at Hamilton OEYC's

Structured Learning Programs	Unstructured 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 6: The Hamilton Early Years Model – a holistic approach to child and family support



5. CONCLUSION

Family literacy programs in Ontario are provided by multiple types of organizations, and 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 about the extent to which public funds are allocated effectively, efficiently, and equitably.

Through Ontario's Best Start strategy, regions across the province are being encouraged to correct some of this chaos by coordinating and integrating their services. The 2009 Pascal Report 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 such as Hamilton are already on their way to achieving this by engaging in promising approaches for coordination and integration in family literacy programs, 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 try 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 in order to create more literate communities.

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