THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

WHAT IS THE CAYC?

The Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC) grew out of the Council for Childhood Education and was officially recognized in 1974 by the granting of a Federal Charter. It is the only national association specifically concerned with the well-being of children, birth through age nine, at home, in preschool settings and at school. Members of the multidisciplinary association include parents, teachers, caregivers, administrators, students and all those wishing to share ideas and participate in activities related to the education and welfare of young children.

MISSION STATEMENT

CAYC exists to provide a Canadian voice on critical issues related to the quality of life of all young children and their families.

THE AIMS OF THE CAYC

1. To influence the direction and quality of policies and programs that affect the development and well-being of young children in Canada.
2. To provide a forum for the members of Canada's early childhood community to support one another in providing developmentally appropriate programs for young children.
3. To promote and provide opportunities for professional development for those charged with the care and education of young children.
4. To promote opportunities for effective liaison and collaboration with all those responsible for young children.
5. To recognize outstanding contributions to the well-being of young children.

IMPLEMENTING THE AIMS OF THE CAYC

1. The National Conference:
   The National Conference is a highlight of the CAYC. The program includes lectures by internationally renowned authorities on children, workshops, discussion groups, displays, demonstrations, school visits and tours.
2. Provincial and Regional Events:
   The organization of members at the local and provincial level is encouraged to plan events to deal with the issues and concerns pertaining to young children. These events may take the form of lectures, seminars or a local conference.
3. The Journal:
   An outstanding multidisciplinary journal is published twice yearly. Articles by nationally and internationally known experts in early childhood education and child rearing are presented in the Journal of the CAYC. Inside CAYC provides information on Association activities.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MEMBERSHIP

Membership fees are payable on application and renewable annually on an evergreen basis. To be considered a voting member, fees must be paid no later than 60 days prior to the Annual General Meeting.

CAYC members receive two issues of Canadian Children as well as favourable rates for national and regional conferences.

Regular $55.00, 2 Year Regular $100.00 association/institution $120.00, student/senior $30.00, international $135.00 (CA).

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ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR LES JEUNES ENFANTS

QU’EST CE QUE L’ACJE

L’Association Canadienne pour les Jeunes Enfants, issue du Council for Childhood Education, a reçu sa charte fédérale en 1974. Elle demeure la seule association nationale vouée exclusivement au bien-être des enfants, de la naissance jusqu’à l’âge de neuf ans, dans leur foyer, à la garderie et à l’école primaire. L’ACJE est composée de parents, d’enseignants, de professionnels de la petite enfance, d’administrateurs et d’étudiants, ainsi que de tous ceux et celles qui sont intéressés à partager leurs idées en participant à des activités liées au bien-être et à l’éducation des jeunes enfants.

SA MISSION

L’ACJE s’est donné comme mandat de faire entendre une voix canadienne sur les questions essentielles ayant trait à la qualité de vie de tous les jeunes enfants et de leur famille.

SES OBJECTIFS

2. Créer un forum pour les membres de la communauté canadienne oeuvrant dans le domaine de la petite enfance afin de susciter une collaboration active dans l’élaboration de programmes appropriés au développement des jeunes enfants.
4. Promouvoir des occasions pour une meilleure coordination et collaboration entre tous les responsables des jeunes enfants.
5. Récompenser et souligner les contributions exceptionnelles faites en faveur des jeunes enfants.

EXÉCUTION DES OBJECTIFS DE L’ACJE

1. Le congrès national:
   Il constitue le grand événement de l’ACJE. Des sommités de renommée internationale en matière de petite enfance y prononcent des conférences et on y participe à des ateliers, des débats, des expositions, des démonstrations, et à des visites guidées d’écoles.
2. Les événements provinciaux et locaux:
   L’ACJE encourage ses membres à organiser des conférences, des séminaires ou des congrès au niveau local et régional afin de débattre des problèmes relatifs aux jeunes enfants.
3. La revue:
   Publication bimensuelle et multidisciplinaire de premier ordre, la revue regroupe des articles traitant de questions d’éducation et de formation des jeunes enfants. On y retrouve également des articles écrits par des experts de renommée nationale et internationale. La rubrique Inside CAYC Censure les lecteurs sur les activités de l’Association.

ABONNEMENT ET COTISATION DES MEMBRES

Les cotisations doivent être réglées au moment de l’adhésion et celle-ci doit être renouvelée chaque année. Pour se prévaloir de son droit de vote, tout membre doit acquitter sa cotisation au moins 60 jours avant l’Assemblée Générale annuelle.

Les membres de l’ACJE reçoivent la revue, et bénéficient de tarifs spéciaux pour participer au congrès national et aux événements régionaux.

Tarif des cotisations annuelles: général: 55 $, général 2 année 120 $, étudiants/aîné : 30 $, associations : 120 $, international : 135 $ (CA).

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Cover Photo by: Silvia Kind
**Canadian Children** is the journal of the Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC), the only national association specifically concerned with the well-being of children of preschool and elementary age in Canada. The journal is published twice yearly and contains articles, book reviews and announcements of professional conferences.

**Canadian Children** is a multidisciplinary journal concerned with child development, child studies and early childhood education. Authors from across Canada, and elsewhere, are invited to submit articles and book reviews which reflect the variety and extent of both research and practice in early childhood education and child well-being.

**CONTENT:**
Submissions should appeal to an audience that includes parents, professionals in the field of childhood education and child services, as well as teachers and researchers. Most issues are multi-theme in nature and the editor will attempt to balance articles that are research related with articles of a practical nature relating to programming, curriculum, classroom practice or child well-being.

**FORM, LENGTH AND STYLE:**
ARTICLES may be of varying length, written in a readable style. Style should be consistent with an acceptable professional manual such as the Publication Manual (6th Edition) of the American Psychological Association. Articles should be sent as an email attachment to the email address below. Authors are to obtain releases for use of photographs prior to mailing. Please include a brief biographical sketch including the author(s) full name, title, professional affiliation, and other relevant information, such as acknowledgements, grant support or funding agency. It is expected that authors will not submit articles to more than one publisher at a time.

**ACCEPTANCE AND PUBLICATION:**
The editors will acknowledge receipt and will review all solicited and unsolicited manuscripts received. The final publication decision rests with the editor, and will be communicated within three months.

**SUBMISSIONS:**
Accepted on an ongoing basis.
The landscape of the Early Years in Canada is undergoing major transformation. Government departments, early learning centres, early childhood educators, parents, kindergarten teachers, university researchers, policy makers and other stakeholders are implementing/experiencing major shifts in programs and services for young children and their families across the country.

These changes are occurring in provinces throughout Canada as exemplified by the following. British Columbia has moved all of its schools to a full-day kindergarten program, and is moving towards the integration of junior kindergarten for four-year old children into the school system. Ontario has accepted a report on a vision for early learning, and has initiated a full day kindergarten for 4 and 5 year-old children, with full implementation by 2014 (Pascal, 2009). A number of not-for-profit organizations in Quebec have worked to collaboratively plan the transition of children from early education and care to school environments. Three government departments have developed a guide for educators and parents to support children's initial transition to school (Guide for Supporting a Successful School Transition, 2010). A plan for early learning and childcare was promulgated in New Brunswick in 2008. Innovations in this province include early child development centres, transition-to-school coordinators, and early intervention reform. In Prince Edward Island, services for children in the early years have moved from the Department of Social Services to the newly-constituted Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. A focus on the development of an Early Years system, rather than an Early Childhood Education and Care sector, is currently in the second year of implementation, and Kindergarten has moved from community-based centres to the public school system.

These examples provide a small cross-section of transitions currently occurring in the field of the Early Years and reflect critical policy decisions being implemented across Canada. Authors of the articles in this issue of Canadian Children draw upon their research and work in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island to share a snapshot of some of the transitions currently underway across the country.

In Troubling Government Discourse on Early Learning Websites: A Critical Analysis, Marianne McTavish analyzes how children, childhood, and families are portrayed on Department or Ministry of Education websites in western Canada as provincial governments adopt new initiatives and programs. In her study, she finds that many of these online texts promote a deficit model of families. As well, texts on the websites frequently encouraged families to participate in early years initiatives in order to support their children in preparing well for learning in school, and also in achieving later economic success.
The issue of deficit thinking is picked up by Joanne Lehrer in A Critical Investigation of Policy, Research, and Programs that Aim to Support Children’s Transition to Kindergarten in Quebec. She investigates the differences between transition to school and school readiness, and the impact of the “pedagogicalization” of parents. She paints a poignant picture of the impact that this approach has had on parents and their children, and underlines the importance of an approach that “support[s] children’s transition to kindergarten from a strength-based, as opposed to a deficit-oriented, perspective”.

The impact of global transitions in Early Years curriculum documents is explored by Gabriela Arias de Sanchez, Ray Doiron, and myself in An Examination of International Early Childhood Curriculum Documents. We examine current (1996-2011) curriculum documents from 17 countries and 5 Canadian provinces—a total of 27 documents. We share the striking similarities among many of the documents: the value of the early years as the most dynamic period of brain development, the role of formal early childhood education as the primary stage in the lifelong learning continuum, and the belief that investing in early years is a worthwhile investment of society’s resources.

Roz Stooke, in her article It’ll all come out in the wash: Managing Policy Change in an Informal Parent-Child Program turns to a narrative approach to explore the impact of changes in governmental policies on a community-based, informal, parent-child program. She conceptualizes the work that the practitioners involved in the program did as “transition work” that allowed them to maintain pace with the policy changes being implemented. The narratives of educators, children and parents in the program illuminate the impact of these transitions.

Patricia Peterson, William Morrison and Ruth Morrison also turn to narrative, and share the impact of transitions on parents in New Brunswick. Their article, Early Childhood Services: Using Narratives to Explore Parents’ Experiences of Transition, weaves the notion of transitions through the lens of the parents’ shared narratives. These researchers explore the meaning of transitions, and the stages parents lived through as they encountered transitions in integrated services early years environments.

Kate Tilleczek draws upon a longitudinal study in which researchers converse about the meaning of transitions in education—defined as “critical moments in a child’s life” with students, parents, and teachers. In her article, Early Childhood Transitions and Critical Praxis, Kate addresses the critical praxis—the “critique and interrogation of the theory and practice surrounding childhood transitions”—underpinning the early childhood education frameworks of Australia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick. In keeping with her focus, she advocates for a “critical praxis for transitions” that addresses the causes of inequities in both education and research.

This is a transformative time for systems and services for young children and their families in Canada, and accordingly, a prime opportunity to sustain and enlarge a pan-Canadian dialogue about the Early Years. I trust that readers of this issue will enhance their “funds of knowledge” regarding the impact of transitions on Canadian children, parents, early childhood educators and teachers, and early childhood and education systems as they engage with the thought-provoking articles in this issue on transitions.

Martha Gabriel

From the Publications Chair
By: Iris Berger

Dear CAYC members, as well as Canadian and international readers, as you are about to find out this special Fall issue of Canadian Children is slightly different from our traditional format for the journal. As the guest editor, Dr. Gabriel, explained above, the articles in the Child Study section of this issue are a collection of research projects from across Canada exploring the timely topic of transitions in early education. Since we wanted to give this important topic adequate space in the journal we decided not to include the Professional Resources section and the Publications’ Chair column in this issue.

I would also like to draw your attention to the Forest Project (see pg. 33-36). In her visually compelling narrative about the evolution of the ‘forest studio,’ educator/artist Allison Wells is able to illuminate, or make visible, how children’s thinking and imagination came to live as they moved between two spaces: the ‘real’ forest and the ‘forest studio.’ This story can inspire us to think about the significance of creating early childhood spaces that are full of possibilities for experimentation, collaboration, and connection.
Troubling Government Discourse on Early Learning Websites: A Critical Analysis

By: Marianne McTavish, PhD

Marianne McTavish is an assistant professor of teaching in Emergent and Early Literacy in the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of British Columbia. Her research interests include young children’s information and digital literacy practices in home, school, and community contexts. Prior to obtaining her PhD, Marianne taught kindergarten through grade three in the public school system for over 25 years. She can be contacted at Department of Language and Literacy Education, University of British Columbia, 2125 Main Mall, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6T 1Z4. Email: marianne.mctavish@ubc.ca

Abstract

In an international study released in 2008, Canada’s provision of early childhood education and care ranked at the very bottom of 25 developed countries, achieving only one of ten minimum standards as outlined by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (UNICEF, 2008). The results of this study, in addition to other emerging research (e.g., Janus & Offord, 2007), has attributed to the production and implementation of several early learning initiatives within Ministries across Canada (Beach, Friendly, Ferns, Prabhu, & Forera, 2009). The purpose of this paper is to analyze how children, childhood, and families are portrayed on multi-sector Ministry websites in western provinces and territories (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Yukon and Northwest Territories) as government transitions to these new initiatives and programs. Results indicate that the texts promote deficit notions of families and endorse families’ participation in these initiatives as ways to ensure success, not only in the child’s readiness for school, but in future individual economic success.

We are well into the second decade of the millennium and the extensive attention to the preparation of young children to be ready to succeed at school entry has not wavered. Discourse regarding the preparation for this century, a changing workforce (Chen, 2011), and the advancement for a new economy (Kears, 2001) continues to headline most government documents. This emphasis represents a paradigmatic shift away from socialization, safety, and nurturance in the early years to transition to a narrow focus on proficiencies, competencies, and investments.

Reasons for this shift have been well documented. The success of early intervention programs established in the United States (e.g., Head Start, High/Scope Perry Preschool, and Bank Street) during the 1960s War on Poverty movement drew great acclaim from governments (Cooley, 2010; Winter & Kelley, 2008). The substantive evidence indicating these programs had long-lasting and positive effects for improving outcomes for disadvantaged children needing support in cognitive and socio-emotional development acted as a catalyst for future programs. In turn, the effects of these programs supported and extended the notion that early intervention could advance society goals for a stronger workforce and a better quality of life (Boyer, 1991; Heckman, Moon, Pinto, Saveliyev, & Yavitz, 2010; Kelley & Surbeck, 2007).

Over time, the need to reconceptualize the term “readiness to learn” became apparent as researchers pushed to incorporate a broader notion of development than one solely tied to cognitive and literacy outcomes (Denham, 2006; Fram, Kim, & Sinha, 2012; Kagan, 1994; Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2006). The identification of specific factors of development (e.g., health, dispositions toward learning, motor and brain development) impacting a child’s ability to learn became a major focus in the 1990s and continues today. Framed by Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological theory positing that children’s learning and development occurs within the many contextual layers of homes, schools, and communities, an emphasis on the shared responsibility and accountability for children’s development became the impetus for intensive and comprehensive intervention strategies (Kagan, 1990; Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Collaboration among these contexts was needed as young children transitioned between homes, local agencies, organizations, and government institutions (Winter & Kelley, 2008).

Against the backdrop of interest in the early years, emerging research in the United States and Britain at the turn of the millennium in the areas of neuroscience, biology, and psychology showed evidence that the early years of a child’s development could impact future success. For example, studies of children in preschool and kindergarten who demonstrated more social competence and emotional self-regulation had fewer conduct problems: an indicator of potential school failure (Blair, 2002; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Stoolmiller, 2008). Advances in brain research also pointed to the importance of quality environments in homes, schools and community contexts not only in terms of cognitive and language stimulation, but in the development of social, emotional, and physical domains (Belsky et al., 2007; Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron, & Shonkoff, 2006).
Currently in Canada, attention to the early years has also gained importance. In a study released in 2008, Canada’s provision of early childhood education and care ranked at the very bottom of 25 developed countries, achieving only one of ten minimum standards (e.g., a national plan with priority for disadvantaged children, subsidized and regulated child care services for 25% of children under three, subsidized and accredited early education services for 80% of four year-olds) as outlined by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (UNICEF, 2008). The results of this study, in addition to research on the development of measures to identify young children at risk for future success (e.g., Anus & Offord, 2007), has attributed to the production and implementation of several early learning initiatives across Canada effectively transforming the ways we think about children, childhood and families (Beach, et al., 2009).

Taking a closer look

The purpose of this paper is to analyze how children, childhood, and families are portrayed on multi-sector Ministry websites in western provinces and territories (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Yukon and Northwest Territories) as government transitions to these new initiatives and programs. Given the promotion of early learning programs in western provinces and territories, increasing government and media attention to early learning programs, and the availability of and accessibility to the Internet, this research is well timed and significant. Websites and the texts promoted on and within these websites were analyzed in terms of: who is targeted, the activities promoted, and the purposes of the initiatives and programs. The findings of this present study draw attention to the explicit and implicit messages in the texts analyzed.

As such, the research questions for the study were:

1) What messages about children, childhood, and families are conveyed in early learning texts on multi-sectoral government websites?
2) What messages about early learning are being conveyed, either implied or explicitly stated?

Using a social and cultural lens

This research is situated within the “cultural/discursive mismatch” (Rogers, 2003, p.5), a social debate in which culture, language and knowledge of working-class parents and students do not align with schools and other institutions (Collins, 1989; Heath, 1983). Rogers claims that there are three ways in which this mismatch is conceptualized. First, she describes how public perception orients deficit notions of lower income families to suggest that these families do not do the kinds of literacies or academic preparation activities that are sanctioned and accepted by schools. Second, Rogers suggests that parents and caregivers may have neither the need nor the desire, depending on their past educational histories or current job status, to practice schooled types of literacy. Third, drawing from Ogbu (1978), Rogers suggests that these mismatches may simply occur because parents may not believe that education may contribute to economic opportunities in the future. While these mismatches still perpetuate, researchers working directly with families (e.g., Mctavish, 2007, 2009) have noted otherwise.

This research is also theoretically situated within the social turn movement that shifts the focus on the study of individuals to an emphasis on social and cultural interaction (Gee, 2000). “Discourse” (Gee, 1996) is a powerful theoretical construct and can assist greatly in understanding the mismatch phenomenon. Discourse, according to Gee, may be defined as “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often language is accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or ‘types of people’) by specific groups of people. [Discourses] are, thus, always and everywhere social and products of social histories” (p. viii, emphasis in the original). Gee’s framework draws attention away from a solitary focus on learning and language use in social settings to position learning, power, and identity construction more broadly in and out-of-schools and across the lifespan (Schultz & Hull, 2002). Using this framework to analyze the discourses on government websites illuminates the notion of how officials may use their power to position particular groups of people in particular ways, how to construct the ways the public views them, and to rank and sort them in particular ways.

Conducting the Research

To select the websites for this study, I began with a search of provincial government websites in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Yukon and Northwest Territories. The reasons for choosing to focus on these particular government websites were two-fold. First, I sought to develop depth in the data set rather than breadth for this particular study. As government websites tend to have prolific hyperlinks that reveal layers upon layers of text, I realized my data collection and subsequent analysis could be a massive undertaking. Second, as my own work is situated in the Western provinces and territories and my familiarity with government documents of these areas was significant, I decided to narrow my focus to include only western provinces and territories at this time.

Having delineated the particular provinces and territories to include, I began my research by using the Google® search engine to access each province and territory’s government website (e.g., Government of British Columbia, Government of Alberta). Within that website, I searched the site using the term “early learning.” That search, including the hyperlinked sites within, yielded a corpus of 45 printed texts. These texts varied in nature and included, for example, printed information on main webpages, linked curriculum documents and frameworks, information for parents in the form of pamphlets and other documents, and news releases (for a further listing of
texts analyzed, see Appendix). As each website was identified, I downloaded the texts contained on the websites converting them to, and saving them as, rich text format (RTF) files.

Once completed, all of the RTF files were read and I began to identify common threads and themes in response to each of the research questions. Next, I compiled a list of key words for each theme. For example, terms such as families, family members, caregiver, and grandparent were grouped under the theme family. Then, using Atlas-ti Visual Qualitative Data Analysis software, I uploaded all the RTF files and consistently coded all of the texts according to these themes. I identified all instances of each theme in the texts and the frequency with which it occurred. Finally, I grouped the various themes into four clusters that I labeled as follows: Messages about Families, Messages about Childhood, Messages about Children, and Early Learning Messages.

Findings

To report the findings, I turn to the first question that guided this study: “What messages about children, childhood, and families are conveyed in the texts on multi-sectoral government websites?”

Messages about Families

Families as targeted audience.

Overwhelmingly, “families” are the targeted audience of these texts. Generally, the texts fell into two categories. Although all websites and texts can be accessed by anyone, including families, in the first category, the texts were written about families. In this category, the texts targeted families in terms of providing the reader with information to show what the government is doing to assist in eradicating vulnerability and promoting health and well-being of families. The following example reflects this:

The Healthy Women, Children and Youth Secretariat works in partnership with other ministries, health authorities and not for profit organizations to develop and implement health promotion and prevention strategies and supports for families and communities, preventing vulnerability, promoting resiliency and advancing the health and well-being of children and youth and their families. (B.C. Ministry of Health, 2011, “Promoting the Health of Children and Youth in B.C.”, para. 3)

In another example of texts written about families, some website texts were written with consideration about what families as a general collective cared about or valued, as illustrated in this example: “What families and communities believe and value about literacy is reflected in the level of preparation children bring to formal instruction, and affects the role of schools in providing literacy experiences and instruction” (Alberta Education, 2011c, “Experiences,” para.1). Both examples reflect generalist notions of families, and a sense of the inanimate.

In the second category, the texts were written to families; that is, the texts provided information or advice on parenting or what families should do or how they should act during certain events. The following is another typical example:

First grade students often enjoy sharing their schoolwork with their family. They take great pride in what they’ve created and feel honoured when it’s posted on the bulletin board or refrigerator. The first time they are able to read to you is a moment to treasure forever. (Alberta Ministry of Health, 2010, “Share the Learning,” para.1)

In this particular example, families are told what to expect of their children who attend grade one as well as outline the expectation for family behaviour once the child performs certain acts related to school.

Despite the repeated mention of family / families, few texts defined the construct. For example, one text defined family as “parents as the primary caregivers while in others, grandparents and other relatives may play an equally significant role” (B.C. Ministry of Education, n.d., p.6). Another defined family as “a single parent, two parents or an extended multigenerational family” (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2007, p. 9). Despite research (e.g., Mui & Anderson, 2008) that documents the roles of family members other than parents (e.g., siblings, aunts, cousins) in supporting young children’s development, on the websites analyzed, parents are the assumed targeted participants within the context of the family. No website text reflected the understanding that the social unit of ‘family’ is culturally constructed; that is, families are different within different sociocultural contexts reflecting diverse beliefs, values, histories, behaviors, activities, and members. From this perspective, the way families raise, support and teach their children is considered “normal” (Anderson, Hare, & McTavish, 2012).

Some texts promoted deficit notions that families do not have the necessary skills or knowledge to support their child’s early learning. For example, some of early learning websites proposed that early learning programs would “demonstrate for parents and caregivers how they can help their children develop” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2011a, Strong Start BC, para. 1), an explicit assumption that parents and families not only need assistance, but children are at a deficit if they do not receive “help.” In some instances, families are given specific advice on selecting appropriate activities, such as “reading, painting, playing with a nearby friend, or spending time with you” (Alberta Ministry of Health, 2010, “Finding Time,” para. 2). In the next sentence, further advice is offered: “When your child says “I’m bored!”, make sure that the solution is not always the TV or computer games” (Alberta Ministry of Health, 2010, “Finding Time,” para. 2), suggesting that families do not make good choices for their children in terms of providing enriching activities.

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**Messages about Childhood**

Early childhood as a short and critical developmental stage.

Although some texts noted that childhoods differ depending on social and developmental circumstances, at the center of a number of these texts is the notion that childhood is regarded as a window of opportunity when children are particularly responsive to experiences that can have long-ranging effects. As such, childhood is profiled as a critical stage of development where young children’s brains demonstrate “plasticity” in the early years and this time is the most critical for neurological development. One website explains:

Children between birth and five are at critical stages of development. Their brains at this age have the most “plasticity” - the potential to be shaped in permanent ways. Research suggests that, during this time, there are windows of opportunity when children are especially receptive to experiences that can shape their whole lives. (Early Childhood Learning Agency, 2009, p. 5)

Other government websites display similar statements:

Early childhood is the most active period of brain development although the brain continues to develop well beyond this time. Experience plays an important role in this development, with the nature of a child’s early experience having a long-term impact on learning outcomes. (Alberta Education, 2008, p.2)

Each of these quotes represents a sense of urgency, the extreme importance of the early years, and the enormity of missed opportunity. As noted in both these examples, there is an emphasis on experience/experiences (with the nuance of both positive and negative experiences) bearing long-term effects. The message connotes that a child’s experiences must be carefully monitored and constructed in order for the child to develop properly.

**Messages about Children**

Children as commodity and one-dimensional.

Children are largely characterized in the texts as one-dimensional unless they are specifically categorized as “at-risk,” “vulnerable,” “ESL,” “Aboriginal,” or “special needs.” Only two texts described the image of children in a positive manner. For example, one text described children as “capable and full of potential; as persons with complex identities, grounded in their individual strengths and capacities, and their unique social, linguistic, and cultural heritage” (B.C. Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 4). A nother text noted, “each child is considered to be a gift to the family and the community” (Government of the Northwest Territories, 2007, p. 9). The term “gift” is interesting in this context and has the potential to be considered by some as a term indicating a transfer of goods or objects, and further, a link made to the social science of economics.

To substantiate this point, children were viewed on some websites as commodities in which to invest and secure a sustainable future. This is illustrated substantively in the following quote:

When ongoing positive investments are made, children and youth are more likely to develop the competence and resilience necessary to participate fully in life, develop healthy lifestyle practices, and develop a sense of self-efficacy, hope and optimism. They are also more likely to grow into competent, participating adult members of society. It is estimated that every dollar invested in early years saves three to nine dollars in future spending on the health, criminal justice systems, as well as on social assistance. (B.C. Ministry of Health, 2011, “Promoting the Health of Children and Youth in B.C.”, para.2)

While many websites did not state it as bluntly as above, some suggested that investing in children in the early years would make economic sense and ensure long-term benefits to society in general.

**Messages about Early Learning**

I now turn to the second research question that asked, What messages about early learning are being conveyed, either implied or explicitly stated?

Early learning contributes to future economic success.

An inherent message in the texts is that early learning is vital to life-long success and provides a foundation on which to build individual, social, and economic wellbeing. For example, one foundational document on a provincial website stated, “early learning is the foundation for lifelong learning, and the basis for individual, social, economic, and environmental well-being” (B.C. Ministry of Education, n.d., p.2). Other texts indicated that universally available programs result in more positive outcomes for children and the economy. One province repeatedly articulated the “great goal of becoming the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent” (Early Childhood Learning Agency, 2009, p.5) in several texts, and indicated that early learning is key to reaching this goal. The link here, although not stated, is that high literacy levels are the underpinning of an educated workforce and in turn, a highly successful economy.

Benefits associated with early learning.

Many of the texts listed a multitude of positive outcomes associated with early learning: less grade repetition, fewer referrals to special education, higher graduation rates, and an increased likelihood of attending a four-year college. As one text indicated:

The children attending the [early learning] programs also experienced later health and social gains including lower rates of teen pregnancy and smoking, a smaller likelihood of receiving welfare as adults, and a greater likelihood of being homeowners with higher income and lower rates of unemployment. (Early Childhood Learning Agency, 2009, p.10)

Other sites promoted the notion of early learning as a main contributor to specific
in-school success including improvements in reading, writing, math, creativity, social development, work habits, motor skills, and performance on standardized tests. As the Alberta Fact Sheet explained, “What young children learn at this stage will have a major impact on successful learning experiences in school, on personal development and on future participation in society” (Alberta Education, 2011a, p. 1). Further, these texts linked experiences of early childhood to having a profound impact on the overall health and wellbeing of individuals throughout their lifetime. As the Administrators’ Handbook on Prekindergarten points out, “a quality Prekindergarten program represents a positive investment in children’s development through improved social skills, better health and higher self-esteem, leading to increased school success and less likelihood of costly interventions later” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p.1).

Early learning as investment. The messages regarding early learning as investment generally encompassed statements of recognition of the importance of investing in early learning. Some texts stated that children were more likely to grow into competent, participating adult members of society if this investment is done when children are at a very young age (Alberta Education, 2011a). Other websites also claimed that every dollar invested in the early years saved reduced future costs in other social policy areas such as health, criminal justice systems, and social assistance (B.C. Ministry of Health, 2011, “Promoting the Health of Children and Youth in B.C.”) as noted in previous quotes. As one text stated plainly, “This government recognizes the importance of investing in early learning” (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2011b, “Why is the Province Moving to Full Day Kindergarten?” para.1).

Early learning contributes to school readiness. Many of the texts indicated that early learning assists with transitions to school. The implicit message here is that there is a set of standards expectations or desirable attributes that must be met or attained before children can successfully begin learning in schools. In fact, some provincial websites reported they had initiatives to do exactly that: “This initiative targets pre-kindergarten to Grade 3 students by identifying learning vulnerabilities and easing transitions between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten” (Yukon Government Department of Education, 2011, p. 2). This message was also connected with implicit messages that families have vital responsibilities in preparing their children for school. Many of the texts featured influential guides for parents, some written at a lower primary grade reading level, with emphases on promoting decontextualized skills such as letter, sound, word, and number knowledge. For example:

Children use mathematics to make sense of their world. They count objects up to 10. They show a given number using pictures or objects. They sort objects by shape, colour or size. They recognize and make patterns. They compare objects on length, weight or volume. (Alberta Education, 2011b, p.2)

Other texts simply pointed out the connection: “There is a strong link between what preschoolers know about books, words, sounds and letters and their readiness for school” (B.C. Ministry of Education, p. 4).

Discussion

As I analyzed the explicit and implicit messages in the texts on these websites, I became increasingly aware that early learning is depicted as a panacea for many social and economic problems in society. I began to wonder by whom these websites were written and maintained, and who, in fact, was accessing them. While I concluded that a number of different agencies and authors were compiling the reports linked on the websites, the actual writers who compose the content on the sites are elusive. Further, upon checking sources in writing this paper, many of the links had been changed or broken; new texts were added and others deleted over time. This is a result, I suspect, of changing priorities, success or nonsuccess of initiatives, or changes in government. I was also surprised by the number of new documents that had been added under the banner of early learning.

It becomes clear that early learning continues to be a focus for many western provinces and territories. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to determine who is accessing these websites, it seems unlikely to me that the target audience for these websites - largely the family - would be accessing and using the information found on these sites.

Attending to the discourse

With regard to messages about families, it is interesting that the websites offered loose definitions of families, generally referring to program participants as “parents” (e.g., Alberta Education, 2011d; B.C. Council for Families, 2011). With the diversity of cultures and family units in the western provinces and territories, a more inclusive description of families is justifiably warranted. As Gee (1996) contends, to speak generically of families instantiates and promotes certain roles affixed to certain groups of people. In the case of early learning, the production of programs for which one size fits all may be a possible outcome without attention to this diversity.

The increased attention to brain research in very young children seems to have entered into the early learning discourse in significant ways. The website texts promoted a seemingly short time frame for which children could most fully benefit from increased stimulation. Clearly, a sense of urgency is associated with these messages; these, in turn, could inevitably lead to blanket practices that pay little attention to the individual developmental patterns of young children. While evidence may point to prime opportunities for neural development, other research has also noted that the brain is capable of forging new pathways throughout the
Moving Beyond the Critique

With the current critical mass interest in the early years, it is time to move beyond the discourse of early learning that focuses on investments, vulnerabilities, and proficiencies toward alternate ways of understanding children, childhood, families, and learning in the early years. The first suggestion may be to examine alternate approaches, such as Reggio Emilia, an approach that has reconceptualized early childhood education in ways that recognize children’s competencies and their multiple symbolic languages, and the important and respectful involvement of families (New, 2007). The Reggio Emilia approach contrastingly portrays optimistic rather than deficit views of classrooms, teachers, children and families, guided by a “system of relations” (New, 2007, p. 11) which link the interests and needs of all - children, families, teachers and community members.

Another possibility may exist in taking a more holistic approach rather than one that focuses solely on a narrow definition of development; an approach that not only views the child from many different domains but inclusively and thoughtfully integrates care, nurturing and learning as communities of practice, such as those articulated in some European educational developments. In these cases, there has been a shift to decentralize and move authority and decision-making to those individuals who are deeply involved with the children and community (Johansson & Moss, 2012).

Finally, we must be open to alternate approaches for assessing the health of communities — those approaches that are sensitive to measuring the wellbeing of populations on many different levels, rather than an exclusive focus on the economy. As Guhn, Gadermann and Zumbo (2012) point out, the focus on early learning may be more about elevating expectations generated by this type of discourse are onerous and, perhaps, quite unrealistic for those that are targeted. This study can serve to alert us to the types of language and discourses that are inherently essentializing. It is also serves as a call for those of us who work within the early years field to voice alternate views of early learning in order to assist with more thorough and complete government articulations. There clearly exists a need for advocacy within early learning communities to procure more positive views of children and families regarding their potential, capabilities and richness of culture. Early learning is a complex construct that has as many layers as the number of hyperlinks found within the websites concerned with the subject. Each layer needs to be carefully and critically explored if we want to make considerable differences in the lives of young children.

Concluding Thoughts

As I looked at the websites’ texts across the western provinces and territories in Canada, I noted remarkable consistency among them, and a reiteration of similar messages, and to some degree, exact replication of parts of the texts. The central extracted message of these websites, for the most part, designate that early learning is about investing early in young children to ensure school readiness, which inevitably leads to academic success and a healthy, productive, engaged life, and ultimately, a more civil and economically sound society. However, as Smythe (2006) and others have pointed out, the expectations generated by this type of discourse are onerous and, perhaps, quite unrealistic for those that are targeted. This study can serve to alert us to the types of language and discourses that are inherently essentializing. It is also serves as a call for those of us who work within the early years field to voice alternate views of early learning in order to assist with more thorough and complete government articulations. There clearly exists a need for advocacy within early learning communities to procure more positive views of children and families regarding their potential, capabilities and richness of culture. Early learning is a complex construct that has as many layers as the number of hyperlinks found within the websites concerned with the subject. Each layer needs to be carefully and critically explored if we want to make considerable differences in the lives of young children.

References


### Appendix

#### Documents Analyzed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province: British Columbia</th>
<th>Document/Content</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BC Early Learning Framework</td>
<td>M indy document found on government website describing the vision, pedagogical principles, and key areas of learning for children birth to five years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expanding Early Learning In British Columbia For Children Age Three to Five</td>
<td>Report found on government website completed by the Early Childhood Learning Agency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full Day Kindergarten Parent Pamphlet</td>
<td>Government issued information pamphlet for families available on Ministry of Education website.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Years Initiatives</td>
<td>General information on main page of Ministry of Education Website describing Ministry’s strategic plan for the Early Years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BC Pre-Kindergarten work</td>
<td>General information on webpage linked within government website describing partnerships with community preschools.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BC Full Day Kindergarten Questions and Answers</td>
<td>General information in Full Day Kindergarten for families and public on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children and Youth Health: Promoting the Health of Children and Youth in B.C.</td>
<td>General information for public posted on government Ministry of Health webpage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Development</td>
<td>General information for families and caregivers concerning services available on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full Day Kindergarten preK</td>
<td>General information on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Learning Initiatives</td>
<td>General information on webpage linked within government website describing commitments and initiatives to early learning in B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Years Study 2: Putting Science into Action</td>
<td>Linked PDF research document within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent/Child Mother Goose Program</td>
<td>General information for families and public regarding early learning program on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read &amp; Grow BC</td>
<td>General information on website describing the province’s literacy action plan on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ready, Set, Learn</td>
<td>General information for families and public describing provincial readiness program on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ready, Set, Learn: Helping your preschooler get ready for school</td>
<td>Linked PDF document for assisting families get their children ready for school within linked government website.</td>
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<td>Tips for Parents/Caregivers attending a Strong Start Centre</td>
<td>General information for families on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>KidsFirst Program</td>
<td>General information for families and public regarding program serving vulnerable families on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<td>Early Learning and Child Care Program</td>
<td>General information on early learning programming main page of Ministry of Education Website.</td>
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<td>Early Development Instrument</td>
<td>General information for families and public regarding child readiness measurement tool on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<td>Ministry Overview Early Learning and Child Care</td>
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<td>Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide</td>
<td>PDF resource document for families and public within government website.</td>
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<td>Preschool</td>
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<td>What is KidsFirst Questions and Answers</td>
<td>General question and answer information program for families and public on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Services Directory</td>
<td>Pamphlet for public and families linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early childhood program</td>
<td>Government report for public linked within government website.</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stepping Into Kindergarten Brief</td>
<td>News release on government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Years Transition Initiative</td>
<td>General information on transitioning and identifying children into school for families and public on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yukon Government Expands Full Day Kindergarten</td>
<td>News release on government website.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Healthy Families</td>
<td>General information on healthy living for families and public on webpage linked within government website.</td>
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Early Childhood Transitions and Critical Praxis

By: Kate Tilleczek, PhD

Kate Tilleczek is the Canada Research Chair in Child/Youth Cultures and Transitions and a Full Professor in Education and Sociology at the University of Prince Edward Island. Her interests intersect the social sciences and humanities as they relate to understanding the lives and times of young people. She is the author of Approaching Youth Studies: Being, Becoming, Belonging (2012, Oxford University Press). She is also co-editor of Marginalized Youth in Contemporary Educational Contexts, which will be released in December 2012.

Abstract
This paper presents literature and findings on childhood transitions in public education. Set in the context of shifts in Canada to full day kindergarten, it makes visible the range of human relational and structural concerns that must be considered in the practice of researching and facilitating transitions for children. The paper draws upon a review of international literatures and a longitudinal, three-year qualitative study of 795 students, parents, and educators in 37 families of schools who conversed about the character and meaning of transitions. Such long-term enactments of transitions as they occur are scarce but important in making visible the complexity and nuance of childhood transitions. Findings include the importance of a critical praxis for transitions which gets at the roots of the social organization and inequality in research and educational practice. The paper addresses critical praxis as found in three early childhood education frameworks (Australia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, Canada). Attention to being, becoming, and belonging for all children and the fit between human and structural concerns at the levels of society, community, school, and family form core elements of critical praxis. Transitions are best understood and facilitated as over time, complex social ensembles.

Research and practice around early childhood transitions centres largely on institutional transitions, particularly in relation to formal care and education. Political, economic, cultural and psycho-social factors interact in shaping children’s ability to access quality basic services. Transitions research has the potential to unravel these factors - at macro, meso and micro levels - that explain why some children have opportunities for development while others do not... Few actions on behalf of children are apolitical or free from theory. (Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008 p. 38)

The above cited review of literature on early childhood transitions is poignant and in agreement with research on transitions of children as they subsequently move through public education. Whether approached from a social justice, economic, human capital, and/or social capital stance, the lives and well being of children are indisputably critical both in their own right and in relation to becoming an adult. Five decades of Canadian research provide detailed evidence of how this is true (McCain, Mustard & McCuaig, 2011; McCain & Mustard, 1999; Keating & Hertzman, 1999). It is easy to fall into general parenthood statements about “well being” and the “future” when one discusses society’s response to children. However, the real lives and struggles of children help to save us from that simplicity. This article addresses transitions as critical moments in a child’s life. It illuminates the complexity, social ensemble, and abundance of experience encountered in transitions by putting into conversation the literature on early childhood and later public school transitions with data from a longitudinal qualitative study on how transitions are enacted over time and while in process.

In so doing, the paper interrogates essentialized ideas of early childhood transitions and suggests, instead, a critical praxis approach provided by the complex cultural nesting framework (Tilleczek, 2011). Critical praxis is used here as invoked by Carroll’s (2005) Critical strategies for social research. It demarks a theory and practice (praxis) in research or education which gets at the root of understanding complex social processes. Critical, in this sense, is not dogmatic but “implies a critique of some sort” (p.1) that depends on a recognition that “the world is marked by extreme inequalities and injustices, and that our knowledge of ourselves and the world is caught up in those very practices and structures of inequality and domination” (p. 2). I would add that our understanding of the lives and transitions of children be similarly grounded. A critical praxis denotes critique and interrogation of the theory and practice surrounding childhood transitions. The findings presented in this article show that transitions are complex, social, and ecological trajectories that are not easily grasped, predicted or interpreted. The complex biographies of children, educators, and families must be made visible to plan for and practice transitions. The paper addresses how early childhood transitions are therefore best theorized, conceptualized, and supported and how they have come to be seen in early childhood education frameworks.
Tensions in Transition

Transitions are not...a reified problem to be solved; instead, transitions are seen as complicated, as an ongoing tension to be understood and discussed. (Tilleczek, 2011, p. 12).

Beaujot and Kerr (2007) concur that there are differing “transitions regimes” for children in different nations but all are structured by complex social, economic, cultural, and institutional arrangements. The literature on moving into public school in early childhood (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Volger, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008) and later moving through public school (Tilleczek & Ferguson, 2007) reveals many similarities in current school transition regimes. Transitions have been recognized as a stumbling point for children, particularly for those who live in situations of risk (Dodge, Pett & Bates, 1994; Lord, Eccles, & McCarthy, 1994; Seidman & Allen, 1994) and a national sample of US kindergarten teachers judged that approximately one-sixth of children entering kindergarten faced serious adjustment problems with an additional one-third facing minor problems (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000). New school settings are commonly associated with dips in academic achievement, dips in self-esteem, and increased anxiety (Alsopah, 1998; Eccles, Lord, Roesar, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1997; Galton, Grey, & Rudduck, 2003) based on the discontinuity between settings. There is a need to examine and “harmonize” early childhood care with local educational practices while broadening our concept and perspectives on what a transition entails for children, educators and families (Tilleczek, 2012; Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008).

When we examined the process of transitions in this way and from the multi-perspectives of children, youth, educators and parents (Tilleczek et al., 2010; Tilleczek, 2012), we found that they are best seen as temporal processes which cross social, academic, and procedural issues. Transitions entail changes in school cultures, increased academic demands, structural changes, and shifts in peer groups which can be difficult to negotiate (Hargreaves & Earle, 1990). There are nested transitions (Tilleczek, 2011) as follows: Transition from childhood to adulthood over the life course; Transitions along pathways through schools, communities, and families; Transitions from family into school within these larger transitions; and Transitions as both fresh starts and false starts.

Therefore, an important emotional paradox undergirds transitions (Tilleczek & Lafalme, forthcoming). Many children at the threshold of a new school are hopeful about the potential of their new status, school, friends, and education (Graham & Hill, 2003). Kirkpatrick (2004) has reported that students look forward to this fresh start and are adept at making new friends for positive academic and social purposes. A contradiction exists, however, in that many children also express anxiety about transitions. Poor and immigrant youth state that they expected things to be easier than they actually turned out (Graham & Hill, 2003) and pre-school children from lower socioeconomic families show more externalizing behaviour in kindergarten then do the children with greater economic advantage (Dodge, Pett & Bates, 1994). Indeed, being poor has long been understood to be the most critical risk situation for children and this socioeconomic gradient effect in children’s educational and social outcomes has been documented in detail (Keating & Hertzman, 1999; Maholmes & King, 2012; Wilkinson & Picket, 2009).

The most pervasive source of anxiety on moving into a new school is the loss of status that comes with being a newcomer (Graham & Hill, 2003; Hargreaves & Earle, 1990; Tilleczek & Hine, 2006). The greatest difficulties identified by kindergarten educators were a child’s difficulty in following directions, lack of academic skill, a disorganized home environment, difficulty working independently, and lack of any formal pre-school experience (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). There is very little qualitative, longitudinal research on childhood transitions from the perspectives of children but the US Pre-elementary Educational Longitudinal Study (PEELS) has collected data from 3,104 children from ages 3 to 5 with special needs and disabilities. Support from school personnel was found to make a significant contribution to the ease of transition. For instance, many educators used over five strategies to ease transition and communication between sending and receiving programs and parents, and this was found to be useful by over 80% of the educators (Carson, Daily, Bitterman, et al., 2009). Dips in self-perception and learner identities are pervasive (Silverthorn, DuBois, & Cramble, 2005) as academic concerns such as homework, pressure to do well, and potential drops in achievement occur (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Social concerns such as getting lost, bullying, and making friends (Schumacher, 1998) are prevalent, perceived risks for children and youth. Structural problems are also imagined and/or experienced by students. Of concern are the size and layout of secondary schools, the time table, complicated schedules and having new teachers (Graham & Hill, 2003; Schumacher, 1998). Kirkpatrick (2004) has reported that students often feel that the honeymoon is over after the initial adjustment phase to school.

It is, therefore, imperative to map transitions over time since they involve non-linear, developmental social processes that are not easily captured in singular or cross-sectional data. Researchers and policy makers have begun to make use of interdisciplinary and ecological models to examine multiple levels of influence and the burgeoning number of risk or protective factors in each setting (Vogler, Crivello & Woodhead, 2008). The complex cultural nesting approach (Tilleczek, 2008, 2011) provides one such interpretive framework for examining the critical praxis of early childhood transitions.

This framework builds upon and
extends Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) highly influential work in describing multiple ecological and social levels at which various risk or protective influences occur. These levels of concentric systems - chronosystem, macrosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem - are well known to early childhood researchers and practitioners who describe the contexts within which children develop. Children adapt to role and setting changes such that children making life transitions confront “ecological transitions” (1979, p. 26) and “every transition is both a consequence and an instigator of developmental processes” (1979, p. 27). Indeed, the ecological systems approach firmly grounds the frameworks reviewed here (Australia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick).

The complex cultural nesting approach further integrates interdisciplinary insights about children from sociology, cultural psychology and childhood studies to move beyond a purely descriptive model of ecological settings and towards a deeper sense by which social contexts are structurally (politically and economically) organized and negotiated actively by children. Invoking a developmental contextual model (Lerner, 2002), the socioeconomic gradient and income inequality models (K-eating & Hertzman, 1999; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), the life course model (Elder, 1995, 1997), and the sociological lens of institutional ethnography (Smith, 2002), this approach does not view development in a traditional sense in which children are understood to move along easily determined or linear pathways. Time and growth remain central aspects but transitions are conceived as non-linear and dynamic (Furlong, Cartmel, Biggart, Sweeting, & West, 2003; Tilleczek, 2011; Tilleczek et al., 2010) and nested within complex cultures (Tilleczek, 2011). This makes it necessary to determine how and why families and children live out their complex narratives, become resilient, and make life changes (Pais, 2003). It reminds us to avoid the mistake of seeing all members of risk groups (e.g., children not “ready for school”, children in poverty, children with mental health challenges) as necessarily and simply “at-risk” without also seeing how they are at-risk, their potential for resilience (Ungar, 2004) and the fluidity of “in-risk situations” for children and youth in transition (Tilleczek et al., 2010, Tilleczek, 2012). What, if anything, of these emerging concepts and theoretical strands is taken up in early childhood educational practice? The theories and practices (praxis) suggested in frameworks and curricula begin to suggest if, and to what extent, a critical praxis of early childhood transitions is emerging.

Early Childhood Transitions and Critical Praxis

Three useful organizing principles - being, becoming, and belonging - emerged in our research project on transitions through public education when approached in a three year qualitative and multi-perspectival way within a complex cultural nesting framework (Tilleczek, et al., 2010; Tilleczek, 2012). Our Transitions Project was a process-oriented study of student, educator, and parent experiences and descriptions of the range of social, academic, and procedural aspects of transition. The review of literature had identified a gap in longer term qualitative research that addressed the complex processes of transitions and the critical place they play in the lives of children while they are being enacted.

Our study sample consisted of 795 people participating in 124 focus groups and an additional 130 interviews with students drawn from these groups. The Phase I samples were comprised of 265 students in 34 focus groups and 52 of these children/youth also participated in interviews. We also spoke with 33 educators and 23 parents in Phase I. In Phase II, we conducted 44 Focus groups with 305 participants and carried out 78 additional youth interviews. Of these, 35 were follow-up interviews with young people with whom we also spoke in Phase I. Phase III included 174 participants who took part in 29 focus groups consisting of 17 focus groups with 125 young people, 8 focus groups with 25 parents, and 4 focus groups with 24 educators.

In short, we found students to be in constant motion and tension in their being, becoming and belonging as they moved from one educational and social context to another. They were in process of being themselves in their everyday lives in forging identities through daily and ongoing active negotiations at school, home, community, work, and with friends. As such, they wanted to be valued for who they are today and to find places to belong. Indeed, a lack of belonging and feeling like an outsider emerged as a significant risk situation in the transition as did feeling of lesser status compared to classmates (Tillezcek & Laflamme, forthcoming). To complicate matters for students, they were also embedded in a societal defined moment of becoming young adults as they moved from school to school. They were very much in nested transitions - between schools, between social statuses, between personal and social understandings, expectations, pressures and treatments of who they are. They and their educators and parents agreed that transitions through school are a critical social and personal marker and recommended the need for a social ensemble - extended transitions teams - to help build bridges across settings, structures, and relationships (Tilleczek, 2008). They needed human and structural supports in place to attend to each of their being, becoming and belonging challenges in the academic and social realms. Continuities were found to be built with enhanced communication between and across schools, educators and families. We suggested an approach to sharing records and documentation that embraced a visual and narrative profile of the situations of risk and resiliency the students lived within (Tilleczek, 2012). Our team was able to approach transitions as a critical praxis for school transitions by finally re-analyzing the data for policy and practice in relation to animations and enactments of being, becoming and belonging.
Early Childhood Frameworks: Prince Edward Island

Similarly, my review of the critical praxis in early childhood transitions arising from three recent comprehensive early childhood frameworks made visible elements of being, becoming and belonging. While the focus in these documents is not directly on the larger concept of transitions per se, elements of a critical praxis emerged. For instance, the Early Years Report for the province of Prince Edward Island, Canada (Flanagan, 2010) is a good case in point. Built upon decades of evidence and grounded in the ecological metaphors based on Bronfenbrenner’s work as recommended by Gabriel et al. (2010), the report builds a vision and framework for childhood development for the province of Prince Edward Island (PEI). The report was written as the province was opening its school doors to full day kindergarten for the first time in history. The earlier discussion about transitions cited in this paper suggests that this seemingly simple policy shift represents in fact represents multiple transitions for children, families, educators and institutions as follows: a) children would move into the school system with the requisite social, emotional, academic and procedural issues raised; b) the early childhood sector would be without these 5 year old children and many pre-school educators and staff; c) the school system would receive 5 year old children for the first time and attempt to come to terms with new forms of primary education and accreditation for such; d) the families of these children would encounter transitional issues; and e) the post-secondary sector would experience shifts in needs for training to keep par with these shifts. In all, the complexity and cultural responsiveness of the human relationship and systemic changes are significant and require evaluation at many levels to determine if this transition has been a “success”, both for the individual children and the system.

The transitional point sparked a need for a comprehensive review of early learning to provide baseline data, vision and framework for the future to address this complexity. Indeed, the goal was to provide a “comprehensive review of early learning in Prince Edward Island...leading to a plan for a sustainable, high quality accessible early childhood system serving all Island children and their families” (Mella Report, as cited in Flanagan, 2010, p.1). The framework embraced the complexity of children and early childhood sectors, the need to integrate and collaborate to address this complexity, the need for seeing children as central in inter-connected nested ecological systems, and levels of support for children at the centre of seven connected segments of society including family, family support programs, community support programs, education and early childhood care, prevention and early intervention, community agencies, and child supports. Missing, however, was a clear focus on transitions and the critical praxis approach as a means to enact and animate success for all children. Also absent were abundance and non-linear trajectories and metaphors crucial to enacting the work of transitions and for supporting the being, becoming and belonging for all children. However, being and becoming are recognized in the proposed vision for children as “…valued for who they are today, and as the future parents and leaders of tomorrow” (p.15).

Early Childhood Frameworks: Australia

In contrast, the second example from Australia’s national Early Years Learning Framework embraces more fully the concepts of belonging, being, becoming and yet misses out on the complexity and cultural nests within which children’s lives occur. In 2009 the Australia Government rolled out Belonging, being & becoming: The early Years Learning Framework for Australia (Australian Government Dept of Education, Employment and Workplace, 2009). Similar to the PEI document, it is not embedded in the notion or concept of transitions or complex cultural nests but it is based upon the fundamental “life characteristics for children” (p.7) of belonging, being and becoming rather than conceptualizing them as fundamental social process for development. Indeed, the document provides both principles and practices laid out in relation to the notions of belonging, being and becoming, defined as follows:

Belonging – knowing where and with whom you belong is integral to human existence...Belonging acknowledges children’s interdependence and the basis of relationships in defining identities...Being recognizes the significance of the here and now in children’s lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life’s joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life. The early childhood years are not solely preparation for the future but also about the present. Becoming – reflects this process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as young children learn and grow. It emphasizes learning to participate fully and actively in society. (p.7)

In each case presented in the Australian document, belonging, being and becoming form the ring around the principles and practices outlined in a model in which they are to constantly inform and remind us of issues of identity, fit and development. While they take up the detailed explication of each, and see development as non-linear and complex, this model presents these foundational social processes as individual and non-problematic by missing the critical interrogation of social inequalities for children and families. However, the Australia Framework offers a useful organizing point for moving toward the complexity that is early childhood transition, and they incite the complexity of childhood and children into specific practice and outcomes in learning.

Early Childhood Frameworks: New Brunswick

In contrast, the New Brunswick framework melds elements from both Australia and Prince Edward Island. All of the
frameworks invoke a good deal of early childhood literature and play-based theory and practice, but the New Brunswick document makes most use of that which relates directly to transitions, continuities and the connections needing to be made for children. In this respect they meld the early childhood and transitions literature, albeit for only two pages of 60. The critical praxis of transition is also evident in the inclusion of discussion about cultural context, inequality and children’s rights. As in the other two documents, the ecological and nested metaphors are prominent but there is additional focus on the quality of interactions and diversity within the systems approaching some of the elements suggested in the complex cultural nesting approach and critical praxis.

Recognizing that each child embodies race, religion, culture, social and economic status, gender and ability in unique and dynamic ways, we also acknowledge that paying close attention to the sites of difference is requisite to ensuring equitable opportunities for all children. In so doing we emphasize the need for a curriculum that is responsive to differences, with the capacity to provide additional support as required to ensure each child’s right to full participation (New Brunswick Department of Child and Family Services, 2007, p. 6)

The authors also cite Rayna (2001) in her use of the term “todayness” in relation to the importance of being. They refer to becoming in relation to the importance of being, becoming, and relationships that are important to belonging as important in all contexts.

The Transitions Study and the three early childhood frameworks reviewed here demonstrate how societies are beginning to better recognize the importance of supporting early childhood transitions. This paper suggests that early childhood transitions require critical praxis. While not the whole solution or direction, the evidence shows that grounding our theory and practice in the everyday complex process of children and childhood is a step forward. We are reminded that we could honour the emotional paradox that exists at the transitional points such that children and families experience both fresh starts and false starts in moving between settings and across time.

Exemplary educational responses to transitions lead schools and people to function as communities which build bridges between students, parents, teachers and communities. Practices should also balance our pre/during/post transition activities and funds (time, resources, etc.), and begin to mark developments by increasing responsibilities for children which allow status, belonging, and confidence when they are ready. In remaining aware of the nested transitions, a longer critical conceptual view will lead to more enduring practices. Research practices should attend to the gaps in knowledge that remain in fully understanding the meso level—where the intersections of culture and individual meet. We should capture the meaning and experience of transitions as they occur and from the point of view of children. Critical praxis in early childhood transitions leads us to attend to different kinds of theories, research questions, and educational practices. How are joys and problems of transition organized socially and politically? What meanings do children, parents, and educators make of the transition and why? What would it look like if we placed the social, cognitive and physical needs of children at the centre of transitional practices? For whom are early childhood transitions most successful, at what point and why?

References


A Critical Investigation of Policy, Research, and Programs that Aim to Support Children’s Transition to Kindergarten in Quebec

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Abstract
This article critically examines Quebec policy and programs related to children’s transition to kindergarten, with a particular focus on “hard to reach” families (Hong, 2009; Mapp et Hong, 2010): those that are low-income, have limited levels of formal education, are part of racialized groups, speak a mother tongue other than English or French, and/or are recent immigrants. A conceptual analysis of parent pedagogicalization (Popkewitz, 2003) and of the difference between the transition to school and school readiness is followed by a review of the literature on children from “hard to reach” families beginning school. Five themes are identified in the literature: socio-demographic characteristics and academic achievement, the neighbourhood environment, transition practices, parent perspectives, and classroom processes. The article concludes with implications for policy, practice, and further research in order to support children’s transition to kindergarten from a strength-based, as opposed to a deficit-oriented, perspective (Carr, 2001; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995).

Current legislation and policy in Quebec, similar to other minority-world countries, positions early childhood education as an economic investment in children as future citizens and taxpayers (Fabian & Dunlop, 2006; Heckman, 2011; Gouvernement du Québec, 2012; Humblet & Vanderbroeck, 2007; Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport 2009; McCain, Mustard & McCuaig, 2011; Moss, 2008). In this context, the transition to kindergarten, and the parent-school relations that are established during this period, are seen as vital for ensuring children’s continued academic and social success at school (Entwisle & Alexandre, 1998; Jacques & Deslandes, 2002; Ramey & Ramey, 1999; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). This transition is deemed particularly important for families identified or constructed as marginalized and “hard to reach” (Hong, 2009; Mapp & Hong, 2010): those that are low-income, have limited levels of formal education, are part of racialized groups, speak a mother tongue other than English or French, and/or are recent immigrants. These children and their families are often reported as having more difficult transitions to school (Brooks-Gunn, Rouse & McLanahan, 2007; Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010; Fantuzzo, Rouse, Mcdermott, Childs & Weiss, 2005; Magretts, 2002; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). However, some Canadian studies have suggested that middle-class children make up the largest proportion of children who are “at-risk” or “vulnerable” upon starting school (Desrosiers, Tétrault & Boivin, 2012; Kershaw, Irwin, Trafford & Hertzman, 2005; Willms 2002).

In 2009, Quebec’s Ministry of Education revealed a 13-point plan to counter the fact that the province has the highest high school dropout rate in Canada¹ (Statistics Canada, 2011). Despite rhetoric on the importance of learning in the early years to later school success (McCain, Mustard & McCuaig, 2011; OECD, 2011), only one of the points of this success plan concerns early childhood: “Prepare children in disadvantaged areas and children with difficulties [emphasis added] for starting school” (MELS, 2009). Similarly, Quebec’s Educational Childcare Act (2012), the legislation regulating Quebec’s government-supported early childcare services, singles out the same groups of children:

The object of this Act is to enhance the quality of the educational services provided by childcare providers covered by this Act so as to ensure the health and safety of the children to whom childcare services are provided, particularly those with special needs or who live in a precarious socio-economic situation [emphasis added], foster their development and well-being and provide them with equality of opportunity. (R.S.Q., chapter S-4.1.1, Item 1)

Official financial documents (e.g., Finances Quebec, 2009; Vérificateur général du Québec, 2011) further reduce the purpose of early childhood education. For example, in a budget report titled Family Policy in Quebec: Where are we? The Quebec government explicitly states that the goal of early childhood education is to “equalize children’s opportunities by promoting their development, by

¹ Among the provinces.
better preparing them to begin school, and thereby contributing to reduce school drop-out” (Finances Quebec, 2009, p.27). The auditor general’s report on the optimisation of resources derides the Ministry of Family and the Elderly for not meeting their own goals of targeting “disadvantaged” children and children from immigrant families (Vérificateur général du Québec, 2011).

The purpose of this article is to explore and to trouble this focus on children living in poverty as requiring extra support during the transition to school. While the geopolitical context of the paper is the province/nation of Quebec, the discourse and research supporting these policy statements take place in a globalized neoliberal context (Kaščák & Pulala, 2011), and therefore, theory and research from multiple minority-world countries will be reviewed in order to situate transition programs currently in place and to make recommendations for further research, policy, and practice. The paper begins with a conceptual analysis of the role of parents in children's early schooling and of the difference between school readiness and the transition to school. Next, recurrent or significant themes in the literature relating to marginalized children beginning school will be presented. Finally, transition programs and practices currently in place in Quebec will be explored in light of the research review, and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research will be outlined.

The Context

The Pedagogicalization of Parenting
Parental participation and involvement in children’s schooling is a relatively recent phenomenon in Quebec, dating back to the 1970s (Deslandes, 1999; Pronovost & Legault, 2010). The institutionalization of particular parenting roles and practices, in particular those that support specific school agendas, has been labeled pedagogicalization (Popkewitz, 2003), and refers to, for example, the expectation that parents read to their young children daily, offer them materials for drawing, cutting, and completing puzzles, and transmit a positive attitude towards school (Humblet & Vanderbroeck, 2007; Popkewitz, 2003). Pedagogicalization is questionable for all parents, as it privileges certain parenting practices above others, prescribes a universal approach to children, and elevates the school experience of the child as more important than all other aspects of their lives. It also devalues and fails to recognize other ways of being a child in the world. This discourse is even more problematic for families identified or constructed as marginalized, who are perceived as lacking the skills necessary to prepare their children for school, and as being in need of more support and assistance than other parents. In fact, this pedagogicalization is one way that marginalization is constructed (Humblet & Vanderbroeck, 2007; Riele, 2006; Tobin, 2007).

Within this context, parents who do not participate in their child’s education according to the expectations of school personnel are deemed not to care about their child and his or her education, even when the parents themselves report caring very deeply about their child’s current and future educational experiences (Barberis, 2008; Doucet 2008; Lareau & Weininger, 2008; Peters, 2010). In consequence, parents end up as “scapegoats” of government failure to invest in support for teachers, educators, and schools, and are blamed for their children’s difficulties transitioning to school (Doucet, 2008).

The Difference Between School Transition and School Readiness
In 1997, the U.S. National Educational Goals Panel (Copple, 1997) suggested that the transition to school has three components: 1) preparing the child for school; 2) preparing the school to welcome the child and his or her family; and 3) establishing community support for learning. Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) elaborated by outlining an ecological and dynamic model of transition, which views the transition to school as an ecological process and the relationships among the child, family, early childhood educator, kindergarten teacher, peers, and neighbourhood, over time, as central to the process.

More recently, two groups of researchers, Doucet and Tudge (2007) from the U.S. and Grieble and Nielsen from Germany (Grieble & Nielsen, 2002; Nielsen & Grieble, 2006), who appear to be working independently, have used the term co-construction to define the transition to school as a cultural process involving changes to identities, roles, and relationships. According to these authors, this process is experienced differently based on the different individuals involved, their cultures, and their previous experiences. This conceptualization views parents and children, as well as teachers, as experts, and values bidirectional communication, establishing relationships, and collaborative meaning-making during each child’s unique transition. Doucet and Tudge (2007), in particular, focus of the usefulness of this model when the teacher and the family do not share the same cultural background.

In contrast, school readiness as a theoretical construct implies that individual children need to be adequately prepared for kindergarten entry, and is often conceptualized as involving distinct domains: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and communication, cognitive development and general knowledge (Janus & Offord, 2007; Kagan, Moore & Bredekamp, 1995). This approach has been criticized as neglecting contextual features of the children’s lives (their families, communities, cultural and friendship groups), the assets and knowledge that children bring with them when they begin school, and the role of the school in defining and enacting readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Farran, 2011; Graue, 2006; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Within the school readiness model, transition difficulties are explained as deficiencies related to the child, and by extension,

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2 A similar analysis could be conducted for children with special needs.
to his or her family and community. According to Farran (2011), just because school readiness can be assessed does not mean that it should be measured.

Research

Research from 1998 to 2011 that focuses particularly on marginalized children and their families (those living in poverty, who speak a non-dominant language, or who come from non-dominant culture) starting school was reviewed in order to identify common themes. A literature search was conducted in English and French, and 26 articles, book chapters, literature reviews and reports, from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States were located. The following five themes were identified: 1) the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics and academic achievement (Brooks-Gunn, Rouse & McLanahan, 2010; Cooper, Crosnoe, Suizzer & Pituch, 2010; Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010; Fantuzzo, Rouse, M cdermott, Childs & Weiss, 2005; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Smart, Sanson, Baxter, Edwards & Hayes, 2008); 2) the role of the neighborhood environment on children's school readiness (ASSM-DSP, 2008; Lapointe, Ford & Zumbo, 2007; Oliver, Dunn, Kohen & Hertman, 2007); 3) transition practices (Lo Casale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008; Magretts, 2002; M cIntyre, Eckert, Fiene, DiGennaro & Wildinger, 2007; Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999; Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005; 4) parent perspectives (Barberis, 2008; Broooker, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Dockett, Mason & Perry, 2006; Dockett, Perry & Kearney, 2011; Doucet, 2008); and 5) classroom processes (Skinner, Bryant, Coffman & Campbell, 1998).

Each of these themes will be discussed individually.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Academic Achievement

There is a body of (mostly) U.S. research that has identified racial, ethnic and gender gaps in children’s school readiness, most often measured by standardized math, language and behaviour assessments. It is important to note that school readiness is a disputed concept (Dockett & Perry, 2009) that often focuses on measuring children's skills instead of their learning capacity (Farran, 2011).

In particular, African-American and Latino boys appear to achieve lower results on these assessments (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2007; Cooper et al., 2010; Fantuzzo et al., 2005), though family education and mother’s education have also been shown to relate negatively to children’s test results (Farkas & Hibell, 2008; Ramey and Ramey, 2004; Smart et al., 2008). The reasons suggested for these gaps in achievement are parent behaviours, parent’s use of language with their children, parent stress, and lack of organized activities or educational materials in the home (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2007; Crosnoe & Cooper, 2010; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Furthermore, research attempting to identify the mediating role of family involvement on children’s test scores found that poor parents reported engaging their children in home-learning activities as often as non-poor parents, but that these home learning activities did not appear to have any impact on children’s early school achievement (Cooper et al., 2010). Both Fantuzzo and her colleagues (2005) and Ramey and Ramey (2004) explored the potential of early childhood programming to increase marginalized children's school readiness. Fantuzzo and colleagues (2005) found that parenting programs within centre-based programs for children were associated with higher test scores in kindergarten, while Ramey and Ramey (2004) presented cognitive results from the longitudinal Abecedarian project, where children whose mothers had low levels of formal education attended quality ECE programs. These children performed better in school and into adulthood than those who did not attend such programs. Crosnoe and Cooper’s (2010) study was the only one in this category to investigate whether or not teacher qualifications or classroom practices mediated the relationship between “family-based risks” and children’s math and reading scores. However, the classroom practices they measured were all related to the amount of time teachers spent with their students on particular math and language activities, such as retelling stories or counting by two’s. Crosnoe and Cooper (2010) found that of these factors, only teacher’s experience teaching kindergarten was significant.

These studies focus on a limited number of child skills, from a school readiness perspective. While the appropriateness of subjecting young children to standardized tests can be questioned, the main concern with this body of research is that blame for children’s difficulties is placed on demographics or on family practices. According to Farran (2011), identifying achievement gaps is unlikely to lead to a better educational experience for all children, particularly when features of the classroom, the parent-school relationship, the teacher-child relationship and other contextual variables are ignored. In addition, Ramey and Ramey’s (2004) study had to control for lack of adequate nutrition and access to supportive social services and health care, leading to the conclusion that the root cause of these achievement gaps may not be family socio-cultural practices. While the finding that attending early childhood educational programs can improve later achievement in kindergarten and beyond (Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Ramey & Ramey, 2004) appears promising, more in-depth research is needed to attempt to untangle whether it is children's learning in such settings, their acculturation into the educational system, the relationships that parents develop with early childhood educators, or other factors, which lead to higher achievement in kindergarten, for children from marginalized communities.

The Neighbourhood Environment

Canadian research in the domains of public health and geography, as well as education, has focused recently on the impact of various features of the child’s
neighbourhood environment on school readiness (ASSM-DSP, 2008; Desrosiers et al., 2012; Lapointe, Ford & Zumbo, 2007; Oliver, Dunn, Kohen & Hertman, 2007). The Department of Public Health of Montreal, in an attempt to argue for a more just distribution of resources amongst different neighbourhoods, used Janus and Offord’s (2007) Early Development Index (EDI) to measure children’s school readiness by neighbourhood in a population study across the island of Montreal, entitled En route pour l’école! (On My Way to School!) (ASSM-DSP, 2008). The Department of Public Health of Montreal’s report identified a relationship between low socio-economic status (SES) families, parents with less formal education, and children whose mother tongue was not English or French, with lower results on the EDI, which was completed by kindergarten teachers in the middle of the school year. Furthermore, this report calculated the proportion of “vulnerable” children in each neighbourhood on the island of Montreal, based on children’s school readiness scores. The neighbourhoods were then colour-coded from 1 to 5, ranging from less than 28.1% to more than 41.3% of children “at-risk”.

Lapointe and her colleagues (2007) used the same EDI measure to compare neighbourhoods in Vancouver. Citing Hertzman and colleagues, this research explained that elements of the neighbourhood become incorporated into the child’s organic make-up, influencing development at the cellular level through a process called “biological embedding”. Lapointe et al (2007) identified multiple family households, Aboriginal status, English-language learners, low-income, unemployment, low levels of formal education, and a lack of early childhood education in the neighbourhood as factors that placed certain neighbourhoods “at-risk.”

Oliver and colleagues (2011) also used the EDI in Vancouver to suggest that family income and percentage of single-parent families, as well as the percentage of the population who had not moved in the previous five years, and the percentage of the population whose first language was not English, were the characteristics of neighbourhoods that predicted school readiness.

Finally, Desrosiers and her colleagues (2012) used the EDI measure to link children’s school readiness with demographic and socio-economic conditions, as well as with children’s school success in grade four. This study found that only half of those children identified as “vulnerable” upon starting school performed below average in grade four. These authors also found that mother’s level of education, being exposed to a language other than the language used at school, having three or more siblings, and living in a neighbourhood that was less cohesive and perceived as unsafe, were associated with lower scores on particular EDI subscales. However, Desrosiers and her colleagues (2012) did note that children often attend neighbourhood schools, and that the relationship identified between neighbourhood cohesion and children’s EDI scores may be explained, at least in part, by school characteristics.

While these Canadian studies focus on neighbourhoods as a unit of analysis instead of individual characteristics of children and families, like their U.S. (and Australian) counterparts, both of these bodies of research are based on the concept of school readiness, not transition. In addition, the blame for children’s lack of readiness is attributed either to families or to neighbourhoods, while not accounting for either school practices or societal issues such as racism and discrimination. In addition, given that at least one quarter of all Canadian children are considered vulnerable at school-start (ASSM-DSP, 2008; Desrosiers et al., 2012; Hertzman, 2010; Kershaw et al., 2005; Willms, 2002) these studies do not appear to tell the entire story. Instead, they take a deficit approach (Carr, 2001; Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2007; Swadener & Lubeck, 1995) to the transition to school of children from marginalized families and communities, pathologizing (Heydon & Iannacci, 2008; Shields, Bishop & Mazawi, 2004) entire neighbourhoods.

Additionally, there are construct and measurement validity issues with the EDI. It has been criticized as measuring teacher’s perceptions of children, which may reflect their own biases (Gleason, 2006). While this body of research may serve to further marginalize and pathologize targeted groups of children, families, and communities, it is important to note that it can have positive effects as well, such as the redistribution or improvement of health and social services (Laurin, Lavoie, Guay, Durand & Boucheron, 2012).

Transition Practices

Transition practices are put in place, usually by the school, in order to facilitate the transition for children, parents and/or teachers (Early, 2004). Research exploring the effectiveness of transition practices has suggested that children from low-income families appear to benefit most from these practices (Lo Casale-Crouch et al, 2008; Pianta et al., 1999; Schulting et al., 2005). For example, Lo Casale-Crouch and colleagues (2008) found that teacher ratings of children’s social competence, behaviour, and academic skills improved based on discussions with early childhood educators. However, the higher the percentage of low-income and minority students, the fewer transition practices offered, in particular those that involved personal contacts between teachers and parents (Pianta et al., 1999). The lower the SES of the school neighbourhood, the lower the involvement in those transition activities that are offered, as well (Maclentyre et al., 2007). Schulting and colleagues (2005) identified six transition practices related to higher academic achievement and parent-initiated involvement in schools serving students from low SES areas: information sent home, preschoolers visiting the kindergarten classroom, parents and children visiting the classroom, gradual entry, home visits by teachers over the summer, and orientation sessions for
parents. Margaretts (2002) found that even when transition practices were in place, teachers rated children who did not speak English at home as having fewer social skills, more problem behaviour, and being less academically competent than their peers.

This research on transition practices begins to explore the role of teachers, early childhood educators, and the school in initiating and taking responsibility for children’s first school transition. These studies also shed light on the fact that teachers need support to perceive children’s strengths and move beyond a deficit perspective. By taking contextual factors into account, this body of research moves beyond the school readiness model and into the ecological and dynamic model of transition (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). While the results point to the potential of transition practices to support marginalized children and their families during their transition to school, these are mainly large-scale correlational studies, and there is little understanding of how or why transition practices are more beneficial for these children. Often, the presence of transition practices is measured, but not whether families participated in these practices or how they were perceived (Pianta et al., 1999; Schulting et al., 2005).

**Parent Perspectives**

A limited number of studies have explored marginalized parents’ perspectives on their children’s transition to school through various qualitative methodologies (Barberis, 2008; Brooker, 2003; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Docket et al. 2006/2011; Doucet, 2008; Lareau & Weininger, 2008). Contrary to teacher reports, both Barberis (2008) and Doucet (2008) discovered that parents wanted their children to have positive experiences in school, and reported positive conversations with their children about school as well as a commitment to their children’s educational success. However, conflicts between the home and school (Barberis, 2008; Brooker, 2003), as well as power dynamics within the home-school relationship (Dockett et al. 2006/2011) were also identified. Parents in Barberis’ study communicated a profound sense of obligation and commitment to support and guide their children to ensure school success. These parents also reported wanting to protect their children, and worrying that becoming involved in their children’s schooling would have a negative impact on their children’s independence. These parents identified a sense of discomfort with the school setting compared to the comfort and engagement they experienced in the Head Start program their children attended previously (Barberis, 2008).

The African-American parents in Doucet’s (2008) study reported deep caring and dedication to their children and a focus on preparing them for life, not just for school. Brooker’s (2003) study of Bangladeshi and Anglo families transitioning to school in a working-class U.K. neighbourhood found that schools were not explicit in communicating their expectations and practices, and that families were frequently at odds with the school in their understanding of teaching and learning.

Dockett and her colleagues’ studies of Aboriginal parents (Dockett et al., 2006) and parents “with complex support needs” (Dockett et al., 2011) in Australia found that parents felt that decisions about their children’s transitions were made by others, and that teachers’ actions and comments positioned parents as lacking knowledge about the school system and about how to help their child. Parents in these studies felt blamed for their children’s difficulties at school and believed that the school failed to recognize their children’s strengths (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Dockett et al. 2006, 2011). A number of these researchers conclude that family practices need to be analysed with cultural understanding (e.g., Brooker, 2003; Doucet, 2008).

Lareau and Weininger (2008) explored time use in an ethnographic study comparing poor and working class families with middle class families, in relation to how family-school relationships influence school readiness. They found differences between the two groups of families in terms of the children’s participation in extra-curricular activities, interaction with kinship groups, and separation of public and private time. These authors explain that family literacy activities can have both positive and negative effects on family life, and that the discussion of school readiness needs to be embedded in a wider context.

The parents in these studies provide alternate explanations for their children’s difficulties, including parental discomfort with the school system, and conflicts, power dynamics, and differing values between home and school. These findings are significant, as they contradict the conclusions of large-scale research that attributes children’s transition difficulties to their lack of school readiness, or to attributes of their family or community. However, these studies do not include child, teacher, or early child educator perspectives from the same situation in order to provide multiple perspectives on the transition to school, and to understand how this transition is co-constructed (Doucet & Tudge, 2007; Griebel & Nielsen, 2002; Nielsen & Griebel, 2006).

**Classroom Processes**

Only one study has explored what actually happens in the classroom when children and families who are living in low-income conditions begin school. Skinner and her colleagues (1998) investigated the construction of “risk” or “promise” through kindergarten classroom discourses and practices focusing on in the intersection of school, home, and child during an ethnographic study of 21 former Head Start children over a period of 5 months. This study involved direct observation of fourteen classrooms, as well as interviews with children, teachers, and parents, and identified teacher practices that contributed to a successful or difficult transition, regardless of whether or not classrooms were “developmentally appropriate”. In general, teachers who were more gentle and caring, had higher expectations, focused on teaching
critical thinking, and provided individual attention provoked less resistance in children. Teachers who were rigid in the way they carved up time and space, who focused on compliant behaviour and following rules and routines, who sought to control children's minds and bodies through constant scrutiny and punishment, and who interpreted active-ness and fidgetiness as defiance were more likely to provoke resistance in children. The more rigid teachers were also likely to judge children who stayed on task, and who were compliant in following rules and routines, as good students, and those who did not, as bad students. In time, these authors reported that the children labeled themselves as good or bad students, and those labeled as bad students voiced a very early dislike of school. The more rigid teachers attributed children's difficulties in following rules to a lack of structure or rules in their home life. In two of the cases, boys who were labeled as bad students changed schools in the middle of the year. Their new teacher was gentler and provoked less resistance, and these children changed both their behaviour and their attitudes towards school in the new situation (Skinner et al., 1998). While this study is dated, and has not been replicated, it continues to be cited (e.g. Luke, Dooley & Woods, 2011; O'Connor, Hill & Robinson, 2009; Pianta et al., 2008), because of its relevance to current constructions of risk and marginalisation as children begin school, and because it explores the daily processes through which children adapt to school, and through which their profile as a student is constructed.

Programs that Focus on the Transition to School

Accès à l’école (Access to school) is an early screening and educational summer camp program offered in partnership with a social pediatrics organization in two low-income neighbourhoods in Montreal. The focus is on identifying at-risk children and on building school readiness skills (Cantin, Bouchard, Charron & Lemire, 2011). This program detects and attempts to remedy deficiencies in children's school readiness, and operates only in low-income neighbourhoods.

The Centre for Assistance and Support to Initiative, Organizations and Professionals in Early Childhood (CASIOPE), a non-profit organization, in conjunction with the early childhood coordinating committee of Ville Émard-Côte St. Paul, the local health and social services centre (CLSC), early childhood centres, and family organizations, developed the Moving On to School observation checklist. This checklist was designed for early childhood educators to complete in conjunction with parents at the end of the year proceeding kindergarten, and for parents to transmit to their child's teacher upon school entry (CASIOPE, 2008). This document has been embraced by at least 14 different neighbourhoods throughout Quebec, in community mobilization efforts that bring together early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers, often for the first time, to collaboratively plan the transition of children from Early Childhood Education venues into the schools in their community (L. Giuliani, personal communication, June 22, 2012). This program is situated within a dynamic and ecological conceptualization of the transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000), and, depending on the practices put in place by the educators and the teachers, could involve a co-construction of the transition (Doucet & Tudge, 2007; Griebel & Nielsen, 2002; Nielsen & Griebel, 2006). However, parents are not involved in coordinating the implementation of the program, or in shared decision-making about the activities surrounding their children's transition to kindergarten. Therefore, power dynamics may be an issue.

Other similar documents have been developed by different organizations throughout the province to allow early childhood professionals to share information about children with kindergarten teachers (MELS, 2010). However, unlike the Moving on to School checklist, these other documents all target children with special needs exclusively.

The MELS, the MSSS, and the MFA have put together a guide for professionals in order to support children's first school transition, entitled Guide for Supporting a Successful School Transition (MELS, 2010), as well as a companion pamphlet for parents (MELS, 2011). The professional guide is based on Rimm-Kaufmann and
Pianta’s (2000) dynamic and ecological model of transition, and outlines six principles of a successful transition:

1. Recognizing that it is the parent who is primarily responsible for the child’s education.
2. Sharing responsibility for a successful transition among stakeholders through collaborative practices.
3. Continuously planning, organizing and assessing transition activities.
4. Recognizing the time required and providing the necessary resources.
5. Involving everyone who knows the child and tailoring transition practices to the child.
6. Recognizing that starting school is a determining factor in the child’s development (MELS, 2010).

The guide also provides checklists for planning each principle in collaboration between the childcare centre and the school (including health and social services if applicable), as well as examples of transition practices to put in place in order to enact these principles. While the professional guide is ten pages long, the parent pamphlet that accompanies the guide, Getting off to a Good Start at School (including health and social services if applicable), as well as examples of transition practices to put in place in order to enact these principles. The guide also provides checklists for planning each principle in collaboration between the childcare centre and the school (including health and social services if applicable), as well as examples of transition practices to put in place in order to enact these principles.

### Programs that Focus on Child Development or Literacy

Montreal’s Health and Social Services Agency offers a program entitled le programme d’intervention éducative précoce (IÉP, early educational intervention), that focuses on ensuring children’s optimal development, in order to ease their school entry, and targets children living in “vulnerable” situations. This program focuses on improving access for these children to educational childcare services and community family organizations; providing clinical support for those children who have been identified as having special needs; improving training opportunities for the educators working in these organizations; and putting transition practices into place (Durand & Guay, 2011). While the IÉP program may contribute to the marginalization of low-income children and their families by singling out particular families or particular neighbourhoods in need of additional support to prepare children for school, it does focus on community support and on improving educational practices in childcare centres and community organizations, as opposed to focusing on parent behaviours or actions.

In contrast, the MELS program, le programme d’aide à l’éveil à la lecture et à l’écriture dans les milieux défavorisés (PAÉLÉ, Support for emerging literacy in disadvantaged neighbourhoods), is a community mobilization effort to group professionals working with young children in low-income neighbourhoods in order to better prepare children for school. In this instance, the goal is to change parental literacy practices at home to better meet the needs of the school system (Myre-Bisaillon et al., 2007). This program’s focus is on teaching low-income parents how to interact with their children, so that they will have a higher chance of success in school in the future. Parents are not consulted about their own goals for their children, and needs of the future take precedent over needs and desires in the present. In addition, the PAÉLÉ program focuses exclusively on early literacy, ignoring children’s other possible interests and talents, and supporting a school culture that prioritizes language (and math) over all other subjects.

### Community Mobilisation Efforts around School Readiness and Transition

A consortium of partners, including the three ministries mentioned above, the Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities, Montreal’s Public Health Agency, school boards and the Regroupement des centres de petite enfance de l’île de Montréal (the collective of early childhood centres of the island of Montreal) that focuses on school readiness is known as Horizon 0-5. This group’s mandate is to work together to elaborate and put into place a regional action plan to address the problems identified in the En route pour l’école report (ASSM-DSP, 2008), as well as the solutions identified in follow-up community meetings (Horizon 0-5, 2009).

Montreal Hooked On School is an organization, funded by the MELS, that brings together multiple community partners (school boards, teachers’ associations, colleges, and universities) in an effort to prevent school drop-out in the neighbourhoods identified in the En route pour l’école study (ASSM-DSP, 2008), and includes children up to age five in their target group. The organization targets youth, parents, and professionals, and works directly with Horizon 0-5 and the PAÉLÉ program. While Horizon 0-5’s focus is clearly on school readiness, it is possible that Montreal Hooked On School is more open to exploring the role of schools in building relationships with families, supporting children, and preventing school drop-out.

While some of these programs, such as Accès à l’école and PAÉLÉ, position children as being in need of “fixing” (Heydon & Iannaci, 2009) before being ready to start school, others focus...
on fixing communities by improving coordination among different sectors, or by improving access to services by families. It is important to note that the majority of these programs are designed to bring professionals together; the role of the parent, and the child, is constructed as a recipient or consumer of these programs.

Implications for Policy, Practice, and Research

Policy and Practice
The programs currently in place in Quebec focus public attention and monies on school readiness and transition practices, as well as on community support for learning (Copple, 1997). Parent engagement in the decision-making process, though included in the Guide for Supporting a Successful School Transition (MELS, 2010), appears to be lacking from all the programs currently in place. It is unclear whether or not Montreal Hooked On School’s programs that target the role of professionals in preventing school drop-out include an understanding of what happens in the classroom, and of the role of teachers and schools in defining and enacting readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2009; Farran, 2011; Graue, 2006; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). According to Peters’ (2010) literature review on the transition to school in New Zealand, relationships are the most important element of a successful transition to kindergarten.

Children, whose teachers take time to get to know them, affirm their culture, recognise and build on their prior learning, and see promise rather than deficits, reflect many of the features of a successful transition that will support their learning. (Peters, 2010, p.2)

In addition, “no matter how academically capable a child is, unhappiness over lack of friends, problems in the playground or toilets, a poor relationship with the teacher, inappropriate challenges, low expectations and so on, have negative consequences for their learning” (p.1). It would appear that the vast majority of transition programs currently in place focus on improving academic skills for children who are deemed at-risk, often by identifying children’s deficiencies, and not on building relationships or on supporting teachers to recognise children’s strengths and prior learning. In order to align with both the ecological and dynamic (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000) and the co-construction (Doucet & Tudge, 2007; Griebel & Nielsen, 2002; Nielsen & Griebel, 2006) models of transition, and to address existing social inequalities, it is imperative that programs focus equal attention on preparing schools to build relationships with children and their families, and on preparing teachers to become aware of and celebrate the strengths and abilities of all children and families.

By singling out specific groups of children, legislation serves to construct social categories of children, leading to judgement, exclusion, and marginalisation (Humblet & Vanderbroeck, 2007). Programs and practices that target only low-income families perpetuate the belief that some families need more support than others to prepare their children for school, but that these families have nothing to contribute to the design and coordination of these programs. Although semantic changes will not be sufficient to counter this trend, avoiding the use of labels, such as at-risk, disadvantaged (défavorisé), and vulnerable, would be a good start, particularly when research seems to point to middle-class children (and their families) as being in need of transition support as well (Desrosiers, Tétrault & Boivin, 2012; Kershaw, Irwin, Trafford & Hertzman, 2005; Willms 2002). However, policy and related programming could shift focus from children’s readiness to school readiness, and in particular on school and classroom practices that support the construction of children “at-promise” (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995). Educational research could also be undertaken from an asset-oriented (Heydon & Iannacci, 2009) point of view.

Future Research

The findings of this review point to a need for future research that values parents’ perspectives of their children’s school transition and seeks out the multiple and varied perspectives of children, early childhood educators, school-based childcare educators, and teachers across varied socio-cultural life situations. In addition, studies investigating kindergarten classroom processes and teacher behaviours, similar to Skinner and colleagues’ (1998) study, would shed light on how and why children from marginalized communities have difficulty transitioning to kindergarten. These studies would be more influential for Quebec early childhood policy and practice if they were carried out in the context of Quebec or Canada, as opposed to drawing from international studies.

References


An Examination of International Early Childhood Curriculum Documents

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Abstract
This review explored early childhood curriculum documents produced in 17 countries and five Canadian provinces between 1996 and 2011. The review forms the foundation for the creation of a meaningful, pedagogical tool that could inform the early childhood research community, front line educators and policy/decision-makers. By comparing the vision and guidelines of early learning curriculum documents as articulated by early childhood leaders in various jurisdictions, stakeholders can identify similarities and highlight gaps.

Two countries from each continent that had early years documents publicly available online, in either English or Spanish, and ratified by a government agency were chosen. Since there is no national document for the early years in Canada, five provincial documents were used. A total of twenty-seven documents were included in the review and the analysis was framed around twenty-three features organized in three main categories - source of the document, content areas included and role descriptions for parent, educators and government.

Several themes emerged from the review such as: (a) the similarities found among the theoretical orientations that support these documents; (b) early childhood education as the foundation stage for the school continuum; and (c) the role that families, educators and governments share in educating the youngest. The congruence among the documents was striking in relation to most of the features of analysis considered for the review. Implications for early childhood professionals and the globalization of the early childhood system are discussed.

Over the past 20 years, early childhood education has emerged as a key program and policy initiative of most governments around the world. The role and purposes of a renewal in early years programs and services has had major influences, not only on parents of young children who access services, but also on researchers, politicians and educators. Questions around ‘best practices,’ effective ways to deliver early childhood programs and strategies for improving the overall system are key topics of discussion and debate in many countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). As well, a major awakening to the needs of families of young children in developing countries under the support of international agencies such as the United Nations (UN), and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has also arisen. Financial investments and an increasing consideration of more formal standardization of professional training and curriculum delivery are some of the main features considered in these discussions. As a result, many early childhood initiatives around the globe have led to the development and implementation of new curriculum documents and the creation and adoption of guidelines and frameworks for the early years.

In spite of a lack of national policies for early childhood in Canada, “an unprecedented number of provinces have developed early learning curriculum frameworks” (Langford, 2010, p.3).
Quebec, Ontario, and most recently New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, have adopted guidelines and principles for the youngest. According to Langford (2010), analysis of these documents reveals that “there is much to inspire and motivate early childhood educators to think about their philosophies of early learning and to provide rich early environments for young children” (p. 28). Yet, she continues, there is still little knowledge about what these curriculum frameworks mean for children, families and communities.

Background of the Study

Reviews are essential tools for researchers, policy makers and front line educators to keep current with the evidence accumulating in their field. “Increasingly, practitioners, policy makers, and managers demand synthesis of evidence that acknowledge complexity and context” (Bravata et al., 2005, as cited in Dixon-Woods, 2007, p. 376). This review expands Langford’s (2010) previous work on the analysis of early learning Canadian documents. While providing valuable information in relation to the origin, development and implementation process of current Canadian early learning documents, Langford also prompted the discussion about “implicit or explicit” (p. 9) theoretical orientations of these curriculum documents, as well as the weight that these theoretical orientations seem to have in values, principles, and beliefs about early childhood. In addition, Langford’s methodological structures such as the role of play, learning goals and assessment were also considered for the initial analysis of the documents considered in this review. While Langford provided valuable findings for the Canadian context, this review intended to broaden the scope to include countries around the world, particularly those not typically represented in previous early childhood documents reviews.

Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model (2005), which proposes that humans do not develop in isolation but in relation to many changing and multilevel environments such as family, schools, legislation, and global conditions has also been influential in the analysis of the curriculum documents. This model offered a helpful approach to understanding what values and beliefs societies and governments (represented by the committees and/or individuals who created the documents) have about children, childhood, families, early learning, and care.

It was expected that by reviewing the existing curricular documents in the early childhood field, both at national and international levels, it could facilitate analysis, comparison and decision making regarding the development of future frameworks or curricular documents, as well as identifying gaps requiring future research in the early childhood area. How do national/provincial governments embrace the role of the child in today’s society? How do the documents articulate the value of the early years? What types of systems are being put into place to facilitate quality early learning and care experiences outside children’s families? What expectations are in place for parents and educators? What does it mean for the early childhood sector to frame its work in formalized documents? These are some of the questions that this review explored.

Another goal of the review was to create a meaningful tool that could inform the early childhood research community, front line educators and decision-makers. By comparing the vision and guidelines for the early years articulated by early childhood leaders in various jurisdictions with their own approach to early learning and care, stakeholders could identify similarities and highlight gaps. This exercise also enhances understanding of global trends and illuminates possibilities for change at macro and local levels.

Defining a review is a complex issue that heavily depends on the characteristics of the documentation. Overall, document reviews are framed as Policy Analysis, a methodology that includes a series of steps such as an exploration of previous revisions of the issue being appointed, political factors that are related to the document, as well as alternative solutions and a plan for monitoring results (Wolfe & Elder, 2007).

Reviews are also conducted for the analysis and comparison of research findings in a variety of literature. These types of reviews mainly follow specific methodologies that might involve quantitative methods, such as systematic reviews, and/or qualitative methods, for instance, literature surveys. Although systematic reviews follow rigorous quantitative methods that allow for transparency and the avoidance of biases, there has been increased recognition that the exclusion of qualitative data from systematic reviews may be causing the neglect of important information (Sheldon, 2005). Overall, there seems to be an increased demand, mostly from practitioners and policy makers, for qualitative syntheses, which summarize extant literature.

Reviews and/or summaries vary depending on needs. Reviewing reports and documents without adhering to policy analysis methodology is a unique approach. We believe that by reviewing and exploring existing early childhood curricular documents, practitioners, researchers and policy makers can be updated about current frameworks and philosophical ideas adopted by particular groups, governments, and institutions.

Previous reviews of early childhood documents (Bennet & Newman, 2004) examined OECD countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Italy (in particular the Reggio Emilia approach). In addition, UNESCO has produced descriptions of how early childhood services have been implemented in countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand (UNESCO, 2004).

In general, many reviews and/or cross-national comparisons of early years documents were developed between 1999...
and 2005 (Dickinson, 2005; McQuali et al., 2003; Oberhuemer, 2005; OECD, 2004; Penn, 1999; UNESCO, 2004). These reviews described and explored early childhood curriculum documents written in English only and focused solely on curriculum documents developed at national levels. This meant that countries that developed early childhood curriculum documents at the provincial or state level, such as the United States or Canada, were excluded from most of these earlier reviews.

**Terminology**

Supported by different values and beliefs about children's ages, children's developmental characteristics, or children's roles in society, many documents define early childhood, early care, early learning or curriculum in different ways. To clarify the descriptors and the terminology explored throughout this review, a series of key definitions is provided below:

**Curriculum and curriculum framework: What's the difference?**

A curriculum is understood as a document that guides the pedagogical contents of a specific area. According to Bertrand (2007), a curriculum indicates the "what," while pedagogy indicates the "how". Bennet (2004) defines curriculum as a short framework that includes principles, standards, and goals, as well as pedagogical principles and guidelines. Bennet (2004) also suggests that a curriculum should ensure that certain learning areas are addressed, that a common pedagogical approach is considered, and that levels of quality are universal within a community. In addition, Bennett (2004) distinguishes two curricular approaches within the early childhood field: (a) the pre-primary approach and the social pedagogic approach which has detailed goals and outcomes as well as an emphasis on school readiness; and (b) the social pedagogical design which offers a broad approach based on goals, strategies and assessment with an emphasis on each child's capabilities and individual needs.

According to a document released by UNESCO in 2004, "Early childhood education and care (ECEC) poses a dilemma for curriculum designers" (p. 1). The broad and holistic approach required by early childhood education demands early childhood educators with strong professional training. That training, unfortunately, is not the reality in many communities. Therefore, "national or provincial ministries in many countries have chosen to issue short guidelines" (p.1) that are known, according to Bennet (2004) as "guidelines or curricular frameworks" (p.1).

Langford (2010) distinguishes between a prescribed curriculum and a curriculum framework. She explains that curriculum frameworks give a space for discussion, negotiation and sharing of values and ideas about children and their learning. As the Government of Saskatchewan states, "values and principles are open to negotiation, critique and change (as cited in Langford, 2010, p.11). The negotiation involves children, parents and educators, and in that sense, the curriculum framework is being constructed (Whitty, as cited in Langford, 2010, p. 8) among the main stakeholders. Curriculum frameworks seem to be generally based on a social pedagogical approach that fully includes the community, the parents and the children in the process of decision-making.

**Early childhood education and early childhood care.**

Early childhood education refers to different pedagogical approaches to scaffold learning through the years prior to school entry. Early childhood care makes reference to the nurturing and protective role that early childhood services should provide, mostly because of the young age of the clientele. Early childhood education and care (ECEC) assumes that both features are interwoven and that they both play a key role for healthy child development.

**Early years**

In our work, we use the term early years to refer to work done with children from the age of 0 to 8. We have found that the curriculum documents we reviewed vary widely in the definition of early years. Depending on the country, the language used to make reference to the early years could refer to pre-school, initial level, first years, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, parvulario or early childhood. In addition, the ages referred to could also vary. Furthermore, in some cases the terminology also varies within each country. For example, in Argentina, nivel inicial refers to ages three-to- five, while jardín maternal refers to ages zero-to-three. However nivel inicial could also be described as jardín de infantes (which is the Spanish translation for Kindergarten). Depending on the particular Argentinean community, early years could refer to ages four-to-five or zero-to-five.

**Methods**

This review explored international early childhood curriculum documents as well as Canadian early childhood curriculum documents that have been published up to March 2011. The intent of this particular review is the construction of patterned similarities and differences among early childhood curriculum documents, as well as the exploration of the features, pre-determined and emergent, used to structure the documents.

**Capturing a Global Perspective**

As a first step, we combed the Internet for any form of curricular documents/ frameworks/ guidelines in countries around the world. The criterion at this point was that the country had a national document and/or guideline ratified by the government and distributed to provide direction for parents and the early years community. Through this exploration, it became evident that even though there seemed to be a universal understanding of the need to create these types of documents, countries were at
very different stages in the development and implementation process. During this initial search and in addition to curriculum documents, we found other forms of documentation that also provided direction to the community and that aimed to develop a better understanding of early childhood services. For example, in some developing countries, UNESCO provides country profiles about early childhood under the title “Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Care and Education”. These profiles provide information about the early childhood institutional structure, the resources and the variety of organizational structures within each country. However, these reports are not considered to be official curricular documents in individual countries. There are many examples of these documents developed by UNESCO [See, for example, Thailand (2006), and Thailand, Philippines and Vietnam (2004)]. The World Bank (2010) and UNICEF (2005) have also developed profiles, evaluations and descriptive documents of the early childhood field in South Africa, Caribbean countries, and in Latin America, which focus on economic and social development in those areas. These projects also aim for economic and social development and the reduction of poverty. Overall, these reports support the tremendous value the early years have for the economic and educational growth of nations.

Our initial literature search indicated it was necessary to further clarify the parameters of our review. We then chose a minimum of two countries from each continent that had curricular documents and/or curricular guidelines in the early years publicly available online in either English or Spanish. Other components of the rationale for selection were that the online document had to have been ratified by a government agency and that the document had to have been written for children ages 0-to-6. With the exception of the Te Whariki (1996) and the first Scottish curricular document for the early years (1999), the rest of the documents were published from 2000 up to March 2011. Countries that had provincial or state curricular documents such as Canada and the United States were also included following the same criteria although some Canadian provinces have not being ratified by government. Once documents were identified, they were accessed and read in their entirety. Our review eventually included seventeen countries with a total of twenty-seven documents. Spanish documents were analyzed by one of the authors, whose mother language is español.

The final documents used in the review are organized by continent and listed below:

**Africa**

The review revealed that most of the countries on this continent do not have early childhood curriculum documents; different programs and guidelines to support children's wellbeing are developing, mostly with support of international organizations. In addition, we included a curriculum framework recently developed in the Republic of Mauritius:

- Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Service, Chapter 6. (Republic of South Africa, 2006); and
- National Curriculum Framework: Pre-primary. 3 to 5 years (Republic of Mauritius, 2010).

**Asia**

Curricular documents developed in Singapore and in Hong Kong (China) were accessed through each country’s National Education Department or Ministry websites. Both documents were available in English and therefore they were chosen for this review. The documents were:

- Nurturing Early Learners. A Framework for a Kindergarten Curriculum in Singapore (2003); and
- Guide to the Pre-Primary Curriculum developed in Hong Kong (2006).

**Americas**

A series of Spanish language documents were chosen from South and Central America:

- Nucleos de Aprendizajes Prioritarios. Nivel Inicial (Province of Cordoba, Argentina, 2010); and
- Bases Curriculares de la Educacion Parvularia (Chile, 2001);
- Programa de Educacion Pre-escolar (Mexico, 2004); and
- Curricular information from the Cuban educational website El Portal Cubano. (Cuba, n.d.)

In the case of North America, choosing a document from the United States became a complex task as most states have recently developed early childhood curriculum documents. For this reason, we decided to consider the curriculum documents from three states with a range of geographic locations, population, and approaches to the early years - Alaska, New York and Minnesota. The documents that we reviewed include:

- Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota’s Early Learning Standards 3 to 5 (2005);
- Minnesota Early Learning Guidelines, Birth to Three (2007);
- The New York State Early Care and Education Core Body of Knowledge Framework (2001); and

Particular consideration was given to Canadian early years documents from British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. These are described in greater detail later in this review.

**Europe**

Many European countries have developed early childhood curriculum documents since the 1990s. We focused in particular on documents developed by the Nordic countries which were the first countries regulating the early childhood field (Oberhuemer, 2005). Since then the initial early years guidelines have been updated.
The forest studio was born out of the opportunity for me to utilize a small studio space in the Oak Room at the Capilano U Children’s Centre. I had five weeks to share my Fine Arts background and experience with the children and to see what we could come up with for this space. It all began with exploring the idea of darkness. We happened to read the story ‘Owl Babies’ by Martin Waddell and illustrated by Patrick Benson. The children noticed how dark the forest was in the story and were very interested in the animals and eyes you might see in the forest at night. My own art practice involves a lot of forest themes and so I connected the children’s interest with my own and decided to transform the studio space into an on-going collaborative art installation based on the forest.

I am very interested in getting children to collaborate on artwork. Often art can be a singular pursuit, which is fine, but when art becomes a collaborative venture it opens up all kinds of opportunities and encounters for the children to have. I want children to experience the community that is created when they work on a project together. I am also interested in the idea of an ‘on-going art installation’, where the product is not static, and the ideas, visuals, and stories are constantly changing. I want the children to be involved in creating a space that is alive and creative, a space where their ideas and actions inform it, and it informs their ideas and actions.

using visual art to explore collaboration and space

the real forest

It is important to acknowledge the fact that the Capilano University campus is situated in a real forest. The children have endless resources at their fingertips by exploring and going on adventures in the temperate rainforest environment that surrounds their Centre. I took this important detail into consideration when I chose to explore the topic of a forest.

The children already knew a lot about the forest and had many ideas about what our forest studio would need. To gather more inspiration we went on several walks/hikes/bush-whacking adventures through the real forest. We took the time to listen to the wind, make rubbings of the tree bark, and find ‘hunting sticks’ along the way. The most exciting part for the children was when we left the path and entered onto the forest floor that was uneven, full of life, and rich with discovery.

We began creating a large backdrop for the forest studio space. The children worked collaboratively, layering charcoal and paint, mixing shades of colours you might find in a dark forest, and creating stories as they painted.
As the backdrop began to cover the walls the studio started to transform into a dynamic space. The children were eager and excited to see what was happening in the studio and came up with many processes and techniques to add to this changing environment. It was exciting for me to give the children a space that was transforming due to their efforts.

Several of the children were interested in playing ‘princesses’. I asked them what we would need to make this a forest for the princesses?

“If we are playing princesses we can pretend we are lost in the forest”
- Chloe

The space comes alive

I am interested in layering and mixing materials in artwork. Once the backdrop was hung in the studio I invited the children to paint their hands and print them all over the walls as foliage and leaves. This experience became a very active process, and the result still carried the same energy and movement the children put into it.

Making trees

I wanted to find out what the children knew about trees, so we had a meeting and I asked them about different types of trees. I was thinking along the lines of ‘maple, oak, cedar’, but the children surprised me by providing their own detailed list of different types of trees:

- smooth trees
- straight tree
- curvy trees
- round tree
- bumpy trees
- cut tree

It reminded me that one does not need to know the given names of things, and that there is no reason why a cedar tree could not be called a ‘bumpy’ tree instead.

“When a tree is all bumpy it means it is old” - Sumner

“When a tree gets old it will fall down.” - Devon

Allison Wells  EDUC 276-02  PRACTICUM II  CURRICULUM EXPLORATION  Capilano University Spring 2011
The forest studio was really beginning to take shape. It had become a space where the children entered and immediately became creative; storytelling, art making, and dramatic play was all taking place. More and more layers kept being added, and the space continued to transform. I was struck with how collaborative the process was turning out to be. My hopes were to get children to work together on an on-going art installation, and bit by bit this project was turning into an entirely joint effort. How exciting it was to see various children at different times take part by adding or picking up on other ideas and stories and adding to what was already there.

Many stories were unfolding with the artwork:

Nathan - "Look the leaves are falling."
Me - "Maybe the wind blew the leaves?"
Nathan - "This is the wind, I am going to make the wind."
Upon which Nathan used a glue stick to make the wind blow and swirl through the forest.

"The wind is carrying these little leaves." - Ella

artist study
I wanted to connect the children and our forest studio project with other artists that were inspired by the forest. I chose to do a workshop on Emily Carr. I showed them many of her paintings, and we talked about the movement, and line in her work. I then got the children to do individual works using oil pastels and watercolour paint to create their own Emily Carr inspired forest with lots of line and movement.

investigation + experimentation
The studio space was also a place where materials were being investigated and experimented with. The project at times moved away from the idea of "a forest" and became a place to build upon previous ideas in detail - such as colour mixing. We had been colour mixing for the Emily Carr study, and some of the children showed a continous interest in trying out different colours to mix. One group of children engaged in an activity that lasted two days, where by they were very specific about mixing 'milkshake' colours and pouring and painting them onto paper on the floor. The milkshake idea came from when I showed them how to mix white into other colours to make them lighter, and someone said it looked like a milkshake.
As the walls became more and more full of layers and textures, we began to explore other creative ventures not necessarily connected to the forest but certainly informed by the space. The forest studio became a space for the children to enter and explore. There was a strong sense of ownership that the children had when they entered the space, and after several weeks of working in there, they knew that they could enter and engage with the surroundings in many different ways.

the space became a provocation for creativity + collaboration

castles + clay lines + stories + paint + gluing + animals + monsters + blocks

building a castle in the forest

"If we make a window, then we can see the trees through the window." - P.J.

"We need to make our castle on the floor that way it can be bigger." - Chloe

All along we had been talking about who lives in the forest. Some inspiration came from the book 'Owl Babies', and one illustration in particular that depicted a nighttime forest with some eyes shining in the dark. There were many ideas around who’s eyes they were: bats, deer, owls, wolves, monsters... The children had painted some of these eyes in the forest studio as well, and were becoming more and more interested in the idea of monsters in the forest.

Sumner found the monster Chloe painted in the forest! He and Max decided to paint some more eyes in the forest.

Met: who’s eyes are they?
Sumner: they are bad eyes
Kai: hide!
Sumner: he’s hiding behind the tree!

"This is where he watches you." - Evan
For this review, we selected the following national curriculum documents from Europe:

- National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland (2003);
- Core Curriculum for Pre-school Education (Finland, 2009);
- Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergarten (Norway, 2006);
- Curriculum for the Preschool Lpfo 98 (Sweden, 2006);
- AISTEAR: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (Ireland, 2009);
- Supporting our Youngest Children. Birth to Three (Scotland, 2005); and
- A Curriculum Framework for 3 to 5 (Scotland, 1999).

Oceania
Since New Zealand developed the curriculum document Te Whariki in 1996, many other documents in the early childhood field have been influenced by the guidelines outlined in that document. This seminal document, as well as three documents from Australia, are included in this review:

- Te Whariki (New Zealand, 1996);
- National Curriculum Framework. Pre-primary. 3 to 5 years, (Australia, 2010);
- Belonging, Being and Becoming. The Early Years Framework for Australia. (Australia, 2009); and

Capturing the Canadian perspective
In its country notes on Canada, the OECD (2004) recommended the creation of a national early childhood framework for early childhood services. The idea was supported by the federal government at the time, which in 2004 sought a bilateral agreement for developing this national guideline. However, the initiative was canceled before it was completed when a different federal government came to power in 2006. Three Canadian provinces that had already started to develop curriculum guidelines (Ontario, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick) decided to continue this development supported basically by provincial funding. At the time of this review, six Canadian provinces have developed or are in the process of developing early childhood curriculum documents and were included in this review. Prince Edward Island (PEI) is currently in the process of piloting a curriculum document, which will be accessible to the public in the fall of 2012.

The Canadian documents that were chosen for this review were:

- British Columbia Early Learning Framework (2008);
- Early Learning and Child Care. English Curriculum Framework for New Brunswick (2008);
- Meeting Early Childhood Needs: Quebec's Educational Programs for Child Care Services (2007);
- Play and Exploration, Early Learning Program Guide (Saskatchewan, 2008); and
- Early Learning for Every Child Today (Ontario, 2007).

The Review Process
The review framework was developed considering some of the key features of curriculum analysis proposed by Langford (2010) in Innovations in Provincial Early Learning Curriculum Frameworks. We began with Langford’s key features of theoretical orientation, the role of play, and learning goals and assessment. As we examined the documents, additional features emerged. These emerging features were then combined with the predetermined ones. As a result, a total of twenty-three features organized in three main categories -source, content and roles- were considered for the analysis of the documents:

- Structure of the document: includes source, date, focus, purpose, and children's ages.
- Content of the document: includes nature of the document, principles, theoretical framework, the view of the child, pedagogical approach, outcomes, areas of learning, assessment, and integration with the school system.
- Roles: includes educators, families, community/ society and global perspectives.

Each curricular document was reviewed in relation to the twenty-three features and organized in individual tables. Using the same features of analysis, tables summarizing each curricular document were synthesized into one table. Trends, similarities and differences were then analyzed.

A summary of the curriculum documents is presented in the Appendix.

Findings
The comparison of the documents resulted in the emergence of a series of themes related to each of the three main categories selected for analysis. Differences among the documents were found in the descriptors that made reference to cultural practices, values and beliefs. For example, Te Whariki (New Zealand, 1996) was written in both English and the indigenous local language. In addition, and in spite of the fact that the majority of the documents have the purpose of providing quality early childhood experiences for young children, the documents’ purposes revealed differences in relation to the needs of particular societies. For example, in Argentina, the aim of the document is to construct equity through education, while in Chile the purpose of the document is to build democracy.

Overall, and beyond linguistic differences, the curriculum documents explored in this review demonstrated more similarities...
than differences in relation to their structure, content, and in the consideration given to main stakeholders involved in providing early learning experiences. Similarities were revealed through the following emerging themes:

**Structure of the Documents**

**Introductions**

With the exception of the *Te Whariki* (1996) and the first Scottish curricular document for the early years (1999), this review explored early childhood curriculum documents developed in seventeen countries up to March 2011. The age range that all these documents were intended for was 0-to-8. In some cases, jurisdictions developed one document that included all ages from 0-to-4 or 0-to-6, or while in other cases, two documents for two different ages groups were developed (see Minnesota, Finland, Scotland and Australia).

A message of a Ministry representative was found in most of the introductions of these documents (exceptions were the documents from Ontario, New Brunswick and B.C.). The letter stated the jurisdictions’ vision for early childhood services as well as describing the origin and the purpose of the document. A clear expectation that these curricular documents could provide guidelines for consistent quality experiences to support the development of children’s maximum potential was also stated in the majority of the document’s introductions. In addition, a shift in recognizing the value and role of the early years as part of the educational system was clearly revealed in some documents, which referred to the need to integrate early years outcomes with school system outcomes (for example, Argentina, 2001; Chile, 2001; Mexico, 2004; New Zealand, 1996).

**A long historical debate. The early years focus: learning, caring or both?**

The documents’ foci had quite diverse approaches. The adoption of an early learning and/or early learning and care approach seemed to depend on different factors. One was the age of the children of interest. There seemed to be a major emphasis on caring from birth to age 3. As children grew older (4 and up), the term preschool appeared more often, and preparation for elementary school — mostly referred to in the documents as school readiness— seemed to drive the learning outcomes of the document.

AII documents that embraced an integrated learning and caring approach justified why such integration was necessary. The language used to underline this belief was for example, “an integrated whole” (Finland, 2003) or statements such as “the child needs both” (Scotland, 2005).

*A Curriculum Framework for 3 to 5, and is based on the same concept that care and learning are inseparable. (Norway, 2005, p.3).*

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De acuerdo con la flexibilidad del currículo, las actividades programadas se estructuran de forma que se combinan armonícaamente los contenidos referidos a las diferentes esferas de desarrollo, en correspondencia con las características del grupo de niños y niñas, condiciones de las educadoras y ejecutoras y los contenidosos trabajan. Esta forma de estructurar las actividades programadas es una posibilidad más de favorecer la creatividad la independencia de los encargados de la educación de los niños. (Cuba, p.1)

**Content of the Documents**

**Strong philosophical ideas.**

The principles stated in most of the documents reveal similar philosophical ideas about children, learning, families, and communities. Both international and Canadian documents emphasize the need to prepare children for the twenty-first century, and express the strong belief that the early years are the foundation for lifelong learning. *Statements within the documents make clear the value of the early years in the development of a child.*

The pre-school should lay the foundations for lifelong learning. *(Sweden, 2004, p.4).*

*The early childhood years are now well-recognized for having great influence on how an individual thinks and behaves, through his school years and as an adult. (Singapore, 2003, p.4).*

The Council of Australian Governments has developed this Framework to assist educators to provide young children with opportunities to maximize their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning. *(Australia, 2009, p. 5).*

*The years from birth to three are generally regarded by families, researchers and practitioners as critical years for the development of the foundational skills and competencies that support continuous lifelong learning. *(National Governor’s Association, 2005, as cited in Minnesota, 2005, p.1)*

*Early child development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour and health. *(Ontario, Canada, 2006, p.6)*

*The congruence among the documents was also striking in relation to the view of the child. AII documents demonstrated an understanding that children are individuals. Children were described as social actors, citizens and active participants. Children’s uniqueness was also recognized and described in all documents through eye-catching photographs that revealed similar socially-constructed ideas about young children’s development (for instance, babies crawling, little hands painting, children playing in puddles and so on). These strong beliefs were grounded in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1990) with which most international and Canadian documents align.*

Early childhood educators guided by the Framework will reinforce in their daily practice the principles laid out in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.* *(Australia, 2009, p. 5)*
We value the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989, ratified by Canada in 1991, which recognizes children as citizens, with rights for opportunities to reach their fullest potential, the right to be treated with dignity and respect, to be protected from harm, to exercise a voice, to engage in play and recreational activities, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. (New Brunswick, 2008, p.6).

Las Bases Curriculares de la Educación Parvularia se enmarcan en principios y valores que inspiran la Constitución Política, la Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza y el ordenamiento jurídico de la nación, así como en la concepción antropológica y ética que orienta la Declaración Universal de los Derechos Humanos y la Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño. (Convention on the Rights of the Child cited in Chile, 2001, p.12).

South Africa ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on 16 June 1995 and the African Children’s Charter on 7 January 2000. Due to these ratifications it became imperative that the Guidelines for Day Care needs to be revised to ensure that children’s rights, as enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the South African Constitution, are met. Our guiding principle in this revised manual is “the best interests of the child”. (South Africa, 2001, p.i)

**How learning is understood in the documents**

The majority of the documents examined in this review adopted a curriculum framework approach which implied on one hand, that consultation and the voices of many (including parents and professionals), had been heard and valued during the process of document development. On the other hand, the consideration of a curriculum framework approach rather than a directive curriculum program demonstrated that the documents were intended as guidelines that could be modified and/or accommodated to different circumstance and scenarios. By adopting this approach, educators were expected to construct the early learning program according to particular needs they might encounter in their classrooms. Terms found in many documents such as “continuous input,” “constructed,” “guide,” and “continuous reflection” were evidence of this idea.

The review revealed that a pre-primary approach (Bennet, 2004) was the method adopted by three Spanish-speaking countries, Argentina, Cuba and Mexico, in their curriculum documents. These three documents aimed for a strong linkage with elementary school outcomes as well as providing clear expectations for readiness and student achievement.

**Theoretical frameworks**

Most of the international and Canadian early childhood documents considered in this review took the similar approach of grounding the document in more than one theoretical framework. This finding aligns with Langord’s (2010) description of the Australian curriculum document Being Becoming and Belonging (2009), which suggests that “a combination of theoretical ideas” (as cited in Langford, 2010, p. 9) is necessary to shape adults’ and children’s identities. This combination of theoretical ideas is considered in both developed and developing countries’ documents. However, and interestingly enough, the combination of theoretical ideas creates tension with the principle of co-constructing a curriculum framework if, at the same time certain concepts that are mostly grounded in developmental orientations, appeared to have been already prescribed. For example, and with the exception of Te Whariki and the New Brunswick curriculum documents, the documents developed in Argentina, Chile, Mexico, Alaska, New York, Minnesota, Quebec, Singapore, Hong Kong, Scotland, and so on proposed learning in predetermined developmental stages that children were expected to achieve, as well as what was required of educators to facilitate these achievements.

The most common theoretical frameworks that the curriculum documents adopt follow below:

a) Human development perspective

The science of early childhood and current research around brain development provided evidence for the importance of the early years. Brain malleability and plasticity during the first years of life were emphasized in the majority of these documents as the reason for developing and assuring quality early childhood learning experiences. In addition, the role that governments had in supporting and investing in the early years was also considered in most documents. In fact, the development of these curricular documents was frequently a national and provincial response from various ministries and government departments to acknowledge responsibility for ensuring quality early childhood education.

b) Socio-cultural perspective

The documents that we reviewed also stated that learning and growth happened in different settings and that the quality of those environments was crucial for healthy child development. These ideas, which are framed on socio-cultural theories, implied a clear understanding that children’s healthy development was a responsibility of the whole society. This notion proposes that the systems where development was happening were continuously interacting. Bronfenbrenner’s biocultural ecological framework (2005) “stood up” through the review process, and interestingly enough, many documents used similar visual, organic, nested models to represent how learning happened in the complex interaction between systems.

c) Post-structural perspective

Supported by post-structural theories, all documents also highlighted the importance of considering an inclusionary approach in the implementation of
curricular guidelines, with particular consideration of indigenous cultures, linguistic differences, and children with different needs.

Early childhood settings serve all children. Children bring diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds as well as differing abilities to the learning environment. (Saskatchewan, 2008, p.27)

In some strategies for caregivers: "Encourage the child to develop an understanding of the feelings, ideas, and actions of others." (Alaska, 2007, p.74).

El mejoramiento de la calidad exige una adecuada atención de la diversidad, considerando las características de las niñas y de los niños, tanto las de orden individual como aquellas que se derivan de los ambientes familiares y sociales en que se desenvuelven, y las grandes diferencias culturales, como la pertenencia étnica. (Mexico, 2004, p.74)

d) Developmental perspectives
Developmental concepts were also evident both in the structure and the content of all the documents. In most cases, development was described in terms of children’s ages and/or cycles or phases, with the understanding that each child is unique in his/her developmental growth. Supported by developmental theories, most of the review documents organized their principles, learning goals, areas of development, assessment and planning around children’s developmental trajectories.

The pedagogy of early childhood learning
All international and Canadian documents considered in this review supported the idea that the early years established the foundation for later learning. Most documents supported a holistic approach to learning. For this reason, even though some documents differentiated areas of development and learning, it was emphasized in all of them that these areas were integrated and interrelated.

In terms of pre-primary curriculum planning, an integrated curriculum across different learning areas offers both education and care for young children. (Hong Kong, 2006, p.21)

Children learn many different things at the same time. What they learn is connected to where, how and with whom they learn. (Ireland, 2009, p.10)

Children learn holistically: their physical, emotional, social, linguistic, visual, auditory, and intellectual learning are closely inter-related and occur simultaneously. The inter-weaving of these different areas of experience is what makes learning meaningful for children. (British Columbia, p.11)

There seemed to be a consensus among the documents reviewed that a broad and a more holistic expectation for learning should be considered for younger children (birth to age 3), while there seemed to be a tendency to describe learning goals and/or learning principles in relation to school readiness as children grew older (4- and 5-year-olds) (Bennet, 2004). This was true as well in all of the Spanish-speaking countries considered in this review (Argentina, Chile, Mexico and Cuba).

The review demonstrated that different areas of learning were considered to be important for children’s development. Even though the terminology about these areas of development varied for each country, five main learning domains framed all documents: socio-emotional, language and communication, cognitive development, physical development, and creative development. In most cases, these areas of learning were offered as guidelines. Strategies, developmental stages and questions for reflections (most of the time oriented to educators) were usually incorporated. Some documents also included descriptions in terms of physical environments and/or different types and use of resources.

Assessment was considered in all documents as an ongoing process drawn from similar perspectives relying mostly on observations made by educators and other professionals. The documents themselves provided many different examples for assessment of learning, such as documentation, learning stories, narratives, and portfolios. In addition, and in parallel with learning expectations for older children, the review showed that as children get older (ages 4 and up), there seemed to be more attention on assessing children’s “performance.” This is partially true in all the Spanish documents, the United States and the Asian documents, but less evident in the Canadian ones.

A assessment was also seen as an essential tool supporting planning that should be based on the framework suggested by the curricula. The implementation of assessment procedures varied depending on the way the document presented learning and developmental goals. For example, supported by a developmental theoretical approach, the document developed in Quebec (2007) described assessment as educational intervention, where educators were expected to observe, plan, organize, intervene if necessary and reflect (Quebec, 2007 p.31).

The international documents recognized play as crucial for young children’s engagement in early learning experiences. In very similar ways, the Canadian documents, described play as the fundamental means of children’s learning.

El artículo 31 de la Convención sobre los Derechos del Niño afirma: “El niño tiene derecho al desarrollo, al juego y a participar en actividades artísticas y culturales”. Desde este marco, la Jurisdicción refuerza el concepto de juego como derecho del niño y sostiene su centralidad en el Nivel Inicial, como construcción social imprescindible para la infancia, actividad decisiva en el proceso de desarrollo cognitivo.
psicosocial, afectivo, corporal y motriz y, por lo tanto, contenido15 y estrategia del Nivel. (Cordoba, Argentina, 2010, p.17).

Play is important to me, and it is important for my learning and development. When I play, I use my body, my mind, my feelings, and my senses. Give me opportunities to develop my play. Watch how I play, and see how you can support me. (Ireland, 2009, p.11)

Play provides the opportunity for children to grow and learn. As they play, children practice skills, develop knowledge, and explore relationships. (New York, 2001, p.6)

At play, children are empowered to learn on their own terms, in their own ways, and in their own time; this freedom is what distinguishes play from other activities. (New Brunswick, 2008, p. 30)

The child’s wellbeing was also addressed in several documents as a key determinant for healthy growth and for learning.

**Key Stakeholders: Roles and Responsibilities**

**Parents**

Parents were recognized in all the documents as the child’s first educators. Only in the Argentinian and Cuban documents was there a more direct emphasis on the idea that parents needed to be educated. Therefore, a large number of additional documents and program have been developed by these two countries to accomplish this purpose.

In the rest of the countries and in the Canadian documents, there was clear reference to the necessity of building strong partnerships with parents. In that sense, the family and the early childhood professionals were required to develop strong communication and meaningful links to support children’s development.

**Early childhood educators**

All documents considered in this review described early childhood educators (ECEs) as professionals. However, there was significant evidence throughout the documents that recognized the transitions and the shifting role of educators from “technicians” (Moss, 2006) to critical thinkers reflecting on their practice. Educators’ professionalism and educational competence seemed to be the overall focus of attention. Requirements for training were also considered in most documents.

Management must also ensure that training is available to enable the adults who work with children to have the knowledge and skills necessary to support the children’s learning and development and to implement the curriculum in everyday practice. (New Zealand, 1996, p. 27)

The Framework supports and strengthens services to young children in New York State by identifying the areas of knowledge needed by all who work with young children and suggesting a continuum of competency levels within each knowledge base area. (New York, 2001, p.4)

La acción de la educadora es un factor clave para que los niños alcancen los propósitos fundamentales; es ella quien establece el ambiente, plantea las situaciones didácticas y busca motivos diversos para despertar el interés de los alumnos e involucrarlos en actividades que les permitan avanzar en el desarrollo de sus competencias. (Mexico, 2004, p.8)

Teachers’ grasp of professional knowledge in the field of pre-primary education is necessary. (Hong Kong, 2006, p. 11).

All staff at a place of care should have had appropriate training in order to be able to perform their duties. Practitioners grow in self-confidence and give better service if they are properly trained. (South Africa, 2006, p. 39).

As educators embrace their changing role there is an opportunity for greater professional pride and rediscovery of the excitement of working with young children. (Saskatchewan, 2008, p. 20).

ECEs are encouraged in all documents to use keen observation skills, reflective thinking (most of the time guided by a predetermined questionnaire developed in the documents) and most importantly, to create quality relationships with children and their parents.

**Community/society**

By framing children’s development within a bio-ecological perspective, the international and Canadian documents proposed that children’s healthy growth and development was the responsibility of the whole community/society, with parents and family having the most direct influence. For example, according to the Australian document (2010), the benefits of integrating society and school were for children and the community itself.

This document stresses the importance of collective efforts among families, early childhood education and care, communities, and policy-makers in supporting the learning and development of children. (Minnesota, 2005, p.1)

The web of family and community is the child’s anchor for early development. Families are the first and most powerful influence on children’s early learning and development. Families live in, and belong to, multiple communities that may support or thwart their ability to support young children’s optimal development. (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006, as cited in Ontario, 2007, p.9)

La familia, considerada en su diversidad, constituye el núcleo central básico en el cual la niña y el niño encuentran sus significados más personales, debiendo el sistema educacional apoyar la labor
This National Curriculum Framework accordingly acknowledges the importance of involving parents, the family and the community and encourages partnership between different Ministries, organisations, practitioners, NGOs, as well as national and international agencies. (Mauritius, 2010, p.1)

Global perspective

The documents recognized, in either direct or indirect ways, that education was crucial to prepare children for the 21st Century. Accordingly to the majority of the documents early childhood education should address issues such as environment, technology and social changes. The documents emphasized that the increase of mobility across borders, the protection of the natural resources, and the fast changes in technology should be learned from early stages in life. Most importantly, there was a clear belief that by educating young human beings to these issues and values, societies and the world would have a better future. For example, the Finnish document Core curriculum for pre-school education (2000) proposed that early childhood education should contribute to providing foundational conditions "for the creation of a good society and a common world."

Implications

There is no doubt that the early childhood sector has been moving from community/local services to an organized system at national and provincial levels in the countries and most states/provinces explored in this review. Rather than allowing a situation where there are inequities in the services in early learning programs available for children and families, these documents aim to provide general principles, values and learning guidelines that early childhood educators can use to provide all children with meaningful opportunities to reach their full potential. This shift encompasses many important changes that have certainly impacted the way most communities view early childhood today. We would like to reflect on two major aspects revealed through this document review— that the early years are being impacted by: (a) recent early childhood research findings; and (b) the increasing professionalization of early childhood educators.

The Impact of Early Childhood Research Findings

Early childhood research appears as a constant pattern in most of the review documents. The documents are grounded and supported by current research conducted around the world in the last twenty years. The economic impact of early childhood services, the development of the brain on the first years of human life, the socio-cultural impact on child development and learning, the consideration of inclusive practices, and the idea that children follow developmental trends at their own pace, are some of the major research concepts that have permeated these documents worldwide. These ideas, as well as the conception of the child as a citizen, are influencing not only how governments at a national and provincial level think about families and young children, they are also impacting governmental decisions about investing today for long-term benefits for society. The guidelines and curriculum documents developed by Ministries and Departments from different governments that were considered in this review, have been created to better frame a service that now seems crucial for future economical and social development. This also suggests that the sector was considered inconsistent and fragmented before governments took responsibility. Clearly, the purpose statements of the documents have as one of their aims, to create consistency, to develop a common language, to validate practices and to introduce uniform principles. However, these ideas undoubtedly create tensions in the early years sector caused by stated adherence to a curriculum framework approach, while articulating outcomes expected before school starts. For example, the document developed in Hong Kong (2006) embraced a curriculum framework approach and at the same time established “what to learn and what to teach” (p. 22).

Research about investment and the value of the early years also revealed the hidden agenda of accountability. In most documents, goals, expectations, indicators, and common learning areas are described with education and care delivered most frequently through a holistic, play-based approach that respects the child. However, at the same time, the articulated goals and expectations of the documents certainly emphasize a standardized view of learning and development.

The Increased Professionalization of Early Childhood Educators

Depending on the characteristics of the document, adults who are in direct contact with young children are listed as parents/caregivers or early childhood educators (ECEs) who are also sometimes called practitioners and/or teachers. Parents as the child’s first teacher was a consistent foundational idea, but the documents seemed more directed toward ECEs and their responsibilities. The idea of investing now in early childhood with the aim of achieving long-term benefits for the whole society implies a tremendous responsibility for the early childhood field, particularly for the professionals who work in it. From the findings in this review it appears that educators are now expected to create this new culture of early childhood where children experience healthy development and achieve their maximum potential. As creators of this new culture, educators are expected to co-construct the curriculum framework and to adapt the document to different scenarios and circumstances.

These documents shape and frame ideas about how quality early childhood education should be defined, as well as how the educators should be described. The majority of the documents defined ECEs as professionals. Therefore, a higher
standard for the role appears to be emerging as a direct consequence of the pressure for standardization of the early childhood sector in both provincial and national jurisdictions. The review revealed that to be a professional, ECES should know and be prepared to work with many different outcomes, but most importantly, to have a solid understanding of young children’s development. While it could be argued this is what ECES were always expected to do, there has now been an underlying pressure for more accountability, creative pedagogy, greater responsibilities and ongoing professional learning.

Throughout the review, educators’ professionalism appears as a key component of the changes that are being implemented in many societies as evidenced by the continuous reference to professional training. The descriptor “training” appears in most documents as a requirement that is essential, but not yet accomplished. “Training” appears either to be limited, not completed, or lacking consistency.

Professionalism and training are directly linked to the learning component of early childhood services. To fully develop children’s potential, pedagogical training and the ongoing development of educators is crucial. In some cases, the document itself becomes the guide that intends to inform and guide the educators, with, for example, suggestions for “best practices”, ideas for environmental arrangements, and effective use of resources. In addition, most documents have developed a series of questions and/or guidelines to support the educators’ critical thinking and reflections in terms of learning goals, areas of learning, developmental trajectories and pedagogical approaches. The majority of the documents present their adopted perception of learning with simple visuals that allow educators to easily understand how key components of the learning process interact. In those cases, the document becomes the vehicle for translating pedagogical knowledge into daily practice.

If most societies are placing a tremendous level of responsibility on early childhood educators, a range of alternatives need to be available to ensure their professionalization. This discussion has already started in many settings and groups, including among the educators themselves. Educators’ accreditations and different levels of certification may facilitate developing a system that is accountable to the society it serves.

**Final Thoughts**

Before policy makers and governments around the globe took interest in the provision of care and education for young children, early childhood services rested “unexamined within cultural practices or historical traditions” (Prochnner, Clehhorn & Green, 2008, p.190). The proliferation of frameworks and/or curricular guidelines appear to be aimed at standardizing early childhood programs and services, and showing that many jurisdictions are taking responsibility for the education and care of their younger citizens. By building a common language for educators and for the community, many jurisdictions are developing the parameters for a sector that is becoming more formalized.

Even though the documents are grounded in cultural difference and demonstrate respect and support of different socio-cultural backgrounds, the similarities among the majority of these frameworks/ curricula are remarkable. Clearly, global trends regarding early childhood are making a notable impact on national and local communities. These developments appear to be driven by common beliefs and ideas regarding early childhood such as the value of the early years as the most dynamic period of brain development, the role of formal early childhood education as the primary stage in the lifelong learning continuum, and the belief that investing in early years is a worthwhile investment of society’s resources. However, a pervasive sense that “one size fits all” does exist. Globalization of the early years has the potential to limit the opportunity for a co-constructed curriculum to emerge.

More research is needed to explore these ideas, particularly in relation to the implementation process and impact of these documents. What is clearly shown by this review is that those who work in the early childhood system have tremendous responsibilities. These professionals must ensure that when these guidelines and the outcomes are implemented, local cultural values and beliefs are not left behind. All the documents instantiated the view that communities are responsible for the development of the younger generations and for ensuring healthy and happy lives for children. In addition, the documents emphasized that communities would become the main beneficiaries of quality early childhood programs and services. As early childhood researchers, it is our hope that such programs and services keep developing and that this particular review, which highlights current philosophies, trends, and ideas adopted by others, could become a useful tool for the main stakeholders in the early childhood community.

**References**


References
Appendix A
International Documents - Summary

Country: Argentina Date: 2004
Source: National
Children’s ages: 0 to school entry
Nature: Prescribed curriculum
Focus: Early learning
Purpose: To extend and enrich children’s learning from birth to five and through the transition to school. To assist educators in developing children’s full potential.
Pedagogical approach: early childhood is a vital period in children’s learning and development. The document has an emphasis on play-based learning. The document’s vision for learning is framed on the concepts of belonging, being, and becoming. Therefore, the document emphasizes that learning is build around relationships. The document is organized through the integration of learning outcomes, principles and practice.

Country: Australia Date: 2009
Source: National
Children’s ages: 0-to-5
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning and caring
Purpose: To validate and document excellent and enriched teaching and learning experiences for all children.
Pedagogical approach: it is stated in the document that the areas of learning should be adapted to children’s needs and characteristics. Learning areas as organized from a series of core learning outcomes described as “Núcleos de Aprendizajes Prioritarios,” which are considered the key elements for the development of equity within the society. Play is considered as fundamental for children’s learning and as a key component of the society’s cultural background.

Country: Chile Date: 2001
Retrieved from: http://www.educachile.cl/Usrfiles/P0001/File/BasesCurricularesEDucPar.pdf
Source: National
Children’s ages: 0-to-5
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning and caring
Purpose: To develop to the maximum the children’s potential.
Pedagogical approach: the document maintains that learning is a time for learning through experiences as they unfold. Early childhood set up the foundation for later learning. The document considers twelve principles of learning and development. Each principle is presented in short statements, followed by an explanation of the principle from the child’s perspective. The explanations highlight the adult’s role. Areas of learning are organized by themes.

Country: China Date: 2006
State: Hong-Kong
Source: Special Administrative Region
Children’s ages: 2-to-6
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning
Purpose: to foster children’s whole person development. To be the reference for the teaching of young children
Pedagogical approach: it is stated in the document that the pre-primary years set up the foundation for life-long learning. Children learn by doing and through play. Sensory activities are the media of learning for young children. The document explains that objectives should be developmentally appropriate. Two general pre-primary goals and a series of goals for each of the developmental areas are described. Learning is framed around three main concepts: knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Country: Cuba Date: n.d.
Source: National
Children’s ages: 0-to-6
Nature: Prescribed curriculum
Focus: Early learning and caring
Purpose: to develop to the maximum the children’s potential.
Pedagogical approach: learning is conceived as fundamentally historical-social and cultural. Play is considered in the document as fundamental for children. The document expresses that the areas of learning should be adapted to children’s needs and characteristics. Learning areas are organized by cycles that are described according to children’s ages.

Country: Mexico Date: 2004
Source: National
Children’s ages: 0-to-6
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning
Purpose: to validate and document excellent and enriched teaching and learning experiences for all children.
Pedagogical approach: The early years are the most important stage in children’s lives. Early childhood is a time for learning through experiences as they unfold.

Country: Finland Date: 2003
Retrieved from: http://www.thl.fi/thl-client/pdfs/267671cb-dec0-4039-b97b-7ac6e69c10
Source: National
Children’s ages: before school entry
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning and caring
Purpose: to give the guidelines for pre-school education.
Pedagogical approach: the document reflects a holistic view of growth, learning and development. The core curriculum guidelines are intended or pre-school education and are integrated to the national guidelines. The objectives of pre-school are broad and are based on children’s developmental skills.

Country: Finland Date: 2000
Source: National
Children’s ages: pre-school
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning
Purpose: to develop the children as human beings.
Pedagogical approach: learning is conceived as fundamentally historical- biological-social and cultural. Play is considered in the document as fundamental for children. The document expresses that the areas of learning should be adapted to children’s needs and characteristics. Learning areas are organized by cycles that are described according to children’s ages.

Country: Ireland Date: 2009
Retrieved from: http://www.childmindering.ie/Links%202010/Aistear_Siolta_Similarities_Differences.pdf
Source: National
Children’s ages: 0-to-6
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning
Purpose: to provide information for adults and to help them plan for enjoyable and challenging learning experiences for all children.
Pedagogical approach: The early years are the most important stage in children’s lives. Early childhood is a time for learning through experiences as they unfold.
Canadian Children Child Study
Fall / Automne 2012

Focus: Early learning
Purpose: the document aims to improve young children's education as well as to support the consistency and continuity between the early years and the elementary school.

Pedagogical approach: the document understands the holistic perspective of children's development. The document is organized around general competencies that individuals should achieve and developed by the end of the school years. Competencies are organized through a series of areas of learning.

Country: New Zealand
Date: 1996
Source: National
Children's ages: 0-to-8
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning and caring
Purpose: to provide a framework that will form the basis for consistent curriculum and programs in early childhood education services.

Pedagogical approach: children learn within relationships.
Learning practices should be developmentally appropriate. Outcome and goals are described from a holistic perspective. The principles are integrated and woven (through a Whariki visual) with five strands and goals.

Country: Norway
Date: 2006
Source: National
Children's ages: 1-to-5 (kindergarten)
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning and caring
Purpose: to give teachers, pedagogical leaders and other staff a binding framework for the planning, implementation and assessment of the activities of kindergarten. To provide information to parents, owners, and supervisors authorities
Pedagogical approach: the document emphasizes the need for an integration of care, learning and play as well as linguistic skills.
The document explains that Kindergartens should be cultural arenas in which children help to create their own culture. The document refers to a series of learning areas which broad goals and a list of "must" that staff should do.

Country: Republic of Mauritius
Date: 2010
Source: National
Children's ages: 3-to-5
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning
Purpose: provides the rationale, the learning outcomes, the descriptors, the performance indicators and the teaching learning process for all learning areas in the Republic of Mauritius
Pedagogical approach: the document has an emphasis on the value of play and developmentally appropriate practices. It suggests the use of themes or thematic units for planning in an integrated way.

or the document implies a holistic approach to learning by emphasizing the importance of the development of the whole child.

Country: Scotland
Date: 2005
Source: National
Children's ages: 0-to-3
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning and caring
Purpose: to build a coherent, continuous and progressive educational experience for all young people in Scotland. To give every child the necessary support to reach their full potential and the best start in life.

Pedagogical approach: a child early years are vital. The document considers an integrated approach of learning. Key features of development are interrelated. The document gives special consideration to play, relationships and responsible care. The document states that relationships influence young children's learning. Learning outcomes are broad and holistic.

Country: Scotland
Date: 1999/2004
Source: National
Children's ages: 3-to-5
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Early learning and caring
Purpose: to build a coherent, continuous and progressive educational experience for all young people in Scotland. To give every child the necessary support to reach their full potential and the best start in life. Pedagogical approach: to facilitate planning, each of the key aspects of learning is presented separately. However, the document clearly states that each of these areas is linked closely with other aspects of learning. Learning outcomes are related to the national curriculum outcomes, ages 3-18. The document states a list of outcomes for each of the areas of development that children "should learn."

Country: Singapore
Date: 2003
Source: National
Children's ages: Kindergarten (preschool)
Nature: Curriculum Framework
Focus: Learning
Purpose: to explain the principles and desired outcomes for the preschool years.

Pedagogical approach: the early years set up the foundation for later learning. Learning can be enhanced by caring adults. Positive attitudes towards learning are achieved both through play and structured learning. The early years should aim to promote a love for learning. The document adopts a holistic approach to education and learning. The document describes a series of dispositions and skills that children should learn by the end of kindergarten.
Early Childhood Services: Using Narratives to Explore Parents’ Experiences of Transition

By: Dr. Patricia Peterson, Dr. William Morrison and Dr. Ruth Morrison

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Abstract
This article examines the concepts of transitions in early childhood through the lens of parents’ personal narratives. How do parents define transition or the process of change? What are the stages that they journey through as they parent their preschool children? This exploration is not only interested in identifying the kinds of transitions experienced by parents, but also the processes of change and the meanings that parents give to them. Furthermore, the nature of the interactions and relationships that accompany the processes of change are examined. These narratives emerge from an early childhood development demonstration site charged with the task of creating integrated programs and services that are responsive to community needs within an educational context. To set the stage for the personal narratives of transition, the larger political narrative of transition provincially, nationally and internationally is also examined.

My name is Susan and I am a mother of three children who are 3, 5 and 9 years old. If you asked me a year ago if I was a good mother, I would have said ‘probably not’. As a matter of fact, I don’t remember ever being told I was good at anything my whole life.

My mom loved me as best as she could. My stepfather didn’t like me at all and I, in turn, didn’t like him much either. I was seven years old when my stepfather pushed me down a flight of stairs when we were fighting. I remember how hard it was to learn after that. I would go to school and get yelled at by my teacher for not learning right and then go home and get in trouble for not paying attention in school. I hated school and I hated being called slow and stupid.

My first daughter, Katie, was born with autism. She is a handful but I always tell her every day how much I love her and how smart I think she is. I don’t ever want her to feel like I did. My other children, Kristie and Tommy, are five and three.

Last summer my worker told me that my children had to start going to a daycare to help them to learn things for school. I went to visit the Early Learning Centre daycare and got yelled at by my worker off my case. I thought I would hate it and I never planned on going back again. I made sure the workers knew it too. I wasn’t going to let them tell me how I should be raising my kids. I hated walking in the doors of that red brick building which brought back bad feelings of my own experiences at school.

I didn’t expect to be treated so kindly from the minute we arrived. I was surprised that these people all took the time to know all of our names and welcome us in their Centre. They asked our advice on stuff about our kids and asked us if we could help them out with stuff too. It was a good feeling and we have been at the Early Learning Centre since.

The best part is that we no longer have to take a bunch of buses for all of the kids’ appointments anymore. It felt like we were always running from place to place. A lot of times I just cancelled because I was too tired to go. Now our Early Interventionist, Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist and Social Worker all come and meet us at the Centre most of the time. The staff makes us vanilla coffee and cookies and it is so relaxing to sit in the Lounge. I don’t miss our appointments anymore.

I help the Centre out too by collecting clothes that are too small for kids in my neighborhood so they can be given to someone else. We also help out at the coffee house for parents at the school on Fridays.

The Early Learning Centre helps us when we need it and shows us how we can help others when they need it too. We like it here and wouldn’t go anywhere else because our kids are happy and learning a lot for school.
Close your eyes. Can you visualize the scene captured in the narrative above? Can you identify with the experience? Do the descriptions of feeling vulnerable, unworthy and fatigued resonate with stories from your past? According to Smith (2010), “We live in, through and out of narratives; we think in story form, make meaning through stories, and make sense of our experience via stories provided by socio-culture realms we inhabit” (pp. 87-88). We not only come to understand ourselves through the stories that we tell, but also through those to which we feel connected.

The Context

This article examines the concepts of transitions in early childhood through the lens of parents’ personal narratives. How do parents define transition or the process of change? What are the stages that they journey through as they parent their preschool children? This exploration is not only interested in identifying the kinds of transitions experienced by parents, but also the processes of change and the meanings that parents give to them. Furthermore, the nature of the interactions and relationships that accompany the processes of change are examined. These narratives emerge from an early childhood development demonstration site charged with the task of creating integrated programs and services that are responsive to community needs within an educational context. To set the stage for the personal narratives of transition, the larger political narrative of transition provincially, nationally and internationally is also examined.

When the province of New Brunswick conducted an early learning and childcare consultation in 2007, parents specified that they required community-based, integrated services—“places where they could access information, help their children get ready for school, and receive help with parenting questions” (NB Early Childhood Development Centres Pilot Project, 2009, p.5). In 2009, four provincial pilot sites were identified. The short-term goal of these centres was to provide seamless programming for children and parents through coordinating and connecting kindergarten, early learning and child-care programs, as well as parenting support services and community resources. The long-term goal was to impact the capacity of children to succeed in life by providing a strong foundation of early childhood education and care.

New Brunswick is not alone in its recognition of the long-term benefits of early childhood supports and services. Early childhood has become the focal point of educational, social and economic reorganization for many countries in the Western world (McCain, Mustard & McCuaig, 2011; Moss, 2007; Vincent & Ball, 2006). Member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development have taken steps to improve the quality of early childhood education and care as part of their economic and social reforms (OECD, 2001; 2004; 2006; 2012). Traditionally, early childhood has been addressed within two sectors—education and care—each section having radically diverse goals, mandates and understandings (Moss, 2011). In many instances, fractured early childhood systems have the potential to reduce accessibility and availability of programs and resources, to duplicate services, and to squander resources. Many countries have addressed these challenges by integrating education and care, or by transitioning responsibility to national or provincial education departments or ministries (Kaga, Bennet & Moss, 2010).

Recent international studies have focused on understanding the process of integrating early childhood education and care under ministries of education. Caring and Learning Together (2010), a cross-national study of five countries (Brazil, Jamaica, New Zealand, Slovenia and Sweden), reports that while the degree of integration differs widely from country to country, the education platform and infrastructure work together to support “access, affordability, concern for a (relatively) well-trained workforce and curriculum as a basic tool for practice” (p. 80). Starting Strong III (2012) focuses on the impact that quality early childhood education and care programs/services have on short- and long-term child and family outcomes. The study suggests that expanded accessibility and affordability will not yield the intended outcomes unless attention is paid to quality.

In the Canadian context, three studies have had a significant impact on provincial policy with respect to early childhood education and care. Early Years Study: Reversing the real brain drain (1999) became a catalyst, igniting national attention to the relationships among quality experiences in early childhood education and care, the shaping of cognitive structures and functions, and enduring consequences for individuals and society. The Early Years Study 2: Putting science into action (2002) emphasized the policy framework essential to improving conditions in early childhood, with a long-term goal of creating healthier Canadians. Most recently, the Early Years Study 3: Making decisions, taking action (2011) outlines current provincial promising practices and provides an instrument—The Early Childhood Index—designed to measure the funding, policies, access and quality of early childhood education and care in each province.

In 2008, New Brunswick responded to the need to improve early childhood education and care by issuing a call for proposals from communities to become early childhood demonstration sites. Four centres were chosen, representing both Anglophone and Francophone sectors in two urban and two rural settings. Each early childhood development centre (ECDC) was provided with $100,000 annually over a three-year period by the provincial government, and became part of a three-year evaluative case study. Toward the end of year one, four additional ECDCs, supported by seed funding from the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation (MWMFF), were recognized as being part of the
study. While the province supports the four initial sites, the MWMFF supports all eight sites in the areas of communication, development, and research and evaluation activities led by the Health and Education Research Group (HERG) at the University of New Brunswick.

The provincial research initiative lead by HERG utilized a case study evaluative framework to document the process by which the eight early childhood centres moved forward to coordinate and connect services within an educational framework. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used to detail each unique story. A provincial composite was realized by means of a cross-case analysis for each year of the three-year study. In the course of conducting site visits, researchers began to hear powerful stories of transformation, hope renewed, empowerment and connections. As such, investigators began to reflect on the potential of using these narratives as a lens for understanding what the centres meant to those intimately involved in site services and activities.

Methodology

This paper highlights narratives that have been entrusted to the researchers by parents and early childhood educators. The participating researchers have been touched by these stories, and have been encouraged to “make the effort of asking questions and listening to the stories that they [research participants] tell” (Bateson, 2000, p.5). For the purposes of this research, narrative inquiry has been defined as both the lived experience being studied and the research processes of collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting data (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

The goal of narrative is to better comprehend the layers or discoveries of the story in both social and historical perspectives. For this reason, this research focuses not only on the events of the stories, but also on the participants’ emotions, perceptions and beliefs embedded therein (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2010; Rossiter & Clark, 2007).

The Narrative

When considering meaning within narrative accounts, there are two questions to be addressed: “What does the narrative or story reveal about the person and the world from which it came?” and “How can this narrative be interpreted to understand and illuminate the life and culture that created it?” (Patton, 2002, p. 133).

My name is Susan and I am a mother of three children who are 3, 5 and 9 years old. If you asked me a year ago if I was a good mother, I would have said ‘probably not’. As a matter of fact, I don’t remember ever being told I was good at anything my whole life.

Who is Susan? What kind of world does she come from? How is her story representative of other parents? Susan is like many of the single parents who live in one of the city’s vulnerable neighborhoods, located close to the early childhood centre. In this urban setting, the majority of the 6000 parents and children live in poverty and are single-parent families headed by women. In the neighbourhood served by the early childhood centre, almost 70% of families live in poverty, with low levels of education and labour force participation.

I would go to school and get yelled at by my teacher for not learning right and then go home and get in trouble for not paying attention in school. I hated school and I hated being called slow and stupid.

Like many parents, Susan has negative memories of schooling. These and other experiences with public systems can act as barriers to accessing services.

Last summer my worker told me that my children had to start going to a daycare to help them to learn things for school. I went to visit the Early Learning Centre daycare to get my worker off my case. I thought I would hate it and I never planned on going back again. I made sure the workers knew it too.

While early childhood services are available, access is often blocked by a series of invisible barriers. Barriers include insular neighbourhoods with families and children who hesitate to venture beyond the boundary lines, stigma associated with accessing certain services, low literacy skills that make filling out paperwork difficult, and prior negative experiences with government departments and agencies rooted in a deficit-focused service model. Access to services can also be blocked by issues of lack of transportation due to changes in bus routes, costs related to transportation, and availability of childcare supports.

It felt like we were always running from place to place. A lot of times I just cancelled because I was too tired to go.

Frequently, the seemingly daunting task of raising three children alone, and the physical and emotional fatigue of doing so without family or community support is too overwhelming, and parents simply give up. Issues of substance abuse may complicate the situation.

My mom loved me as best as she could. My stepfather didn’t like me at all, and I, in turn, didn’t like him much either. ... My first daughter Katie was born with autism. She is a handful but I always tell her every day how much I love her and how smart I think she is. I don’t ever want her to feel like I did.

Many parents feel alone and isolated when dealing with parenting issues. Some parents lack confidence in their abilities to parent effectively, which could be due, in part, to their experiences of growing up in dysfunctional families that did not provide models that they wish to replicate. These parents have a deep love for their children and families, and yet they do not know how to access the supports that they need.

To fully understand the historical context, one can review the events leading up to the creation of the early learning centre. This urban centre has a strong coalition
of early childhood service providers and community partners who have a long history of working together and who have been impacted by the research findings on early childhood presented in the Early Years Studies 1 and 2. First, this community recognized that early childhood development was a prime factor in reducing poverty and preparing individuals to become contributing members of society. Second, stakeholders realized that the quality of early childhood development services was a key predictor of children's abilities to learn and succeed in school, as well as to find and maintain healthy lifestyles in adulthood. Armed with these beliefs, the early childhood stakeholders, the school and the business community collaborated to open an early childhood centre. As such, this ECDC is part of a larger community initiative designed to break the cycle of poverty in the city.

This site was chosen because of the readiness of the school to embrace the concept of embedding an early learning centre. The location is a K-8 school that already functions as a community hub, with many programs in place for school-aged children and their parents. These programs include initiatives involving local business and community organizations that partner with school staff, students and parents to enhance students' learning environments. A local partner manages a community centre that provides daily afterschool programs for school-aged children from 3 p.m. to 8 p.m. At the same time, it was important for the neighbourhood to be ready to embrace the early learning centre.

Transitions

If we define transition as change or the process of change, we see many examples of transition embedded within Susan’s story. Reading between the lines and drawing upon the myriad of other emerging narratives within these case studies, researchers were able to explore the quality of interactions and relationships that have accompanied these changes.

A new perception of self: Developing a sense of personal competence

If you asked me a year ago if I was a good mother I would have said, ‘probably not’. As a matter of fact, I don’t remember ever being told I was good at anything my whole life.

Susan’s perceptions of herself have been re-storied. Not only is she exploring these stories personally, she is making them public by sharing them with others. This process can be further examined by reviewing Susan’s initial contact with the early learning centre.

I didn’t expect to be treated so kindly from the minute we arrived. I was surprised that these people all took the time to know all of our names and welcome us in their Centre.

The invitational nature of the initial greeting and subsequent encounters were pivotal factors in creating a space where Susan felt safe and comfortable. What are the relational characteristics of these initial encounters? First, there was an authenticity in the initial exchange that involved an exchange of information concerning self and others, and suggested equitable and fair interactions. The fact that the centre director openly and generously shared her own story of growing up in this neighbourhood as a single mother provided a sense of connection. Susan experienced a sense of acceptance or unconditional caring. The observation that “these people all took the time to know all of our names” began to build her sense of self-worth.

They asked our advice on stuff about our kids and asked us if we could help them out with stuff too. It was a good feeling.

By soliciting Susan’s advice, her sense of self-worth and competency was affirmed. Affirmation recognizes a person’s abilities and potentials, and is the relational quality that makes it safe for individuals to recognize and explore areas of need and concern (Morrison & Morrison, 2002). This allowed Susan to risk becoming involved in parenting programs and working with service providers within the centre. The end result of these relationships for Susan has been an increased sense of self worth, the development of an image of herself as a good parent, and a sense of competency in her ability to contribute meaningfully to the community.

I help the Centre out too by collecting clothes that are too small for kids in my neighborhood so they can be given to someone else. We also help out at the coffee house for parents at the school on Fridays.

A sense of belonging

There has been a conscious effort on the part of the centre to reach out to parents in meaningful ways. The Director of Childcare spoke of the need to build authentic relationships among parents within the various parent/child programs. Inviting parents to prepare a lunch meal together and share it with their children has provided a space for conversation among all parents regardless of socio-economic or educational background. The early childhood team shared about the need to provide opportunities for parents to recognize their gifts and potential.

Lunchtime on Drop-in day is similar to a cross between an episode of “18 Kids and Counting” and “Come Dine with Me.” Parents and children, grandparents, aunts, caregivers, early interventionists, speech therapists and whoever is in the centre are invited to come and break bread at our growing table.

At first it is loud and chaotic as we all work together to mash, chop, stir, pour and serve. We all fill our plates with bread, fresh vegetables, meat and potatoes. Everyone helps each other get set up to eat and help to feed all the children and babies so everyone gets a chance to relax and chat awhile.

People who question why we added this meal to our program time only need to
visit once. Visitors who shared a playroom with each other over several weeks as they supervised their own children’s play remained strangers or acquaintances, occasionally sharing tidbits of gossip about a particular parent who was absent that day. Conversation was superficial at best.

There’s something about breaking bread together at a table that changes us all. We sit and share a few smiles and laughs, a few tears and regrets, a few recipes, a few tips, and lots of fellowship and love. We know by looking around at everyone that we all bring something unique to this table and we can all help one another. (Site Director)

This narrative, shared by the site director, highlights the ways in which the early childhood site creates opportunities for parents to build deeper connections with each other in informal, authentic ways. These social networks are very important in terms of banishing the sense of isolation and loneliness experienced by many parents. Sharing with each other, supporting each other, and interacting socially with each other are observable outcomes among centre stakeholders.

I’ve noticed parents do better when they are with other parents. The difference between knowledge and action is confidence and competence. When parents share with each other, they appear to be more open and candid with each other. Parents can learn from each other. (Service Provider)

Non-confrontational settings are also spaces where parents can connect authentically with other parents or service providers. Whether it is a speech therapist across the table or an early interventionist on the floor of the drop-in playgroup, the qualities of the relationships influence the openness and confidence of parents to seek the supports they need. The literature describes these kinds of initial interactions as soft entries where first meetings take place in safe and secure environments, and where the parents’ autonomy remains intact. In other words, parents retain the choice of whether to engage or not.

A sense of autonomy

When parents have developed a sense of belonging and personal worth, they have an enhanced awareness that they have the independence and power to make personal choices.

I hated walking in the doors of that red brick building which brought back bad feelings of my own experiences at school. ... I didn’t expect to be treated so kindly from the minute we arrived. ... It was a good feeling and we have been at the Early Learning Centre since.

In the preceding passage, one can sense the emerging shift in emotion. The first sentence indicates compliance to the social worker’s directives to attend the preschool. The last two sentences denote Susan’s positive feelings about herself as part of the early childhood centre, and her choice to remain as part of the community.

How does this model of integrated early childhood service delivery support parents in developing a sense of autonomy? The “hub model” of service delivery works on the premise of developing a comprehensive continuum of services that surrounds children and families to meet their unique needs. For Susan, this means being able to access the services in one location. For others, the flexible childcare programs facilitate parents’ decisions to make life changes. Consider Carl’s narrative, a single dad who has sole custody of his daughter Abigail.

Abigail was born six weeks prematurely at a birth weight of two and a half pounds. Her heart stopped shortly after birth and Abigail was kept in the hospital for one month. Abigail was eventually removed from the care of her drug-addicted mother and placed into foster care.

Abigail’s father Carl was in a motorcycle gang at the time of her birth. He too was heavily involved in drugs and illegal activity and had no contact with his daughter.

When Abigail was approximately one year old, Carl made a decision to change his lifestyle and seek out his daughter. He began working odd jobs and removed himself from the people with whom he engaged in dangerous behaviors daily. He sought treatment for his addictions, and late last February was granted temporary custody of his daughter, Abigail.

Life has not been perfect for Carl. Every day he faces the demons of his addictions in a community of poverty, filled with these temptations.

The early learning centre has provided childcare to help Carl continue to improve himself and his family’s life. He often thanks us for the wonderful care and recently told me, “Knowing Abigail is safe and happy here, I can go to work part time and attend my meetings, which make me a better man and a better dad.” (Site Director)

Knowing that his child is receiving quality care allows Carl to continue his process of growth and development. For others, including newcomers like Yi Min, the early childhood centre has facilitated the transition to a new country:

In broken English, Yi Min told me that his family was new to Canada and that they needed our help. He told us that his new neighbor had told him to come and see us. Yi Min explained that his expectant wife in her last trimester was having a very difficult time right now, and they needed temporary care for Jack, their two year old, so she could rest.

The following Monday, Jack began attending the Early Learning Centre. Jack’s dad would come in and pay every week like clockwork and tell us what care they needed for the following week. The flexibility of short-term care at their convenience offered them a chance to go to medical appointments, set up their new home, and rest and prepare for the new baby. Sometimes Jack came for half days,
What are parents’ experiences of transitions? The few narratives that have been shared in this article demonstrate that parents’ experiences of transition are as diverse as the population of the community. What remains clear is that one early childhood centre is working to minimize transitions by offering flexible programming onsite, increased access to programs and services by encouraging service providers and community partners to offer programs at the centre, and the empowerment of parents through the creation of safe and secure spaces where they can network with other parents and take an active role in programming.

Conclusion

Farquhar (2012) questions whether early childhood policy directions can simultaneously focus on the “lived experiences of children and families” and “global economic agendas” (p. 289). Is it possible for New Brunswick to balance public goals with the needs of families, parents and children? Certainly, New Brunswick has taken steps to honour the lived experiences of children and families. Like New Zealand, New Brunswick has developed an Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2008) that “emphasizes responsive relationships, children’s strengths, and engaging environments ... [that] views children as confident, active learners whose learning, growth, and development are profoundly influenced by the quality of their relationships with people and their interactions with places and things” (p. 1).

Through analysis of the narratives emerging from the ECDC demonstration site case studies, it is evident that the belief expressed in the frameworks that learning, growth and development are impacted by the quality of relationships also extends to parents. The narratives are laced with examples of how quality relationships have empowered parents. Parents have likened the centre to a “home where you can get together with friends”. In a recent interview, a parent stated that, “the school community reaches out and draws you in”. In a public address in Fredericton, Peter Moss (2011) encouraged New Brunswickers to re-conceptualize the image of an early childhood centre as follows:

A public space...a forum or place of encounter for all citizens (children and adults)...a collaborative workshop for communities:

- expressing the community’s responsibility for its children and for their education and well-being;
- expressing an entitlement to participate;
- expressing the potential of early childhood centres for many purposes and projects – some predefined, others not.

Is it feasible to have this kind of early childhood centre in every New Brunswick community? This research highlights the narratives of parents who are active in early childhood centres. What are the stories of other parents who are not accessing services? How can policy support the working mother with three preschool children who cannot afford the fees, yet does not qualify for childcare subsidies? Does current policy support equitable access? The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Report (2006) noted that in many European countries, 66% to 90% of childcare costs in public universal childcare programs are funded by the government (p. 113). On the other hand, other countries, including Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia, support independent markets in early childhood services, where parents absorb the lion’s share of childcare costs (Farquhar, 2012). In these countries, childcare is viewed as a parental responsibility. Canada’s public expenditures on early childhood programs are the lowest of all the twenty countries that were part of the review (OECD, 2006). Starting Strong II cautions that an economic approach to early childhood can result in inequality with respect to access, segregation of children from low socio-economic levels, and a shortage of quality programs (OECD, 2006).

Farquhar (2012) refers to the work of educational economists Cleveland and Krashinsky (2003), who suggest that “early childhood care and education should be seen, like the compulsory public sector, as a social good, as benefitting the general health of a nation’s children and their future educational achievement, improving labour market volume and flexibility, and enhancing social cohesion” (p.293). As New Brunswick considers the future of childcare services in the province, what underlying goals will drive their policy construction? Four government-funded early childhood sites and four additional early childhood sites with seed funding from the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation (MWFF) have demonstrated how the practices of integration of care and education have ameliorated transitions for parents, as well as for their children. The emerging narratives point to the importance of community-level autonomy in building early childhood centres that are truly responsive to the needs of families, children and parents. They also point to the importance of leaders who understand the unique needs of the community; who practice the building of reciprocal, respectful relationships; and who believe in collaborating with all stakeholders (including parents) in planning and implementing early childhood programs, activities and services.

As the New Brunswick government considers what it means to transition early childhood development services into the Department of Education, Moss (2011) suggests that progress will come from asking critical questions, rather
than proposing solutions. Such critical questions pertain to the current state of the world and the world we envision for the future; the purpose of early childhood education and care; and societal values and ethics. Further, Moss (2011) purports that only after we have begun to answer these questions are we ready to move to the more technical questions, including:

- How should we or organise and structure our services?
- How should we practice education?
- How should we evaluate?
- What pedagogical tools are useful?
- What relationship should exist between early childhood education, parental leave and school?

Embedded in Susan’s story are some of the advantages that integrated service delivery provides, particularly to families living in at-risk circumstances. Clearly, policies must be developed to facilitate partnerships among professionals and families to ensure that early childhood needs are met at a local level, especially during the transition of a child from preschool to kindergarten. From a community perspective, short-term, sporadic interventions are not sufficient for sustainable improvement, nor do they enact real change in the lives of families. The stories emerging from the New Brunswick ECDC case studies provide compelling evidence for the inclusion of intentional, integrated and relational approaches to family involvement in early childhood programming and service delivery frameworks.

References


“It`ll All Come Out In the Wash”: Managing Policy Change in an Informal Parent-Child Program

By: Roz Stooke

Roz Stooke has worked as a classroom teacher, family literacy facilitator, and children’s librarian. Currently she teaches courses in curriculum studies, children’s literature and early childhood literacy at Western University. Her research explores ways in which diversely situated practitioners and families support young children’s literacy in community settings.

Abstract

This paper draws on a qualitative case study to discuss ways in which a group of practitioners employed in an informal, community-based, parent-child program were experiencing recent changes in Ontario’s early years policies. I conceptualize the practitioners’ efforts to manage the changes as transition work, by which I mean that they were working to develop ways of participating in a fast-changing professional world. The paper explores ways in which a narrative approach to documenting program activities can bring visibility to practitioners’ work and support critical reflection on practice. I employ two stories to provoke further discussion about larger stories of change.

Introduction

There are good reasons to celebrate the recent changes to Canada’s early childhood education and care (ECEC) policy. For too long Canadian spending on ECEC lagged behind that of other wealthy countries; for too long federal governments failed to recognize each child’s rights to early education and care. Among the most widely publicized changes in ECEC in Canada are the expansion of access to publicly funded kindergarten programs and the development of early childhood curriculum frameworks to guide practice in a variety of ECEC settings. Less has been written about the impact of recent policy changes on the informal sector of ECEC: that is parent-child programs, community play groups, family literacy programs, and so on. And yet there is evidence that policy changes are reshaping the informal sector too. Moreover, even welcome changes can be overwhelming for the people who must manage them. As one Ontario ECEC practitioner put it: “What’s tricky for everybody to keep up with is that there’s been a lot of change. . . . There’s the Child and Family Centres, FDK, ELECT, and they’re all good, but it’s difficult to keep up with them. . . . And I think it’ll all come out in the wash, but it’s a bit of a struggle.” This article draws on data collected in a study that examined the work of a small group of ECEC practitioners employed in an informal, ready-for-school program in Ontario. My data support the view expressed by Billett (2010) that even long awaited changes can be a sources of dissonance and stress for workers.

[Given] the importance of work to many individuals’ sense of self and identity, the prospects for continuity in that occupation, and the degree and frequency of change experienced by that occupation are likely to influence their well-being and capacities to adapt to constant change. (Billett, 2010, p. 99)

My discussion is premised on the belief that managing change requires practitioners to engage in transition work. Following sociocultural researcher Barbara Rogoff (2003) and others, I view transition work as a form of identity work. Transitions are neither inherently bad nor good, but they force people to reach “beyond the self” (Carr, 2009, p. 22), and this makes transitions at once potential sources of growth and insight and potential sources of stress. There are good reasons to view transitions as processes rather than events (Peters, 2010). They take time and effort, and may require “significant psychosocial and cultural adjustments with cognitive, social and emotional dimensions” (Vogler, Crivello, & Woodhead, 2008, p. 2).

Two characteristics of transition work provide clues to understanding why transitions in the workplace can feel so stressful. First, transition work is not easily deferred. That explains why a young child who experiences several different education and care arrangements in one day can feel so overwhelmed at the end of that day. Second, people’s subjective experiences of a transition are influenced by the roles they are able to play in shaping the transition. In a study of transition-to-school programs, New Zealand researcher Sally Peters (2010) found that teachers’ and parents’ experiences of a transition-to-school program could differ markedly. Peters concluded that including the perspectives of all involved in a transition was the key to its success.

It is not surprising that changes to an institutional landscape as complex and fragmented as early childhood education and care would leave some people feeling confused. The practitioners who participated in my study were working hard to figure out how to participate in an early years landscape whose contours were shifting dramatically, but they were doing so without a usable map. I have therefore organized the article in two parts. The first part aims to provide a map of sorts. It outlines recent changes to ECEC policies in Canada and more specifically...
in Ontario. The second part describes my study and presents two stories from the data that point to the larger story of policy change.

**Toward an Integrated System: The Policy Story**

The ECEC policy story cannot be described as one of rags to riches, but in their introduction to *Early Childhood Grows Up*, Miller, Dalli, and Urban (2012) observe that early childhood education, once the “Cinderella of the education system” (p. 1), has “slowly but surely travelled up the priority list of national policy agendas across the globe” (p. 1). Canada has been called a “curious outlier” (White, 2011, p. 71) and a “conspicuous laggard” (Friendly & Prentice, 2009, p. 4) among wealthy countries. Until recently they spent relatively little on ECEC and provided weaker governance than countries such as Sweden, Denmark and France, preferring to provide informal supports for families rather than programs that recognized every child’s right to ECEC (see e.g. Friendly and Prentice, 2009; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2006; Pascal, 2009; United Nations Children’s Fund, 2008). Martha Friendly and Susan Prentice (2009, p. 5) describe the ECEC landscape in Canada during the early 2000s as follows:

[The] programs include both childcare centres and family childcare in private homes, with the primary aim of allowing mothers (and fathers) to participate in the paid labour force. They also include kindergartens and nursery schools or preschools whose main purpose is early education rather than providing childminding in the parents’ absence. Sometimes they also include family resource programs, which tend to focus on parents rather than on providing either care or early childhood education. These projects are variously intended to enhance child development and well-being, to support parents in and out of the paid workforce, and to meet other objectives such as reducing poverty and its effects, enhancing social inclusion, and facilitating the entry of newcomers to Canadian society. What is missing is a publicly financed, universal ecec system that can do all these things.

The turning point for ECEC in Canada is marked by the increased involvement of the provinces and territories. Quebec had already instituted universal, affordable child care a few years earlier, but after the federal conservative government cancelled the former liberal government’s “embryonic national childcare system” (Friendly & Prentice, 2009, p. 2) in 2006, an increasing number of provincial and territorial governments began to take a much more active role in the provision of early learning and care. Better access to affordable early learning and child care is still desperately needed by families with very young children, but direct provision of ECEC to all children is now recognized as a goal that provinces and territories can work towards. A unprecedented number of children now have access to publicly-funded kindergarten programs and several provinces have adopted ECE curriculum frameworks that “move away from standardised testing, acknowledge cultural and linguistic diversity . . . and propose tools such as pedagogical documentation and learning stories as preferred methods for engaging in practices that value depth and context” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2011, p. 4). Earlier this year a Commission on the Reform of Ontario’s Public Services recommended, among other things, “the cancellation of the FDK program with appropriate phase-out provisions” (2012, p. 29), but to the surprise of many, the Ontario government did not take the commission’s advice. The development of provincial early learning frameworks is a major accomplishment, although the frameworks themselves tend to receive less media attention than initiatives such as FDK. Frameworks are less prescriptive than official school curricula. In theory they allow for more than one interpretation and for consultations about curriculum implementation at the local level. As a participant in my study explained, “We do not have an official curriculum. It’s left up to us to make the curriculum, to be more open and adaptable.” One the other hand, frameworks, like official curricula, reflect a set of core values. Those underpinned by a social pedagogy perspective view early education as “a broad preparation for life and the foundation stage of lifelong learning” (OECD, 2006, p. 13); those underpinned by a pre-primary perspective tend to focus on cognitive development and the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and behaviours important for success at school. The authors of Ontario’s Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2006) framework discuss these two perspectives at length, but opt for neither. Instead, they devote a large section of the document to a continuum of “domains, skills, and indicators of skills” intended to support “observation and documentations of children’s emerging abilities” (Langford, 2010, p. 18).

Ontario’s framework was created by an Expert Panel on Early Learning. The liberal government commissioned the panel to develop “an early learning framework for formal preschool settings that would link with the Junior/Senior Kindergarten program and, ultimately, develop a single integrated early learning framework for children ages two-and-a-half- to six-years” (Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services, n.d.). When ELECT was published, however, the intended readership of the unchanged document had been expanded to include practitioners in a variety of informal settings such as parenting workers, family support staff, and home care visitors (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2006, p. 1). This meant that practitioners working in the informal sector were working from a document intended for practitioners in formal settings.

The development of early learning frameworks such as ELECT marks a change in the ECEC policy focus that has been largely overlooked by the popular media. At the beginning of the 2000s, Canadian policies tended to focus on building community-based supports for families. By 2010, policies focused on direct provision of early education and care services to every child. Witness the difference in two Ontario policy...
In the Early Years Study, McCain and Mustard (1999) described parents as too stressed to do “what good mothering has done for centuries” (p. 6) and argued for a network of strong community support for families.

A program that is created top-down and laid on communities, rather than growing up through community initiative and support, will be less sensitive to the needs of families and the characteristics of the communities; it will also be less likely to engage the kind of leadership and the kind of broad community support, buy-in and understanding that is necessary for the initiative to take root and thrive. (McCain & Mustard, 1999, p. 149)

“Family strengths” policies led to the creation of a plethora of privately- and publicly-funded programs and services for families across Canada (Stooke & McKenzie, 2010). In Ontario, the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) were the centrepieces of the Early Years initiatives, but many other programs and services were provided by profit-oriented and not-for-profit organizations with broader mandates, for example public health units and public libraries. These community organizations routinely collaborated with one another to plan and deliver services, but coordination and communication were ongoing challenges.

Ten years later, Charles Pascal introduced full-day early learning kindergarten programs to the Ontario public in his report, With Our Best Future in Mind (Pascal, 2009). Like the Early Years Study, the report With Our Best Future in Mind described parents as long suffering and attributed parental stress to fragmentation of services and linked strong ECEC policies to a strong economy. Pascal nevertheless took a bold step in suggesting that early learning should be provided under the auspice of the Ontario public education system.

We are all aware that successful economies and societies of the future will be the best educated and the most innovative . . . . We are on our way in Ontario but have work to do when it comes to early learning. (2009, p. 4)

In a chapter of his report entitled Leaving the Patchwork Behind, Pascal also called for the government to “create a continuum of early learning, child care and family supports for children from the prenatal period through to adolescence, under the leadership of the Ministry of Education” (p. 14). In light of the ubiquity of Early Years and Best Start programs across the province, this was an odd recommendation. What was to become of the OEYCs? At this time, the OEYCs and other programs continue to operate, but the operational guidelines are changing and the Ontario government has begun to act on Pascal’s recommendation, establishing several demonstration sites for Child and Family Centres. It is against this backdrop of uncertainty and change that organizations in the informal sector are reconfiguring their mandates and competing for funding.

Overview of the Study

In the summer of 2011, I conducted a small, qualitative case study with a group of community-based ECEC practitioners. A program coordinator called Kate (all names have been changed) worked with two program leaders, Donna and Charlotte, to implement a 12 week, play-based, ready-for-school program in a suburban mall. Over the 12 week period, one or both of the program leaders were sometimes replaced by other practitioners. Several student volunteers from child-youth and nursing programs attended regularly along with settlement workers who supported newcomer families and English language learners. When referrals to specialized services were initiated by parents and staff in the program, staff from partner agencies sometimes arranged to meet families at the program rather than at their offices. Four half-day sessions were scheduled each week during June, July and August and I acted as a participant observer in 12 of those sessions.

The program goals included promoting “everyday life” family literacy activities, fostering children’s readiness for kindergarten, and forging community connections among organizations. As a researcher, I was interested in exploring how a learning stories approach (Carr, 2000) might bring visibility to some aspects of ECEC program work that tend to escape notice. A previous observational study of informal early learning programs revealed that practitioners felt pressured to show they made a difference in order to secure further funding (McKenzie & Stooke, 2012). The study had found too that “attending to the small stuff” (Stooke & McKenzie, 2010) did indeed make a difference to parents’ experiences. However, bringing visibility to the “small stuff” remained a challenge.

As a colleague and former practitioner in informal programs, I wanted to support the program leaders in managing their accountability requirements. They were interested in documentation, but were only just beginning to use the approach in their programs. Where ECEC practitioners employed in formal education and care settings had been practising learning stories and other approaches to documenting children’s learning for some time, practitioners in informal programs had only recently been asked to engage in documentation practices. The leaders had recently participated in a workshop, but found the prospect of carrying out documentation daunting. Their mandated work roles had not included any assessment of children’s learning and development. Rather, they supported parents and caregivers as educators and referred them to specialized services upon request. In their (mostly) drop-in programs, evaluation practices had usually involved keeping attendance records and anecdotal feedback provided by parents and adult caregivers.

Although the leaders had access to toys, games and other resources owned by their organization, they had less than one
week to prepare the vacant store space. They employed floor mats and shelves to define small areas for puppetry, dress-up and building, and they grouped tables to make centres for painting, messy crafts, and so on. They used a small space at the back of the room to prepare snacks, but the room had no water source or sink. By locating the program in a mall, the organizers hoped to attract some families who did not attend existing play groups in local schools and libraries. Because the program was funded through a community revitalization grant, the target audience for the program was local families with three- and four-year-old children. However, no registration was required and the program drew participants from across the city.

During site visits, I talked with participants and took photographs of children, their parents, and program leaders as they engaged with materials and with one another. The photographs served several purposes. They were personally helpful as research artefacts that triangulated and sometimes replaced observational field notes. The program coordinator selected images to include in reports to the funder. But most important, the practitioners and I employed specific photographs as tools for critical reflection. I viewed them as data from which to create stories.

Several characteristics of Carr’s learning stories approach are congruent with my goal to illuminate work that often escapes notice. Learning stories can “document complex reciprocal and responsive relationships in [the] . . . environment” (Carr, 2000, p. 5). They invoke dialogue rather than evaluation and closure. But most important, they are intentionally multi-voiced and open-ended. They gain power as research tools when “[i]nsights are . . . contextualized within our own experiences and juxtaposed with those that differ from our own” (Hibbert, Stooke, Pollock, Faez, Namukasa, & O’Sullivan, 2010, p. 72). Using a learning stories approach allowed me to set my interpretations of events alongside the interpretations of others and to allow interpretations to speak to one another.

My early visits to the program were devoted to “casing the joint” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 19). I composed descriptive field notes and collected photographs of the physical space, and learning resources. Later I focused on the actions of participating children, adults, and leaders interacting with materials and with one another. Many of these photographs depict children demonstrating what Carr (2000, p. 17) calls learning dispositions: taking an interest, persisting in challenging situations, communicating ideas and emotions and taking responsibility for their learning. From the large set of photographs, I selected several small sets of photographs that told stories of the program. I invited practitioners and family members to provide input about the meanings of these images and composed stories that we later employed in professional learning workshops organized by the practitioners.

While creating the stories, I talked with the program leaders about a range of issues that concerned them: how to reach out to newcomer families; how leaders should convey expectations for involvement to caregivers while maintaining a supportive and welcoming tone. Sometimes discussions took another tack. What were some differences between FDK and the half-day kindergarten? How could a drop-in program “do” emergent curriculum? How could leaders in programs like this one respond to children’s interests in substantive ways when the make-up of the group varied from day to day? These questions appeared to preoccupy the leaders although they were not related to the funder’s accountability requirements. In fact, the funder had not specified any curriculum-related requirements. Listening to the questions and I concerned I began to draw connections between the concerns and the story of policy changes outlined earlier in the article. Our program was only a minor player in that larger story, but the sponsor organization was inextricably caught up in the policy shifts. I inferred that the program leaders were trying to figure out how their organization, whose primary mandate had until now been parent education and support, could enact emergent curriculum with young children, sometimes as many as 100 in a morning. The leaders were also confused about the relationship between emergent curriculum and the Ontario Early Learning Framework (OELF). Both had been introduced to them in a single workshop leaving the boundaries between them blurred. More than one practitioner also expressed concerns about how changes in the Ontario early years landscape might affect their professional opportunities. They were engaged in identify work.

Two Stories of Change

In this section I reflect on two stories. The images feature children at play. They served as centrepieces for learning stories in which the children were key characters, but here I use them to illuminate transition work being carried out by program leaders. In the first story a program leader called Fleur teaches a four-year-old boy called Nick how to play a game called Red Light, Green Light. Fleur’s focus on teaching Nick as a soon-to-be student is contrasted with the stance taken by other program leaders who conceptualized the program leader’s role in terms of support and education for parents. In the second story, I reflect on the meaning of an image in which Joy (aged three) and Bo (aged five) are engaged in parallel play. Their story is then revisited as a metaphor for interagency collaboration in the program.

Story #1: Red Light, Green Light

Figure 1
The playroom is divided into an outer reception area and an inner play space by a large room divider. It’s possible to make a circuit around the divider and Nick has been doing exactly that for some time now. Behind him clatters a little toy dog-on-a-leash. The toy is meant for younger children and the leash is too short, so it makes an awful noise as it bounces on the hard floor. Harmless fun, Nick, but in a space this crowded, it’s going to hurt someone’s shins – maybe someone’s knees. So Fleur’s hand goes up. She is a traffic cop. She looks at Nick and says firmly, “Red light means stop”. Nick runs right past, but Fleur repeats the command on his next time round. Eventually he stops and smiles – and waits for the green light. His interest in the game has been piqued.

Fleur is employed in a school-based full-day learning program. The day I took the photo of Nick learning to play Red Light, Green Light, she told me that having parents at the program made it difficult for her to teach skills such as following directions. She said it was hard for children to get ready for school with parents present. Six months after the end of the program, though, I met with Nick’s mom, Candace, and showed her the picture. Candace smiled as she said, “Nick’s Mr. Social Butterfly.” Then she told me about games she was playing at home with Nick to help him to “take up less space” when they do physical activities at school. One game was Irish dancing, “dancing with your arms straight by your side.” Candace showed me what she does and we laughed. Then she recalled that Fleur had been good at engaging the children in group games. She appreciated the way Fleur drew the children together.

Candace thought that the program had been good for Nick because it was somewhere between a playgroup and school. When I took the photo back to Fleur with Candace’s comments, Fleur seemed surprised, but pleased. She hadn’t realised that Candace had noticed what she was doing.

Fleur’s focus on Nick as a soon-to-be-student was unusual in the context of the parent-child program. As an ECE professional employed in a full-day learning kindergarten program, she felt that making a successful transition to school must happen partly at school and she was not convinced that an informal play program could adequately support Nick’s school readiness. By contrast, the other leaders conceptualized their work in terms of support for parents. They too worried that the program might not be school-like enough, but their curriculum was premised on a belief that the skills and dispositions needed to be “a child at school” are not acquired in a few weeks. Rather, parents are their children’s first and most important teachers.

In the transformed early years policy landscape, Fleur’s perspective is gaining momentum. For better or worse, the discourse has changed and program leaders are required to forge new professional identities. I asked the program coordinator if my hunch was accurate.

Kate (program coordinator): As we roll out ELECT and things, we’re seeing ourselves as being the facilitators of the education of the kids you know, learning through play, getting them ready for school. But part of it is in our work with the kids and part of it is in our communications with the parents.

Researcher: So you’ve moved more from parent support to parent education?

Kate: I believe that. And also to children’s education with the parent as being a partner in it. We’re trying to develop that awareness of (pause) you know, developmental stages. But then being able to say to them why we’re making some of the changes in our programs too.

Kate’s response suggests that organizations whose mandates include support for families are figuring out how they can participate in the changing landscape of the early years and where they might comfortably live in that landscape.

I was trying to compose a learning story that would illustrate Carr’s credit view rather than focus on what Joey was not yet doing. I was only partly there. “Joey,” I wrote, “I was excited to see that you stopped running and you were taking an interest in how the elevator works. Were you figuring out what makes the elevator go up? Bo, I know you don’t talk to the other children in English yet, but I think you like to be with other children. You always come to the snack table as soon as someone calls ‘snack’ and you seem very happy sharing the Parking Garage™ with Joey.”

As we discussed the events of a morning, the program leaders and I found it all too easy to talk about the things children were not yet doing. I was trying to frame the image of Joey and Bo playing as a starting point for stories of successful participation in the program. Now, reflecting further on the conversation, it occurs to me that we were not unlike Joey and Bo, working beside one another, but not necessarily communicating. Each of us seemed to be drawing on the professional values, strategies and resources that had worked well for us in other practice settings. Like Joey and Bo, we were “doing our own thing”. For example, I was the researcher. I had intended to be more of an action researcher, but grew cautious about overstepping the boundaries as a visitor to the program. Donna was a program leader, but she had been educated as a primary teacher. She embraced professional conversations and loved big ideas, but
she wondered about how the program was different from play groups and wished she had more sense of the program “objectives”. She also thought “it might have been good to have [the funders] involved at a more grassroots level – to hear their vision.” Fleur had insider knowledge of FDK and nursery school. She worried less than the rest of us about how to “do” emergent curriculum, but she was less certain about the facilitator’s role in a parent-child program and wondered if the program could be more effective without the parents. Charlotte was the most experienced of the group. She was adept at helping parents connect to other services. She had seen “fads” come and go and was reserving judgement on the merits of emergent curriculum and documentation, both of which seemed very labour-intensive.

In our story too, it is all too easy to focus on what we were not yet doing as a team. Reframing our situation through a credit lens, however, allowed me to see us at a starting point for successful integration of the kind envisioned by Charles Pascal. The funders were impressed by the extent to which partner agencies had been involved in the program. And yet there was a missing piece. If we were to come together to integrate our various practices on behalf of children’s learning, we needed a better map.

**Concluding Remarks**

In this article I critically reflected on two stories from an informal parent-child program. The stories illuminate “tensions and dilemmas that arise in the complex contexts of everyday practice” (Wood, 2009, p. vii), yet point to a larger story of policy change in early childhood education and care. In the year that followed my study, I have revisited my experiences in the program and collaborated with the organization on several small professional learning projects. I continued to learn about the professional worlds of my colleagues and to empathize with their positioning in the changing early years landscape of Ontario. My positioning was, of course, very different from that of the practitioners and I cannot claim to share their subjective experiences. Rather I have tried to examine the landscape from where they stood and to explore it in a respectful way. The learning stories approach was helpful in this regard. It prompts storytellers to take a credit view, to attend to the context and to invite dialogue rather than closure. It also leads to the discovery of implications for practice. My recommendations, however, are for policy makers and system planners and to them I make two requests: First, when you invite practitioners to go with you on an exciting journey, provide each group with a map that makes sense to them. One-size-fits-all workshops are not adequate and may, in fact, create confusion. Second, as you implement the changes that children so richly deserve, don’t curb your enthusiasm, but do remember that you are asking practitioners to “go beyond the self”. Assuming a new professional identity is no mean accomplishment and it takes time.

**References**


Count on More than Just Counting with Counting Books

By: Gregory Bryan and Ralph Mason

Dr. Gregory Bryan is a professor at the University of Manitoba, where he specialises in children’s literature and literacy education. Like Dr. Bryan, Dr. Ralph Mason is also a professor at the University of Manitoba in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning. Dr. Mason specialises in Mathematics Education. This project was conducted with funding through a grant provided by the Imperial Oil Academy for the Learning of Mathematics, Science & Technology.

Literature-triggered mathematics is one means of integrating mathematics and language arts in elementary classrooms. In literature-triggered mathematics, a teacher uses sets of children’s trade books with mathematical elements to lead students into contextually rich, active, and interactive mathematics activity. After appreciating each trade book as a literacy experience, students engage with the mathematics within the story through various activities. The project here reported is one aspect of a larger project that involved the collaborative design and implementation of a literature-triggered mathematics approach to instruction within different classrooms from different school divisions.

In this article, we describe some of the activities that emerged from grade three and four classrooms where the students were given the opportunity to read and respond to a range of counting books. Such books are often used with children first learning to count. In the hands of skilful teachers and imaginative children, however, we found that counting books can be used in ways far beyond teaching someone how to count from one to ten. Borne of a willingness to follow the leads of the students and to encourage the children’s creativity, the classroom activities that emerged from this project embraced approaches to teaching and learning arithmetic beyond traditional math number sentences problems.

As a genre of mathematics curriculum design, literature-triggered mathematics offers elementary teachers an opportunity to increase significantly the quality of activity that their students undertake during mathematics instruction and learning. In literature-triggered mathematics lessons, children interact with children’s trade books as one means of facilitating mathematical growth. After the teacher and students have engaged in processes for sharing and building meaning in response to the text as literature, the teacher invites the students to attend mathematically to elements in the text. Inspired by their engagement with the trade books, teachers facilitate and extend the students’ mathematical thinking as they interpret the mathematical ideas contained in the texts.

Ralph, the second author, is a professor of mathematics education, while Greg (the first author) is a professor of children’s literature and literacy education. As such, this study represented a good marriage of our interests and expertise. Before meeting with the teachers, Greg and Ralph had assembled text sets—sets of five or six copies of seven or eight different children’s trade books with a common mathematical theme. The purpose of the meetings was to collaboratively envision various approaches and instructional strategies that might be employed within the classrooms. At the conclusion of the meetings, each teacher took with her a text set of counting books and an eagerness to extend her professional practice.

School by Numbers

In the planning meetings, the teachers expressed their desire to ensure that the students’ first experience with literature-triggered mathematics would be active and enjoyable. The uniqueness of one of the books led us to imagine a whole-class activity that served as a good introductory exercise. Stephen Johnson’s City by Numbers depicts city scenes where the shape of the urban environments portrays the shapes of numerals from 0 to 21, rather than the quantities that are associated with the numerals. For instance, the faded paint of a crosswalk looks like the numeral 13, a crumbling brick wall appears to contain a 15, while two rubbish bins side-by-side look like an 8.

With Johnson’s example from New York City scenes in mind, students dispersed across their classrooms and across their schools for similarly “hidden” numerals. In some instances, students made drawings recording their findings. Others merely wrote down the location of various numerals. In some instances within one classroom, the students actually took digital photographs depicting the numerical shapes they found embedded within their school environment. For instance, the following photographs illustrate the location of a 2 that appeared when the teacher’s coffee mug blended with a thermos sitting on the desk behind it.
After the introductory activities, teachers led students to engage with the mathematics of counting quantities, a feature common to all of the books. What follows are some of the experiences or which the teachers were especially proud.

**Your Sister Ate What?!!**

One of the counting books in the set was entitled *My Little Sister Ate One Hare*. Written by Bill Grossman and illustrated by Kevin Hawkes, the book begins:

My little sister ate 1 hare. We thought she’d throw up then and there. But she didn’t.

The “little sister” then eats 2 snakes and 1 hare. Then she eats 3 ants, 2 snakes, and 1 hare. After the little sister is depicted eating a series of less-than-appetizing items, the book ends:

My little sister ate 10 peas. But eating healthy foods like these makes my sister sick, I guess. Oh, my goodness! What a mess!

Books such as this one can be an important addition to our mathematics classrooms because they can add fun to the math experience. The books also serve as a starting point for various mathematical explorations. The students were asked, “If it was you, of all of these things that were eaten, what would you most prefer? What would you most strongly resist eating?” The students wrote their names on yellow sticky notes and then, using the sticky notes to cast their votes, they added their names to the bar graphs depicting the most popular and least popular “menu items.” In that particular class, eating nine lizards was the most resisted meal, while, fortunately, eating the ten peas was preferred to eating such things as worms, mice and bats.

One grade 4 group created a readers’ theatre script inspired by this same book. In the student-created script, a mother required her children to clean up their bedrooms and so they proceeded to eat the mess in their rooms: 1 spider, 2 books, 3 dirty socks, and so forth. Keeping to the pattern of the original text, eventually the children vomited up everything they had eaten. When the mother came to the bedrooms to check on progress, she said, “Oh, my goodness! What a mess!”

In some instances, the teachers took more traditional approaches to engaging their students in mathematics, posing addition questions within the context that the story had provided. Teachers found that students responded more enthusiastically to more creatively framed questions. Students were asked such things as:

- How many “things” did my little sister eat? (1 + 2 + 3...+ 9 +10).
- How many legs did my little sister eat?
- How many legs if...
  - The ants were aunts?
  - The hare was a hair?
  - The bats were baseball bats?
- If my sister ate one “thing” a day, how many weeks would it take her to eat everything?
- What if it took two days to eat each bat?

**It’s Impossible to Sleep in Here**

Another counting book within the set was entitled, *Goodnight, Sweet Pig*. Linda Bailey’s text begins: “To sleep or not to sleep? That is the question.” This opening is a deliberate nod towards Shakespeare’s Hamlet. There are many other Shakespeare references in the book. The book protagonist herself is a little pig named Hamlette. In one of Josée Masse’s illustrations, a book in Hamlette’s room is entitled Porkeo & Juliet. Elsewhere, a visitor to Hamlette’s room is carrying a book entitled *The Merry Sows of Windsor*. Another illustration shows Romeo and Juliet playing on the television screen. Such details add interest to the book, as well as increasing the educative potential of the book as preliminary exposure to Shakespeare for young children.

The text continues:

Pig number one was trying to sleep, plumping her pillows and counting sheep. But pig number two liked to read with a light and eat buttered toast all through the night.

Pig number three and then pig number four enter the bedroom. Visitors continue to crowd into the bedroom, up to and including pig number ten. The text then reads:

The first little pig began to weep, “How can a poor pig get some sleep?”

In response, the pigs start to leave the distressed little pig’s bedroom. As such, after counting up from one to ten, the book then contains a countdown from ten to one. *Goodnight, Sweet Pig* was shared as a read-aloud within the grade three classroom. With all of the pigs in the room, in the book the little pig had a difficult time getting to sleep. With all of the creativity that abounded as the children responded to the book, fortunately, there was no one sleeping in the classroom either.

After the read-aloud, the students were invited to discuss the patterns they identified within the book. The initial responses specifically identified counting from one to ten. When the children were reminded of the count back from ten to one, several spoke of a one to ten and then ten to one pattern. One child then identified a more general pattern: “The numbers get bigger and then smaller,” she said. A classmate then responded to the idea of the numbers getting bigger.
and smaller and identified an even more general pattern, saying, “Something goes up and then comes down.” The class began to agree that, generally speaking, the patterns in the book might be identified as things that go up and down, or things that get bigger and then smaller.

With these patterns in mind, the children were asked to identify other things—items beyond the counting book—that could fit a similar pattern. Some of the things that the children identified as fitting into an up and down pattern included: aeroplanes; someone working on a ladder; escalators; hopping animals like frogs, kangaroos and rabbits; birds; the temperature; and mountain climbers. Some of the things identified as fitting into a bigger and smaller pattern included: balloons; a dieter’s belly(!); “my pile of Halloween candy”; food on a table (as a meal is progressively placed on the table and then eaten); and the moon (waxing and waning). After class identification and discussion of things that fit the patterns of the book, the students were asked to think further about the up and down pattern. They were encouraged to be imaginative and to sketch something that fit the pattern but that no one else would think of.

When the children had completed their sketches, the teacher invited the children to join her on a classroom “gallery walk,” whereby the class members wandered about the room as if in an art gallery, pausing to examine the various artworks on display. Some of the things sketched included: the screw top on a bottle; the handle on a hand-cranked pencil sharpener; a painter’s paint brush; the hands on a clock; the branches of a tree on a windy day; a smile; and—with the instructions firmly in mind to sketch something that no one else would think of—a flying robot! Overall, the set of sketches clearly demonstrated the students’ successful extension of the numerical idea of going up and down in a rich range of ways.

One of the “up and down” things that was sketched was a basketball player leaping high to make a slam dunk. This gave us the idea to extend the mathematical experience the children were enjoying into an area that involved measurement and provided some preliminary investigation and exploration of ratio. Not being a particularly enthusiastic follower of the sport, the teacher was eager to show her students Michael Jordan’s height and to show how high he needed to jump to make a slam dunk.

Students traced an outline of one of their classmates. While one group coloured and cut-out the outline of their classmate, other students created a life size cut-out of Michael Jordan which they then coloured. Still another group cut out and coloured a basketball backboard and basket. When these coloured cut-outs were placed side-by-side, the students were staggered to see how much taller Michael Jordan stands than does their grade three classmate.

As this exercise shows, the counting books used in this classroom provided a jumping off point—in the slam-dunk case, almost literally—for mathematics exploration. Importantly, the math stayed with the children. It is difficult to remember facts when they are encountered in isolation and without contextualization. Rather, we tend
to more fully remember experiences and then remember facts that are connected to those experiences. Three weeks after the tattered Michael Jordan cut-out had been removed from the floor, and more than five weeks after the counting book had been shared with the class, the classroom teacher was delighted to report: “I have to tell you...On Friday afternoon a group of my students were discussing yo-yos. One student very excitedly said, ‘Ms. Weathers, Ms. Weathers! Yo-yos go up and down!’ It was great.”

**A Countdown to Success**

Given the enjoyment that was evident in the manner that the children approached these cross-curricular tasks, it is likely that they will long remember these early forays into exploring sophisticated mathematical concepts like ratio, proportionality, and graphing.

Under the guidance of enthusiastic teachers, these grade three and grade four classes did a lot more than most people might initially have thought possible with simple counting books. In addition to various strands of mathematics—including addition, patterns, graphing, measurement and ratio—the students were involved in artwork, photography, research, writing and drama. They were also involved in working collaboratively and creatively in effective and enjoyable learning situations. Many students were clearly successful at expanding their repertoire of experiences which they saw as linked to the mathematics they already knew. It is also important to note that, while all of these things were going on—while the students were playing with their imaginations and exploring possibilities—working with counting books provided an opportunity for some class members to catch up on, or solidify, some basic counting fundamentals that perhaps needed strengthening.

In the hands of skilful teachers willing to allow their students to explore math and literature in imaginative ways, we believe that people can count on counting books being a useful, and often enjoyable, addition to elementary grade classrooms.

**Counting Books Included in the Text Set**


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**Friends of Children Award Guidelines**

The CAYC “Friends of Children Award” was established to give CAYC a way of recognizing outstanding contributions, by individuals or groups to the well-being of young children. If you wish to nominate an individual or group for this award, please use the criteria and procedure below.

**CRITERIA**

The Friends of Children Award may be presented to an individual or group, regardless of age, who:

• Has a history of commitment to the CAYC mission statement and/or aims.

• Has shown an outstanding scholarly, advocacy, innovative or practical contribution to the well-being of young children.

• May or may not be of Canadian citizenship.

• May or may not hold CAYC membership although it is encouraged.

**PROCEDURE**

• A nomination must be made by a member of the Board of Directors and be seconded by a member of the Board of Directors. Board members can, however, receive recommendations for nominations from individual CAYC members or from other organizations.

• Nominations will be brought forward at a Board of Directors or National Executive meeting by the board or executive member assigned responsibility for the award. This board or executive member will present and speak to the nomination.

• The nomination will be voted upon and passed by the Board of Directors with a consensus decision.

• The award will be presented promptly and in person when possible.

• Publicity of the award and the recipient(s) will appear in the journal, *Canadian Children*, and other publications where possible.

• The number of awards per year will vary.
Friends of Children Award

Submitted by: Karyn Callaghan

**Raffi Cavoukian** has been awarded the prestigious “Friends of Children Award” from the Canadian Association for Young Children. Throughout his long career, he has made an outstanding contribution to the well-being of young children, first through his music that respectfully addressed significant issues and concerns and joys of young children without pandering or insulting their intelligence, and more recently through the initiation of his holistic philosophy of “Child Honouring”.

Raffi is an internationally revered musician whose string of gold and platinum-selling recordings in North America includes his classic “Baby Beluga” song with its beloved melody and lyrics. But a very interesting piece of Raffi’s story is not as well known: Raffi’s pioneering commitment to honouring his young fans changed the way we came to view music made for children. Founding his own record label, Troubadour, then folk musician Raffi set out on a path that rescued children’s recordings from bargain bin pricing and sub-par production values. He has steadfastly refused to capitalize on his popularity by marketing directly to children. Because of his belief that children should not be exposed to too much television viewing and that they should not be directly marketed to, during his thirty-year career as a superstar of kid’s music Raffi refused all offers for commercial television shows and commercial endorsements. Even recently, when approached by a Hollywood production company to do a film based on “Baby Beluga,” he declined when told that the film’s marketing would include direct advertising to children. This is only one of a series of lucrative deals Raffi and Troubadour have declined over the years.

**Changing Stride**

In 1988, Raffi attended a presentation at the Ontario Science Centre, which outlined the alarming decline in the beluga whale population in the St. Lawrence River. “I was stunned,” writes Raffi in his autobiography. “The estimated 5,000 whales at the time of World War II were now down to 450… Autopsies of dead belugas washed ashore showed that the creatures had died painful deaths from cancer and other internal failures… their bodies were riddled with toxins and declared hazardous waste sites.”

This was a pivotal revelation and a calling to Raffi. He shifted focus dramatically and began attending ecology summits, advocating for ecology initiatives and writing and performing call-to-action ecology-themed music throughout the 90s into the new millennium. Raffi’s 1990 ecology album, Evergreen Everblue, has earned praise from the United Nations and is a valued resource in environmental education.

After his parents passed away within hours of each other in 1995, Raffi wrote an honest and thoughtful autobiography that explored both his own childhood and his reflections on what all children need in order to thrive.

**Full Circle**

In 1997, Raffi was inspired to develop a holistic philosophy called Child Honouring. The heart of this vision was expressed two years later in A Covenant for Honouring Children (Raffi’s poetic declaration of our duty to the young), along with its nine principles. The Covenant and Principles are now circulated widely in public health and education circles.

The philosophy is outlined in the book Child Honouring: How To Turn This World Around (edited by Raffi Cavoukian & Sharna Olfman, 2006). The principles are listed below. With a foreword by the Dalai Lama, this anthology is a groundbreaking work which provides the reader with an exciting, positive vision of how to “turn this world around, for the children”, as Nelson Mandela has said. The book has also been published in Portuguese in Brazil. A paperback edition was released in October, 2010.

To express Child Honouring themes musically, Raffi wrote and produced two CDs for adults: Resisto Dancing (2006) and Communion (2009). His anthemic songs “Turn This World Around” and “No Wall Too Tall” have found their way into the keynote presentations of progressive thinkers.

After years of networking and reflecting on what it might take to create a world fit for children, in 2010, Raffi founded the Centre for Child Honouring on Salt Spring Island in British Columbia. The Centre advocates for an ecological worldview, a whole systems shift in the way we think and make decisions — decisions that affect our children’s world today and the world they will inherit. Raffi is outspoken in his call for a “compassion revolution” so the world’s children might receive the respect and support they deserve.

Raffi is a most worthy recipient of the Friends of Children award.

Respectfully submitted,
Karyn Callaghan
A COVENANT FOR HONOURING CHILDREN
Raffi

We find these joys to be self evident: That all children are created whole, endowed with innate intelligence, with dignity and wonder, worthy of respect. The embodiment of life, liberty and happiness, children are original blessings, here to learn their own song. Every girl and boy is entitled to love, to dream and belong to a loving “village.” And to pursue a life of purpose.

We affirm our duty to nourish and nurture the young, to honour their caring ideals as the heart of being human.

To recognize the early years as the foundation of life, and to cherish the contribution of young children to human evolution.

We commit ourselves to peaceful ways and vow to keep from harm or neglect these, our most vulnerable citizens. As guardians of their prosperity we honour the bountiful Earth whose diversity sustains us. Thus we pledge our love for generations to come.

CHILD HONOURING PRINCIPLES

The words of A Covenant for Honouring Children suggest nine guiding principles for living. Taken together, they offer a holistic way of restoring natural and human communities, thus brightening the outlook for the world we share. They form the basis for a multi-faith consensus on societal renewal.

RESPECTFUL LOVE

is key. It speaks to the need to respect children as whole people and to encourage them to know their own voices. Children need the kind of love that sees them as legitimate beings, persons in their own right. Respectful love instills self-

worth; it’s the prime nutrient in human development. Children need this not only from parents and caregivers, but from the whole community.

DIVERSITY

is about abundance: of human dreams, intelligences, cultures, and cosmologies; of earthly splendours and ecosystems. Introducing children to biodiversity and human diversity at an early age builds on their innate curiosity. There’s a world of natural wonders to discover, and a wealth of cultures, of ways to be human.

Comforted by how much we share, we’re able to delight in our differences.

CARING COMMUNITY

refers to the “village” it takes to raise a child. The community can positively affect the lives of its children. Child-friendly shopkeepers, family resource centres, green schoolyards, bicycle lanes, and pesticide-free parks are some of the ways a community can support its young.

CONSCIOUS PARENTING

can be taught from an early age; it begins with empathy for newborns. Elementary and secondary schools could teach nurturant parenting (neither permissive nor oppressive) and provide insight into the child-rearing process. Such knowledge helps to deter teen pregnancies and unwanted children. Emotionally aware parents are much less likely to perpetuate abuse or neglect.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

sums up what early life is about: a time for exploring emotions in a safe setting, learning about feelings and how to express them. Those who feel loved are most able to learn and to show compassion for others. Emotional management builds character and is more important to later success than IQ. Cooperation, play, and creativity all foster the “EQ” needed for a joyful life.

NONVIOLENCE

is central to emotional maturity, to family relations, to community values, and to the character of societies that aspire to live in peace. It means more than the absence of aggression; it means living with compassion. Regarding children, it means no corporal punishment, no humiliation, no coercion. “First do no harm,” the physicians’ oath, must now apply to all our relations; it can become a mantra for our times. A culture of peace begins in a nonviolent heart, and a loving home.

SAFE ENVIRONMENTS

foster a child’s feeling of security and belonging. The very young need protection from the toxic influences that permeate modern life—from domestic neglect and maltreatment, to the corporate manipulations of their minds, to the poisonous chemicals entering their bodies. The first years are when children are most impressionable and vulnerable; they need safeguarding.

SUSTAINABILITY

refers not merely to conservation of resources, renewable energy development, and anti-pollution laws. To be sustainable, societies need to build social capacity by investing in their young citizens, harnessing the productive power of a contented heart. The loving potential of every young child is a potent source for good in the world.

ETHICAL COMMERCE

is fundamental to a child-honouring world. It includes a revolution in the design, manufacture and sale of goods; corporate reform; “triple bottom line” business; full-cost accounting; tax and subsidy shifts; political and economic cycles that reward long-term thinking. Ethical commerce would enable a restorative economy devoted to the well being of the very young.

From: Centre for Child Honouring
www.childhonouring.org
Call for Contributions

Special Issue on Neoliberalisms in Canadian Early Childhood Education

for Canadian Children, Spring, 2014

Guest Editor: Luigi Iannacci (Trent University)

Since its inception and subsequent emergence as a dominant conceptual apparatus, neoliberalism has been riddled with complexities and contradictions. Processes of neoliberalization within social/institutional worlds have equally been complex and contradictory (Harvey, 2005). These processes require nuanced, critical attention and specific theorizing and analyses that illuminate how neoliberalisms are negotiated, subverted, managed, manipulated, accepted etc. within a variety of contexts.

This special online issue of Canadian Children therefore invites contributors to contextualize and map pedagogical moments, practices, events, discourses and conceptualizations within Canadian early childhood education. The articles might critically examine how neoliberal arrangements, linkages and assemblages can simultaneously create limitations and possibilities for children, educators, parents, researchers, policy makers and curriculum developers.

Because neoliberalism is not a singular entity (its entanglements are multiple, intertwined, fluid and mobile), this special issue will address the implications and impact that neoliberalism’s complexities have had on theory/practice/research/people and things. Complexifying and critically exploring these entanglements within Canadian ECE is the ultimate aim of this special issue.

Teachers, researchers, policy makers and curriculum developers are invited to submit an abstract for this issue of Canadian Children focused on neoliberalisms in Canadian Early Childhood Education to Luigi Iannacci by January 30th, 2013. If the abstract is accepted, the manuscript is due by April 1, 2013. Once the review process has been completed, accepted papers must be resubmitted by September 20, 2013. Articles must then be finalized and submitted to the editor by November 26, 2013.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Canadian Children is the journal of the Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC), the only national association specifically concerned with the well-being of children of preschool and elementary age in Canada.

Form, Length and Style:

• Articles may be of varying length, written in a readable style. Style should be consistent with the Publication Manual (6th Edition) of the American Psychological Association.

• Articles should be sent as an email attachment to the email address below on or before the due date.

• Authors are to obtain releases for use of photographs (if any) prior to mailing. Please include a brief biographical sketch including authors full name, title, professional affiliation, and other relevant information, such as acknowledgements, grant support or funding agency. It is expected that authors will not submit articles to more than one publisher at a time.

• Text should be double-spaced in a font such as Times New Roman, size 12.

• Please submit your MS as a Microsoft Word file. PDFs are NOT acceptable.

• All manuscripts should include an abstract of 100—150 words

• A reference list contains only references that are cited in the text. Its accuracy and completeness are the responsibility of the author(s).

• If the MS contains tables, figures, illustrations or photographs, they should be placed in the MS where the author requires them.

• Final versions of accepted papers should be sent on or before the due date (November 26, 2013) to the editor along with an author bio of no more than 100 words.

• Articles need to be submitted with the appropriate permission form(s) as per journal’s guidelines.

Submission email address:

To submit a manuscript, email to cdnchildren@gmail.com, copied to Luigi Iannacci (see below).

Contact Information:

For further information or inquiries, please contact the special issue guest editor directly:

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E: luigiannacci@trentu.ca
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