

Toward a Provincial Framework for Early Learning and Care in Alberta

Putting the Pieces Together: The Integrative Elements of a New Early Learning and Care Framework



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1.0 Introduction

The absence of a national policy framework for early learning and care (ELC) in Canada has been widely noted. Less frequently remarked upon, however, is the parallel absence of comprehensive approaches or frameworks at the provincial/ territorial level – the level of government with primary responsibility for ELC in Canada. In its review of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Canada, the OECD recommended development of ‘provincial plans for early childhood services development’ including clear goals for services, annual targets, specific funding and outcome measures. The OECD also encouraged the provinces to consider decentralizing management of services to the local level through publicly mandated community or municipal agencies that would have combined responsibility for both kindergarten and child care (OECD, 2004: 153).

Over the last decade, all provinces/territories have introduced specific initiatives to increase the quantity and/or quality of ELC. In Alberta, for example, the provincial government has, amongst other initiatives, supported the creation of new child care spaces and introduced wage enhancements for staff in accredited child care settings. More recently, it has begun to explore the option of full-day kindergarten as part of the public education system.

A small number of provinces (including Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island) have either begun or completed larger ELC reviews that explore more systematic or integrated approaches to the funding and delivery of services. Much

still remains to be done, however, with important questions outstanding around the goals for children and their families; how best to bring together existing services; how to implement change over time; how to engage stakeholders in the process and maintain their enthusiasm and support; and, how to manage the potential significant increases in public expenditures that come with increasing the quantity and quality of services.

These challenges are not unique to Canadian provinces and comparative analysis reveals that many countries (if not most) now invest more public resources in early learning than they did two decades ago. The translation of ambitious early learning goals for children or social goals for parents into services and improved outcomes remains a complex work in progress, however. And while research suggests that delivering high quality, accessible ELC for children and families requires a more systematic or coherent approach, with a well-defined level of public management and commitment to evidence-based practices (White and Friendly, 2012), moving toward this type of approach demands time, resources and the capacity to support significant change. It is further noteworthy that a well-integrated approach to ELC (referred to as ‘full integration’) is in place in only a small number of countries with most supporting ‘partial integration’ with variations in how services are financed, managed and delivered.

One strategy for moving toward a greater level of integration is that of using key ‘integrative elements’ that have the potential to bring services closer together at multiple points. Bennett and Moss (2006) identify a common pedagogical approach as one such integrative element that incorporates both care and education.

They argue that a broad, integrative way of thinking about early education is common to those countries that have moved towards the fuller integration of services, with the subsequent development of an overall policy framework that encompasses legislation, administration, regulation, curriculum, access, staffing and funding.

Consistent with the idea of advancing ELC over time, through a series of well-considered steps, this discussion paper considers some possible integrative elements for an ELC system in Alberta, drawing in large measure on the ideas included in the Childcare Resource and Research Unit's *Quality by design* project (Friendly, Doherty and Beach, 2006).

The paper has six sections each of which considers a possible integrative element:

- Purposes and goals for early learning and care
- Governance - management, planning, participation and ownership in early learning and care
- Financing early learning and care
- Organizing early learning and care service delivery
- Human resources for early learning and care
- A curriculum framework for early learning and care

The sections generally follow a common format, and discuss the integrative elements from four perspectives:

- The current Alberta situation;
- Examples of approaches and policies from other regions of Canada and elsewhere;
- The major findings from research and policy analysis;
- Ideas to consider for an Alberta early learning and care framework

The arguments presented are intended to promote further consideration of how each element might support a more integrated approach to the funding and delivery of ELC in Alberta. The sections can be read individually, or as a whole, depending on the interests of the reader.

2.0 Purposes and goals for early childhood education and care: What do we want early learning and care to do in Alberta?

... very generally, there is a consensus in much of the current child development and education literature that children need to feel loved, respected and listened to; that they are sociable and enjoy the company of other children and adults besides their immediate family; and that through affection, through social intercourse and with a stimulating environment, they mature, learn and develop a remarkably wide range of skills and competencies in the first five or six years (Balaguer, Mestres and Penn, 1995: B7).

2.1 Introduction

Since the early 2000s, international policy analysis has helped both to highlight a wider range of purposes and goals for early learning and care (ELC) than previously considered and to create new understandings of how these link to policy and provision (OECD, 2001; Penn, 2009). There is agreement that the ‘ideas’ that underpin ELC shape the services themselves, as well as determining who uses them, who pays for them, and who manages and delivers them. While researchers acknowledge variations in these purposes and goals reflect differences in how societies view children and the roles of the state and family in supporting their well-being (Adema, 2012; Hertzman and Williams, 2009; Kershaw and Anderson, 2009), they also highlight how jurisdictions with different histories, circumstances and points of view often share common ideas about children, childhood and ELC (Cryer, 1999; Balaguer, Mestres and Penn, 1995).

A growing body of research and experience further sheds some light on organizing, funding and delivering high quality ELC. And while it acknowledges the complexities involved, confirms that ECEC programs can, if carefully planned and designed, fulfill multiple purposes and meet multiple goals at one and the same time.

The following section explores the common purposes and goals that shape ELC in Alberta, Canada and beyond and considers the ideas that inform them. It concludes with a brief discussion of some possible ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework.

2.2 Current purposes and goals for early learning and care in Alberta

The goals and purposes for ELC in Alberta, as in much of Canada, have emerged over time. The funding and delivery of services under two departments: child care, under the oversight of the Ministry of Human Services (formerly Children and Youth Services) and Early Childhood Services (ECS), the responsibility of the Ministry of Education, reflects two traditions. First, the provision of child care to enable parents of young

children, particularly those who are low income, to participate in the workforce or to attend training; and second, the delivery of early childhood education for young children in preparation for schooling or, more broadly, to support their learning and development. These two main purposes stand out as the drivers for services in Alberta and the rest of Canada; although how individual provinces balance them varies.

In Alberta, support for the participation of parents—especially low income parents—in the workforce or training shapes much of the regulated child care services for children below the mandatory school age of six and for school-age children. Families with lower household incomes are eligible for subsidies to reduce the costs of licensed or approved child care services, while provincial regulations and program standards safeguard the health and well-being of all children attending child care programs. The Ministry of Human Services has recently placed an emphasis on improving the quality of child care through a voluntary accreditation program, and technical grants, as well as both maintaining the supply through wage enhancements and increasing service options through a space creation initiative.

Early Childhood Services (ECS), including half day kindergarten, are publicly funded through Alberta Education. These services place an emphasis on preparing young children for schooling as well as supporting their early learning more broadly. Kindergarten, a non-mandatory part of the public education system, aims to provide children with early learning experiences that promote a positive attitude toward lifelong learning. Further ECS services for children from 2.5 years of age target those children who have an identified special need or who require additional supports such as English as a Second Language.

A number of recent studies provide some insights into what Alberta parents of young children, Albertans in general, and the ELC community think about and want for ELC in Alberta. Provincial government consultations, held in advance of the emergent national child care strategy in the spring and summer of 2005, for example, reveal public support for making child care more affordable for low and middle income families, additional supports for stay-at-home parents and investments in services for children with disabilities (Government of Alberta, 2005). Consultations in

response to the federal government's 'Space Creation' initiative again show support for improved access to high quality, affordable and flexible child care for families; while also revealing the challenges of providing this care through the current service model (Government of Alberta, 2006). The provincial government's Commission on Learning, based on its consultations with a range of stakeholders, recommended an extension of existing entitlements for early learning through the public education system with full-day kindergarten for all five year olds, and part-day junior kindergarten for four year olds (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003).

ELC stakeholders who participated in the initial round of community discussions supported by the Muttart Foundation, Calgary UpStart and Success By 6 identified four main rationales for increased public spending on ELC: supporting early learning and child development; enabling labour force participation by parents with young children; supporting the social and cultural integration of families and communities; and helping address inequities in opportunity that women and some children face (Muttart Foundation, 2011a) These stakeholders further saw value in partnerships between the provincial government, school boards and municipalities to expand service delivery at the community level, as well as the need to approach child care in a way that supports child development and family well-being (Muttart Foundation, 2011b).

In focus group discussions across Alberta in 2011, parents of young children placed an emphasis on high quality, affordable child care services rather than 'early learning', saw value in early education and family support services being linked together more closely, and felt that early childhood programs for three and four year-olds should have a 'play-based' focus (Hennessy and Leebosh, 2011). More broadly, an Alberta survey found that a majority of respondents viewed raising children as a shared responsibility and not solely a private family one. They further saw value in public spending on ELC and supported funding that makes programs more affordable for families – especially those on lower incomes (Rikhy and Tough, 2008; Tough et al, in press).

2.3 Purposes and goals for early learning and care: A complex mix of policy and practice

The OECD review of Canadian ECEC, almost a decade ago, emphasized the importance of developing a ‘coherent, long-term vision for each province and the country as a whole’ as the ‘first task’ in advancing ECEC (OECD, 2004). And although federal interest in early learning and child care has waned a number of provinces have taken up this task.

The experiences of these governments reveal that determining how best to approach ELC is complex. It demands consideration of the ideas, insights and arguments from multiple fields of research – as well as reflection on shifting views and values around children and childhood and the roles and responsibilities of families, communities and government in supporting child and family well-being. Thus, while a clear statement of the ideas, values and purposes for ELC is central to any long term vision for service, reaching agreement on such a statement requires significant discussion. Perhaps as a result, across Canada at least, clear overarching policy statements for ELC are not well-developed.

Penn (2009), in a report commissioned by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Education and Culture, outlines ten common rationales that drive early childhood education policy and provision, the research perspectives used to inform them (for example, economics or child development research), and the likely policy focus that each yields (for example, targeted early childhood education or universal access). These ten rationale include the following arguments: ECEC is a ‘good investment’ for reducing future social costs and results in healthy, productive populations; ECEC is a good investment only if it is of a high quality, as poor ECEC may do more harm than good especially for the most vulnerable children; early childhood education benefits all children, enhances their disposition for learning and socializes them for starting school, especially children from poor or migrant families; education and lifelong learning are essential to a competitive knowledge economy and education promotes social mobility; women are essential contributors to modern economies and provide

important financial contributions to their families’ financial health; mothers need to be involved with their children, and parents are a child’s first educators; child poverty has profound impacts on children, and can severely impact their educational performance, sense of self-worth and subsequent societal contributions; birth rates below a replacement level are a societal problem; children, including young children, are rights bearers and have a right to protection, provision and participation.

Penn cautions against over-reliance on the sometimes limited research that underpins these rationales and emphasizes the importance of understanding the contexts (geographic and socio-cultural) in which services are delivered and outcomes realized. She, like other researchers (Adema, 2012; Friendly and Prentice, 2009), concludes that ELC services are best thought of as part of a ‘wider spectrum of measures to promote the learning of children and gender equity’, and that ‘considerations of children’s well-being and child rights need to inform the planning and development of services’ (2009: 60)

The Childcare Resource and Research Unit adds the promotion of social cohesion and social inclusion to Penn’s rationales. These related goals draw on the idea that ‘early childhood services are community institutions in their own right’ (Moss and Penn, 1996: 28), and can function as public places where young children and their families share experiences and build community. A number of studies highlight the role of early learning centres as ‘neighbourhood hubs’ (Friendly, 1994: 208) or ‘multi-functional children’s centres’, as suggested in UNESCO’s *Rights from the Start*, that are “responsive to their local communities” (Munoz, 2012: 33) and that support their development and well-being (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 1999).

Two further purposes for ELC include health-related rationales (such as health promotion and population or developmental health) (McLauren and McIntyre, in preparation; Muhajarine et al, 2012) and ensuring that children’s rights commitments are met (Canadian Coalition on the Rights of Children, 2011). A rights-based rationale for ELC provision has become increasingly prominent in the literature; although it has not to date driven discussions around ELC provision in Canada.

Internationally, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the main vehicle for interpreting and monitoring ELC as a child rights issue; an agreement to which all the provinces, as well as the federal government, are signatories. While the CRC is not legally binding, the Canadian Coalition on the Rights of the Child highlights that Article 18 (2) of the CRC constitutes an obligation for Canada to establish and support a high quality, equitable ECEC system (2011) while Friendly identifies the implications for ELC in the CRC's other Articles as well (2007). Outside Canada, the CRC has been the basis of adoption of a legal right to ECEC provision in a number of countries including Denmark, Finland and Sweden.

A children's rights rationale for support of ELC also shapes how the services themselves are constructed and delivered. While the arguments are complex, a children's rights approach emphasizes the importance of considering and responding to present conditions and concerns. It places an emphasis on children as active learners in the here-and-now and encourages the engagement of their families (Penn, 2009; Leseman 2002; Moss, 2006). This perspective is exemplified by the influential Reggio Emilia program approach to early childhood services, developed in northern Italy, and has recently informed work and thinking around early learning curriculum frameworks in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and British Columbia.

Finally, and most recently, there has been some interest in a redistributive purpose for ELC; linked to concerns about growing income inequality (Stiglitz et al, 2009). An analysis by Verbist, Förster, and Vaalavuo considers how publicly provided services impact family well-being and inequality. Their analysis of five public services: education, health care, social housing, child care/pre-primary and elderly care found access to early education and care to be 'one of the key elements of strategies to reconcile work and family life, promote equal opportunities and combat social exclusion' and that 'limited and unequal access to child care services perpetuates social inequalities, whereas investment in early education can protect children from further social disadvantages and contribute to more equality' (2012).

2.4 The main drivers for interest in early learning and care in Canada

In Canada, two main sets of arguments have drawn attention to ELC (including that of provincial governments). The first encompasses the significant social and demographic changes to families' lives over the last two generations, including the increased participation of women in the labour force; an aging population and a shrinking child population; a growing ethnically and racially diverse population; stubbornly high child poverty; a youthful and disadvantaged Aboriginal population; and increasing class and generational inequality. Of these, the increased labour force participation of mothers with young children stands out as the most significant. This driver is linked both to social investment rationales that focus on the economic benefits derived from increased mothers' labour force participation (See, for example, Fortin et al, 2012) and gender-based analysis that takes a broader feminist perspective (Dobrowolsky and Jensen, 2004; Prentice, 2009).

The second set is associated with the idea that early childhood programs are 'good for children' (and by extension their families and the communities in which they live). While arguments supporting this perspective, based in child development research (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000), have been used for many years in Canada, a somewhat different and influential approach to child development has come to the fore in the last decade or so. This perspective draws on the emergent ideas about child development, neuroscience and brain development that highlight the early years as critical periods in human development (Baker, 2011; McCain, Mustard and Shankar, 2007). The field of brain research has captured the public imagination as well as that of some policy makers, helping provide the impetus for provincial initiatives that expand public access to ELC through the education system (such as the move to full day kindergarten in Ontario) with the goal of increasing early learning and fostering human development (human capital) over the life span.

Translation of the complex field of neuroscience into effective ELC policies for children and their families remains a challenge, however, given the risk of 'overstating what is known and its policy implications' (Oates et al, 2012); as does establishing realistic

expectations for what ELC policy, on its own, can deliver. This has led some researchers to caution against narrow interpretations of child development and to encourage broader policy approaches to ELC that connect with related policy fields such as maternal and prenatal health, parent and family support, work and family balance, and income inequality (including generational inequality) (Cohen, et al. 2004; Prentice, 2009; and Kershaw and Anderson, 2009; Munoz, 2012).

2.5 Ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework

The following section outlines some ideas around purposes and goals for consideration as part of an Alberta Early Learning and Care Framework. The ideas are sketched in preliminary form and intended to generate discussion. The list is not exhaustive and additional ideas also merit consideration.

I. Supporting children's well-being and development – early learning as a foundation for lifelong learning

The idea of early learning has long been a central theme and purpose for ELC. Different ways of conceptualizing early learning, however, have implications for program implementation, as well as setting goals for children and families. More recent understandings of early learning extend the term to cover the full range of young children's experiences: physical, intellectual, emotional, social and creative. Early learning, in turn, provides the basis for 'lifelong' learning contributing more broadly to individual, family and community well-being.

All children are born 'natural learners' curious about themselves, the people and children around them, and the spaces and places in which they find themselves. Their capacities and approaches to learning develop and change as they grow and are supported through relationships with their families, other children and other caring adults. While children are different and grow up with different cultures they all benefit from equitable access to rich early learning experiences.

ELC services must be of a high quality if they are to foster and support child development. Poor quality programs or services are of little benefit to children and their families and may do harm especially for children who are vulnerable.

II. Supporting family well-being – supporting parents as their children's first teachers and providing all families with choices that enable them to balance raising children with work inside and outside of the family home

A comprehensive, accessible range of ELC services (centre-based full-day, part-day preschool, family child care, family resource programs) available at the local community level, together with a robust family leave program, provides families with choices around how best to balance the demands of raising children with those of work inside and outside of the home.

High quality ELC supports the role of parents as their children's first and most important teachers, and complements and builds on the ELC that takes place in home and community settings.

High quality ELC can help reduce the challenges linked to poverty, marginal employment, access to education and training opportunities and social isolation.

III. Supporting strong, healthy and inclusive communities – building engaged, cohesive and inclusive communities

ELC services can serve important community and democratic functions as places that engage parents and families at the local level. They can provide spaces in which parents, community members and service providers (including those in related health and social service fields) come together to support child and family well-being.

ELC programs can provide services that are responsive to local communities and their needs and aspirations, reflecting and supporting a full range of values, cultures and traditions. They can bring different groups together and develop and build social capital within and between communities at a local level.

Local community engagement in services can support the active participation of parents, local community members and early childhood educators as well as other key stakeholders such as researchers and experts in ELC. It can also help to raise the local profile of ELC. At the same time, some commentators note a tension between appropriate participation and the down-loading of public roles and responsibilities to a local level without appropriate resources. This can place pressures on families (in particular, women) to initiate and maintain needed services.

IV. Advancing equity for women and children

ELC supports the rights of all women and children to fully participate in their communities. ELC services raise the profile of the citizenship of women and children and affirm their rights and responsibilities.

ELC can help address the specific equity issues that challenge the full participation of children with disabilities and their families, Aboriginal children and their families and new immigrant children and their families in their local communities.

3.0 Governance— management, planning, participation and ownership—in early learning and care

3.1 Introduction

How jurisdictions govern early childhood services can have an important bearing on how they consider and approach the integration of services. Used in a general sense, ‘governance’ refers to where authority lies, the process of decision making, how decisions are implemented, and the nature of accountabilities between stakeholders. The term is used here to include those aspects of an early learning and care (ELC) system that cover policy making and administration, service management and planning, and community participation and ownership.

Roles and responsibilities in ELC range from the definition and legal oversight of services, their

management and planning, to their delivery and monitoring. Inevitably, these involve both public players, national, provincial/territorial and local governments such as municipalities and school boards, and private players, including parents, service providers and voluntary groups. In Alberta, and across Canada, these roles and responsibilities are shared, although how varies both within and between jurisdictions. Different jurisdictions take different approaches to governance and have identified different strategies to introduce change in how they govern. Inevitably, these draw on their own understandings of, and commitments to, ELC which are, in turn, informed by political, social and economic arguments - as well as the emerging body of research that addresses system governance.

This section considers some key aspects of the governance of ELC, beginning with a scan of the approaches in place in Alberta and the other provinces. It summarizes some of the emerging research and policy studies that consider governance matters, before presenting some ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework.

3.2 Alberta in the Canadian context

Roles and responsibilities – Policy Making and Administration

Under Canadian constitutional arrangements, provinces/territories have responsibility for early learning and child care, determining the shape, content, and extent of programs through legislation, regulation, funding, and policy-setting. These policy instruments define the services covered, age groups served, the eligible providers of services and their legal obligations, program standards (such as staff training, ratios and physical space requirements), the level and nature of public funding, and the service monitoring, performance and reporting requirements. The federal government plays a more limited role with federal funds distributed through the Canada Social Transfer (and other more specific mechanisms including the Child Care Spaces Initiative) to support service delivery at the provincial/territorial level. There are no dedicated federal funds for elementary education including kindergarten or pre-kindergarten.

In addition to the broad policy instruments outlined above, provinces and territories develop and use further tools to address specific aspects of service delivery, for example, mechanisms for ongoing quality improvement or program assessment. Alberta's child care accreditation program, provincially funded but operated by a community agency, is one example of this type of mechanism. Similarly, the maximum province-wide parent fees Quebec, PEI and Manitoba have adopted, the salary scales developed in Manitoba and PEI, as well as the mandated planning role for municipalities in Ontario are further illustrations of specific mechanisms that shape service delivery.

In Alberta, the ministries of Human Services and Education share jurisdiction for early childhood education and care (ECEC). Child care services are the responsibility of the Ministry of Human Services while early education (Early Childhood Services (ECS) – including kindergarten) are the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. Separate pieces of legislation, and supporting regulations, define the nature of the services provided and their delivery. Some division of ministerial responsibility is common across Canada (being the case in 6 of the ten provinces) and reflects the dominant traditions of care and education that have shaped the evolution of services. It translates, in policy and practice terms, into differences in how services under the two ministries are structured, regulated, managed, planned, funded, and delivered.

Broadly, under education ministries, kindergarten, specialized early education and, to a lesser degree, pre-kindergarten services are offered at no cost to parents. There is a public entitlement to service with an emphasis on public management, oversight and delivery. In comparison, child care services, are administered through a more 'mixed economy approach' with a balance of public and private interests. Provincial regulations establish guidelines for service delivery, although public bodies perform more limited planning and management roles. Public funding either targets specific aspects of service or is allocated to reduce the costs of service for identified populations.

Service Management Planning

Under Alberta policy and funding arrangements, elected school boards manage, plan and deliver kindergarten

and other early childhood education services at a more local level with the support of public funds. This approach is similar in almost all provinces and territories. Ten regional Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs) monitor and license child care services. These authorities administer parent subsidy programs and provide supply side funding to regulated service providers in accordance with provincial policies and regulations.

Alberta school boards' management of early learning services enables them to try and match services to demand, and some discretion to allocate provincial funding to meet community needs - such as full-day learning for five year olds or full- or part day learning for younger children. A number have also, over the last decade or so, increased the early learning services they provide - some of which they fund through public funding and others for which they seek additional private funding.

Other provinces have also moved to provide additional early childhood services through school sites. In British Columbia, for example, *StrongStart* (an early learning program) is provincially funded in over 300 schools, while in Saskatchewan the Ministry of Education funds the operation of 230 prekindergarten part-day programs for three- and four- year-old children considered in need of additional support prior to school entry. In Ontario, the 2009 Pascal report (*With Our Best Future in Mind*) outlined an enlarged role for local school boards in the management and support of early learning –with an initial focus on full-day learning for four and five year-olds.

The management and planning of ELC services under the Ministry of Human Services is more limited. The ten regional CFSAs across Alberta, place an emphasis on monitoring and licensing functions, with more limited resources available for service management and planning. The development and operation of services are mainly private responsibilities and fall to parents, business or local community groups. Decisions about where, when, and for whom services are delivered are largely shaped by private interests and initiative; although ministries retain the capacity to encourage or support service developments through financial incentives or regulatory and practice guidelines. In Alberta, for example, the provincial *Child Care Space*

Creation Initiative, the additional operational support for infant care, and the differential funding for regulated child care in the Northeast Region, are all examples of provincial strategies to stimulate or encourage local service delivery responses.

Up to the mid-1990's, Alberta municipalities (including the cities of Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer and Medicine Hat) played larger roles in the management and delivery of child care services (Langford, 2010). Through the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), provinces were reimbursed for 50 percent of their eligible expenses for child care by the federal government. In Alberta, these funds, together with provincial dollars were accessed by municipalities which they supplemented with their own resources, to support and deliver child care. The termination of CAP in 1996, and its replacement with the Canada Health and Social Transfer, largely resulted in these municipalities discontinuing these roles.

Community Participation and Ownership

How provinces approach the funding and delivery of ELC services also shapes the nature and level of community participation in the services as well as their ownership. In Alberta, the public funding and mainly public delivery of kindergarten, and to a lesser extent other pre-kindergarten services, renders them accessible to almost all eligible children and their families. Nationally, participation rates for kindergarten are extremely high (upwards of 95 percent), with significant public demand also expressed for the newly introduced full-day learning for four-year olds in Ontario.

The delivery of kindergarten as part of the education system gives it a public 'footprint' and provides parents and communities with a shared stake in its funding and delivery. The election of local school boards and the provincial requirements that schools engage parents in their operation - through schools councils or similar structures - fosters a broad level of parent and community engagement that reinforces the service as a 'public good' over which communities have shared jurisdiction.

The predominant market model for child care services, in Alberta and beyond, produces different forms of community engagement and ownership. There is no broad public entitlement to service, and families have more limited access to services with lower levels of

participation and use. Regulated child care spaces are available for smaller numbers of children, approximately three in ten below the mandatory school age in Alberta, and many families access private, non-regulated forms of care. This is the case in most other provinces as well.

The private for-profit and non-profit organizations that deliver services in Alberta represent different models of ownership. The local businesses that deliver services, sometimes with 'hands-on' owner-operators, or as part of small chains, are private organizations from which families purchase services. The primary relationship is one of vendor and client. A relatively new phenomenon in Alberta are larger corporate child care operations more characteristic of the US or—more recently—Australia and the UK. These are either publicly traded or privately-held companies. The two largest child care firms are Calgary-based Edleun Group, which trades on the Toronto Venture Exchange and Kids and Company, a privately-held firm based in Toronto. Edleun operates 50 centres across three provinces, with 45 licensed programs in Alberta; Kids and Company reports 51 centres operating (or coming soon) across Canada, 10 of which are located in Alberta.

The non-profit organizations that deliver services in Alberta, at least, are also mainly smaller organizations, many governed by community boards drawn from the families who purchase their services. These families also commonly comprise the organization membership. The local YM and/or YWCA's have emerged as one of the main providers of child care in the major centres in Alberta, and in some other provinces, operating multiple programs sites that include one or more related services. The local links of these organizations, and their engagement of families in governance, can build an internal sense of community around ELC. The absence of connections between smaller non-profit organizations can leave them somewhat isolated with little broader community engagement. As a result, individual organizations often lack a larger public profile, and are unknown to families and community members who do not access their services.

3.3 Research on the governance of early learning and care

Over the last decade or so, there has been much research and policy analysis on governance in early learning and care including the linkages between the quality, access and integration of services and their public management, planning and ownership. Some of the findings from this research are summarized below from three standpoints: policy making and administration, service management and planning and community participation and ownership.

Ministerial Responsibility – policy making and administration

The division of the governance, policy making and service administration for ELC between community or family services and education ministries has generated considerable research and related policy analysis - some of it linked to the OECD (OECD, *Starting Strong I and II*, 2001 and 2006). This research identifies the challenges that this division can present to more closely integrating ELC services given the different traditions that underpin the work of the two ministries.

The division is associated with problems of service fragmentation for the youngest children and those closer to school age; the greater emphasis on early learning for children 3 and over and ‘child minding’ or care for those under 3; governments assuming greater responsibility for services for children over 3 years of age and less for those 3 and under; and significant difference between ELC services themselves including their quantity and quality, how they are funded and delivered and the goals and purposes they set out to achieve (Kaga, Bennett and Moss, 2010, p. 17).

The two main strategies adopted to address this division are greater coordination between ministries with responsibility for ELC or the consolidation of responsibility within a single ministry. While both have merit, the former is considered to work with either a specific purpose in mind (for example, the coordination of a particular task) or for services to specific populations (Choi, 2003 and OECD, 2006). Coordination mechanisms are less effective where the goals extend to a broader, more integrated approach to service provision (Kaga, Bennett and Moss, 2010).

A number of studies including the OECD reviews (2001, 2006) and work by UNESCO (Kaga, Bennett and Moss, 2010 and Choi, 2003) examine the consolidation of responsibility for early education and care within a single ministry. The possible benefits of consolidation extend to a more coherent approach to policy with more consistency across services; a greater focus and level of investment in services for the youngest children (under 3 years); improved continuity in early learning experiences for children and their families; and improved public management of services (Kaga, Bennett and Moss, 2010).

There are also identified risks and challenges. Consolidation within education ministries can, for example, risk rendering early childhood services more ‘school like’ (Kaga, Bennett and Moss, 2010), and may exacerbate gaps in levels of service between the youngest and older pre-school age children. It may also distance ELC services from other social welfare, family support and health related services. One noted lesson around consolidation is the need for deliberate strategies to ensure that change (integration) at a ministerial level extends down to changes in service cultures and practice. This requires dedicated resources and time to achieve.

The significant public costs of more closely aligning ‘child care’ services with those of public schooling (including greater entitlements to services and common service standards and practices) can also present serious challenges to government (OECD, 2001). The fiscal pressures on provincial budgets across Canada, for example, appear to have prompted a number of governments (including those in Ontario, BC and New Brunswick) to reconsider how best to broaden public access to ELC services. Thus, as Kaga, Bennett and Moss (2010) comment ‘The observation by Neuman (2005) that the organization of ECCE settings for children from birth to compulsory school age under the auspices of education is a trend that calls for further investigation’ (p. 134) remains valid.

Service planning and Management

In its Canada review, the OECD suggested a more planned approach to ELC encouraging provincial governments to develop ‘an early childhood strategy with priority targets, benchmarks and timelines, and

with guaranteed budgets to fund appropriate governance and expansion', with the participation of the 'major stakeholder groups' (2004). These suggestions around a planned approach, as well as the idea that public authorities are most appropriate to manage planning functions, underpin the idea of a publicly- managed model of ELC.

Generally, none of Canada's jurisdictions have developed extensive or long-term province-wide planning approaches to ELC services; although there are examples of short- or medium-term initiatives developed to address key service needs. Alberta's *Child Care Space Creation* initiative, operational from 2008 to 2011, and Ontario's phased introduction of full-day kindergarten over a three year period are both examples, of specific strategies to expand services; although neither were supported by larger strategic planning frameworks. Manitoba has developed and executed several plans in five-year cycles that have some of the characteristics identified in the OECD's review.

System-wide planning at the provincial/ territorial level, supported by service management and planning at the local level, are considered key elements for the successful implementation of an ELC policy framework (Mahon and Jensen, 2006; Prentice, 2007; OECD, 2004). Together, they can help address inequities in service supply (Prentice, 2007) and communicate broader public commitments to accessible, affordable and high quality ELC services.

The more local management of services, with the support of overarching policy frameworks and the financing from more senior levels of government, is consistent with the concept of 'subsidiarity' - the idea that certain tasks are best handled by the least centralized unit of government authority that is 'as close to the citizens as possible'. From this perspective, local management supports community-level decision-making and enables local bodies to consider how best to meet service needs within agreed service guidelines.

In a study of the municipal role in child care in eleven cities across Canada, Mahon and Jensen found that 'planning efforts can have an impact not only on quality and equitable access but also on number and type of services', 'to rectify geographic imbalances in the distribution of spaces and to identify and reduce service gaps.' (2006: 21). It cites a British Columbia task force's

suggestion that child care planning structures can 'identify need, coordinate, develop and deliver services consistent with community needs and priorities', noting that this had paved the way for the introduction of community level planning structures undertaken by several municipalities in British Columbia, the most notable of which is Vancouver's. The study identified other (also non-mandated) local communities that engage in some level of ELC planning, often working with other services and the community: these included Montreal, Sherbrooke, QC and Calgary. A key conclusion of this study was that provinces can best work in 'full partnership with municipalities and school boards to plan for equitable distribution of ELCC resources' (2006).

Mahon, commenting specifically on the municipal level of service, observes that 'it is this level which is most capable of recognising specific needs and bringing about the level of integration required of a truly comprehensive system' (2004:1). She cautions, however, that as regional entities, such as cities, have typically not been part of intergovernmental policy-making or fiscal arrangements in Canada, new approaches are required to support their assumption of greater roles and responsibilities.

The recent plan for an integrated system of ELC in BC (*Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Learning and Care*), developed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and Early Childhood Educators of BC (2011), similarly proposes that local 'elected Boards of Education be mandated and funded to plan, develop, and govern the delivery of a range of early care and learning (ECL) services in their districts — whether these services are located in community or school facilities' (2011: 11). The notion of local management is consistent with the planning and management of education services in Alberta, and other provinces, and represents a common approach in the management of complex service landscapes.

One common service management and planning challenge numerous commentators identify relates to the complex nature of 'steering' (OECD, 2004) mixed service systems in support of broader public goals for services (such as those relating to integration, service accessibility and quality). The growth of 'child care markets', especially in countries with less well-supported welfare regimes such as the US, Australia, the

UK and Canada (Lloyd, 2012), has prompted a number of researchers to highlight the challenges of publicly managing, and planning services that are privately owned, operate largely independently of each other and, in the case of private business, retain a profit motive. (Penn, 2012; Mitchell, 2012, and White and Friendly, 2012).

In these contexts, Penn (2012) identifies three common regulation strategies jurisdictions use to ‘manage’ (and ensure) key aspects of service including accessibility, affordability and quality: first, financial interventions such as price controls (similar to maximum fees) alongside increased base funding directly to programs; second, quality interventions, including regulation, monitoring and licensing, with robust accountability systems; and third, an emphasis on data collection to provide information on services. White and Friendly (2012) argue that mixed economy approaches can be made more ‘effective’ in meeting public goals through broader regulations, for example, province-wide parent fee and staff wage grids (as Manitoba and Prince Edward Island have done); by directing public funds only to public and non-profit organizations (as Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and—to some extent—Quebec and some Ontario municipalities have done); and through more vigilant setting and monitoring of quality standards (2012).

Humblet (2006) cautions that ‘simply opening a competitive market in private services’ is not sufficient to advance the funding and delivery ELC and may reflect a ‘misunderstanding of the nature of early childhood services’ (P. 3). The analysis of the impacts of the move away from publicly-managed ELC on service access and quality in the Netherlands, (Noailly and Visser, 2009; and Plantenga, 2012); comparative assessments of the quality of ELC in for-profit and non-profit service environments (see Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2011a and 2011b for a review and a bibliography of this research); and a critique of the success of public reforms to ELC in New Zealand (Mitchell, 2012) all highlight the importance of effective public management strategies, while noting the challenges of advancing service accessibility, quality, and affordability in strongly market-oriented ELC environments.

Community participation in early learning and care

A greater focus on local ELC management makes it possible to involve community members, parents and children in the issues of program delivery that are most important for them - staffing, schedules, facility design and programming - so as to ensure responsive programming (Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and Early Childhood Educators of BC, 2011). This means that, in addition to community and parent involvement at the individual service level, community members and parents can also be involved in setting priorities, planning and quality assurance for a locally managed system.

Moss (2006, 2009) presents a vision for community involvement in ELC. He sees ELC programs as public spaces that reflect cultural, social and political values, and places of

citizen participation and collective decision-making that may enable a community to take responsibility for its children and their education (in its broadest sense): responsibility not just for providing services but for how they are understood, for the purposes they serve in that community and for the pedagogical practice that goes on within them” (Moss, 2009: 39).

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates and the Early Childhood Educators of BC’s community plan for a public system of integrated early care and learning (2011) emphasizes the importance of local service managers (which they identify as elected Boards of Education) maintaining strong connections with the communities they serve. They envisage service providers, families and other stakeholders actively engaged in local decision-making.

The proposed plan also speaks to the need for First Nations and Aboriginal communities to have the ‘power and resources’ to govern ELC services in ways that are consistent with their cultural needs and interests. The plan uses the term ‘democratic’ to characterize the more public nature of a proposed new system of ELC.

Drawing on European examples, including the highly regarded nurseries in Northern Italy, a number of researchers emphasize the role of parents as ‘rightful

partners' in the 'joint enterprise of education and care' (Moss, 2006; Bloomer and Cohen, 2008; and Penn, 2009). They argue that parent involvement often has a narrow meaning with families largely asked to support program or service activities (e.g. fundraising, attending field trips) rather than contributing more fully to the shaping of the services. Penn (2009) highlights the work of groups in Europe (DECET, Children in Europe and Eurochild) to make early childhood education and care services more "democratic spaces".

From a somewhat different perspective, the recent UNICEF-IRC report (*The Childcare Transition*) (2008) and the OECD *Starting Strong II* (2006) study affirm that ELC services must recognize parents' rights within services including their participation in key decision that involve their children.

3.4 Ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework

The following final section outlines some governance ideas for consideration as part of a proposed Alberta early learning and care framework. The ideas are sketched in preliminary form and intended to generate discussion. The list of ideas is not exhaustive and other ideas also likely merit consideration.

I. *Bringing the Ministries of Education and Human Services closer together*

The split ministerial jurisdiction for ELC in Alberta, and other provinces, reflects the historical evolution of services. The reconciliation of these divisions in terms of practice requires that, at minimum, the two ministries establish new structures and mechanisms that will enable them to work more closely together. These closer working relationships will be particularly key if significant changes in service delivery are contemplated including the introduction of full-day learning for five year olds.

At this stage, greater coordination between the two ministries would appear more feasible than the consolidation of responsibility for ELC in a single ministry. Alberta ministries have a history of working

together on key initiatives and it would appear reasonable for the greater integration of ELC to represent another such initiative.

The links between ELC and the broader domain of early childhood development suggests further value in closer working relationships between both ministries and Alberta Health and Wellness (and Alberta Health Services).

II. *Greater public management of early learning and care*

The idea that a more publicly-managed approach to ELC is an important component of a integrated service system is a common theme in the research and policy literature. There are many elements of a public management model that include planning, infrastructure, funding as well as the ownership of services and each requires a more detailed review to assess their potential contribution to improving the access Alberta children and their families have to affordable, high quality ELC.

At a provincial level, the statement of policy goals and purposes for ELC needs to be supported with planned strategies to improve services and outcomes for children and families. The effective operation of a mixed market service delivery model requires clear service requirements, the collection and reporting of system-wide service data, as well as mechanisms to implement, monitor and support change. Infrastructure support and specific strategies are also needed to 'steer' services to meet provincially set goals and objectives.

At a more local level, new management structures have the potential to ensure that services meet community needs including appropriate levels of service access, quality and affordability. These new local management structures (including or drawing on existing structures such as municipalities, school boards and Child and Family Service Authorities) could be mandated and funded to plan, develop and provide oversight of the full range of ELC services in their region. They would be accountable both locally and to the provincial ministries for guiding the integration of local services in accordance with agreed targets and benchmarks for services.

Alberta's historical and current experience with public management of services through municipal governments

and/or other local regional authorities, together with knowledge about this from Ontario and other locales, can help to inform part of a thorough consideration about how to move towards a more publicly managed approach to child care in Alberta.

III. Increased family and community participation in early learning and care

The importance of local community participation in ELC is emerging as a relatively new consideration in the research and policy fields – reflecting in part a greater interest in child rights as well as a recognition of the diversity and different cultural heritages and traditions of children and their families. This kind of democratic participation is not only appropriate for parents as children’s ‘first teachers’ but can contribute to social inclusion and community-building.

Local community participation can be institutionalized through structures such as community ELC councils and at the individual service level through structures such as parent boards or parent/community boards. The design and implementation of such approaches and structures, must take into account the balance between public and private interests – especially if a broader goal is to ensure that services are more accessible and thought of as ‘public goods’.

Careful consideration is required to determine the appropriate roles for private (non-profit and for-profit) organizations in delivering services and how these organizations can accommodate greater community participation. Across Canada, and internationally, individual jurisdictions have established guidelines for the involvement of both non-profit and for-profit organizations in service delivery with some differences in how each is treated. While there are definite variations between jurisdictions, there is a preference for a greater role for service delivery through public or non-profit (community-owned) services rather than privately-owned for-profit ones.

4.0 Financing early learning and care: The level and nature of public and private investments

4.1 Introduction

While all the integrative elements explored in this discussion paper are important for developing a more comprehensive approach to early learning and care (ELC), financing—both from policy and program perspectives—is predominant. Financing has major implications for quality, accessibility, affordability, human resources and physical environments. Financing is one of the most important policy tools, or levers, that shape the characteristics of ELC provision. The amount and the form of financing are informed by the purposes and goals of ELC, as well as by culture, ideology and the availability of resources; although, in the wealthy industrialized (OECD) countries, availability of resources has been shown to play a lesser role than other factors.

The review of research and practice reveals two broad question areas around financing: first, how much public funding is allocated to support ELC – and by extension what is the level and nature of service that this funding is anticipated to support? What proportion of the costs of ELC services are covered through public funding and what proportion is covered privately? And do these proportions vary between different types of service for children of different ages? Second, what form does public financing take? Are public monies allocated using demand-side strategies - that is, is funding directed to families for the purchase of services or are public resources allocated to support program operations and service delivery (supply-side funding)? Is dedicated capital funding available to maintain equipment and facilities, and or to support service expansion? What types of programs and services are eligible for public funding support, what service standards must they meet and how do they report on and account for the use of public monies?

The evidence (see the review by Cleveland and Krashinsky, 2004) shows that, if the objective is to make ELC work better for children and families, both *how much* public funding is available and *how* it is made available matter. Although other elements also come into play, both of these key factors have a significant impact on how ELC functions: whether programs are generally high, mediocre or poor quality; the nature of the workforce and its remuneration and benefits; the supporting infrastructure for service delivery; the nature

and quality of the environments in which services are provided; and how the supply of services responds to the level and nature of service needs at the local, regional and provincial levels.

Both of these two key characteristics of financing—how much and how it works—are public policy matters, determined by the government (or governments) with jurisdiction over service. Both are, in turn, also linked to larger questions: whether ELC represents a public good with attendant broader public benefits or whether it is understood more as a private, family responsibility; and how governments view the capacities of private and publicly managed services to respond to and meet community needs.

The following section explores ELC financing in Alberta, in Canada and beyond. It reflects on current research and analysis around ELC financing and concludes with some ideas on financing for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework.

4.2 Financing early learning and care in Alberta

Like other elements of ELC provision in Alberta (and Canada more generally), financing for ECS programs through the Ministry of Education and for child care services through the Ministry of Human Services are quite different. ECS, including kindergarten, is publicly funded with no parent fees. ECS programs are base funded, with funds flowing from the provincial government either to the school board that operates them or to non-profit ECS providers.

By comparison, public funding for child care services through the Ministry of Human Services primarily take the form of fee subsidies for eligible families and accreditation supports (including staff wage enhancements) for eligible programs and services. For the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012 the Ministry distributed \$239.4m in funding with fee subsidies for parents estimated to comprise 60 percent of the monies invested.

Child care fees and subsidies

In Alberta (as in other provinces) parents pay fees for regulated and approved child care services. Provincial fee subsidies are paid to the service provider by the provincial government on behalf of an eligible parent¹. Maximum subsidy rates range from \$628/month for an infant to \$546/month for other ages in day care centres and \$310/month for a school-age child. As of January 2012, the provincial government calculates that the mean fees in regulated care were \$771 for centre-based child care, \$621 for family day home care, \$403 for out-of-school care and \$106 for preschool (2012). The number of subsidies is not capped but parents must secure a space before applying for subsidy. As well, the Stay-at-home subsidy program typically pays \$1200/year for a preschool space for income-eligible families in which the mother is not in the labour force.

Accreditation funding

Alberta provides accreditation funding for eligible day care, out-of-school and family day home agencies. There are a number of grant types: quality funding, staff support funding, benefit contribution grants, professional development funding, and staff attraction incentive allowance. All are available as pre-accreditation funding as well as to programs which are accredited² - and all are available to non-profit and for-profit programs.

Additional base funding support is provided for Inclusive Child Care, Subsidy transaction fees, infant care and respite care. A high school bursary scholarship is available to students who want to pursue a career in child care and attend a post-secondary early learning and child care program. Grants are also available to eligible staff certified at the Child Development Supervisor level to attend workshops and conferences.

1 The criteria for subsidy eligibility include parents working, studying, looking for work or the parent/child has a special need. Families are eligible for subsidy up to the following thresholds \$64,472 (1 parent, 1 infant) or \$80,076 (2 parents, two children) (as of April 1, 2012).

2 Accredited services achieve program standards that exceed provincial licensing requirements. Over 96% of regulated child care services participate in accreditation.

Capital funding

From April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2011, two forms of capital funds were available: the *Making Space for Children: Space Creation Innovation Fund*, which paid individuals or organizations up to \$1,500 for each new licensed and approved child care space created and the *Child Care Modular Initiative*, which paid school boards the full cost for modular buildings located near a school to be used for regulated child care. These capital funds were available to non-profit and for-profit programs.

4.3 Financing early learning and care in Canada and beyond

Financing of ELC varies between provinces. One common characteristic, however, is the distinction between publicly funded kindergarten, delivered as part of the education system, and child care services for children below the mandatory school age which are mainly privately funded (through parent fees).

Kindergarten is publicly funded in all provinces, with the main variation the number of program hours funded. Six provinces provide a full-day program for five-year olds while Ontario is also implementing full-day early learning for four-year olds. How provinces fund child care services for children below the mandatory school age shows greater variation. In general, provinces rely on a combination of public funding and parent fees to cover service costs. The overall levels of public investment vary between provinces, however; as does the manner in which they allocate funding (supply-side versus demand-side strategies).

The following three funding approaches from Quebec, Manitoba and Prince Edward provide some illustration of how public funding is used to support greater service access and to increase service quality as part of more integrated approaches to ELC (see Friendly, 2011, for details on funding in these three provinces). In addition, the funding model in Sweden is described – one of the nations with the most integrated approach to ELC.

Quebec

Quebec's 'educational child care' program for 0-4 year olds is Canada's most fully developed example of base

funding (a supply-side funding strategy). Services include CPEs (centres de la petite enfance) – small neighbourhood-based networks of non-profit centres; garderies (for-profit centres) and family child care networks using an agency model. School-aged child care, operated by schools and under the aegis of the ministry of education, is similarly base funded. The public funds plus the flat parent fee of \$7/day for a 0-12 year old are intended to cover all operating costs. There are no unfunded CPEs, but since 2008 unfunded garderies have been encouraged.

A formula for the 'basic allowance' is used to calculate the amount of funding from the provincial government, based on annual operations (funds are paid on a monthly basis). The basic allowance formula varies somewhat for the three types of child care (non-profit CPE's, for-profit garderies and family child care agencies); but all are based on the number of annualized licensed spaces, actual (annual) occupancy and annual occupancy rate. Garderies and family child care receive smaller basic allowances than do CPEs.

In addition, there are supplementary funds for such things as pensions, maternity leave payments, operating in a disadvantaged area and inclusion of children with special needs, as well as several kinds of one-time only grants. Capital grants have been small since 2004 when the primary capital funds available to CPEs were eliminated. There are no fee subsidies but parents with children aged 0-4 on social assistance and not in the paid labour force are entitled to up to 23.5 hours per week of child care at no fee.

Manitoba

When Manitoba's 'unit funding' approach to child care financing was introduced in 2001 it was unique. Since 2010, however, PEI has adopted a similar model based on Manitoba's example. Manitoba's unit funding combines base funding with a set parent fee and a fee subsidy. It was established to provide sufficient operating revenue to enable payment of competitive wages to early childhood educators and to keep parent fees relatively affordable. Unit funding is available only to non-profit programs (and to all non-profit programs); for-profit centres licensed before 1991 were grand-parented to receive a small grant-type payment and can receive subsidies. Any new for-profit centres are not funded, though they may receive subsidies.

As in Quebec, Manitoba has a province-wide maximum parent fee set by the provincial government³ but unlike Quebec's flat fee, Manitoba's maximum fees vary by age group. To operate effectively, the unit funding model requires both base funding (operating grants), set parent fees and subsidies that are equivalent to the fee. A final key component of unit funding is that it is designed to use a province-wide salary scale for child care staff, developed by the provincial government in collaboration with the Manitoba Child Care Association.

Prince Edward Island

There have been significant recent changes in ELC Prince Edward Island (PEI) as the province has undertaken an extensive overhaul of its child care and kindergarten programs begun in 2010. PEI's initiatives are based on an extensive review of existing programs, research on alternatives and a wide community consultation. The province set out to approach the significant changes using an integrated approach, one component of which was to move kindergarten to the public education system and to introduce full-day (compulsory) kindergarten. Kindergarten had previously been provided as part of regulated child care, fully publicly-funded under child care legislation and delivered by private (for-profit and non-profit) child care centres.

A second component of the new approach, child care for 0-4 year olds, has begun to be delivered in public funded *Early Years Centres*, which are intended to be non-profit, supported by provincial resources and developed using a public planning process. Provincially-set parent fees and a salary scale negotiated with the provincial Early Childhood Development Association, together with a unit funding model that combines set parent fees, fee subsidies and operational/base funding make up the core program for this age group.

Funding early learning and care in Sweden

Sweden provides a widely-reported example of how base funding works outside Canada. Most ELC in Sweden is publicly delivered by municipalities, with the National Department of Education providing overall policy direction. While there are well-defined roles for

³ Unfunded programs may charge whatever they choose unless they enroll subsidized children.

the national government, there is also considerable local autonomy. The national government provides block grants to municipalities which use these (together with additional funds derived from municipal taxes⁴) for operating their early learning and child care systems. Since 2002, parent fees have been set at a national level in Sweden, based on a formula that takes family income and the number of children in the family into account, but not their ages. Parent fees make up a small part of child care budgets, however, between 15% and 20% nationally.

Municipalities are responsible for monitoring quality and make the final decisions on how funds are spent. The national *Education Act* requires municipalities to provide sufficient child care without 'unreasonable delay' (defined as three to four months).

4.4 Research on financing early learning and care

The amount of public funding allocated to support ELC and the mechanisms used to distribute it emerge as important considerations in the research literature. The OECD country review of Canada (2004) identified a number of challenges with the fee subsidy models in place (with the exception of Quebec) in terms of their ability to support the effective delivery of accessible, affordable, high quality ELC services – especially for children below the mandatory school age. The OECD noted significant differences in both the levels of public investment and the strategies for the allocation of public funds between Canada (and between individual provinces) and those European nations with a more integrated, approach to the funding and delivery of ELC.

Research and analysis of funding practices carried out by the OECD and others, identify base funding (or supply-side funding) strategies as more effective than demand-side funding strategies (vouchers, cheques or fee subsidies for individual parents), or the primary reliance on parent fees, in supporting high quality services. UNICEF's 2008 ratings of twenty-five countries on ten indicators of quality and access, for example, indicates that those countries with a primary

⁴ Swedish municipalities have substantial taxation power and there is no sub-national government level like provinces or states.

focus on demand-side funding strategies tend to rank lower than those with an emphasis on supply-side funding (UNICEF, 2008).

A twenty country comparative study conducted by the OECD similarly found that the use of public funds to base fund ECEC services was associated with a higher quality of service, better training for educators and higher levels of equity, access and participation than consumer or parent subsidy models (OECD, 2006). The study noted that the ‘supply-side investment model, managed by public authorities, brings more uniform quality and superior coverage of childhood populations than parent subsidy models’. It cautioned that although often ‘politically attractive’ demand-side funding strategies can make it more difficult for governments to manage early childhood services in support of broader public goals and purposes. The OECD, following its review of Canada’s early childhood provision, recommended a ‘move away from personal subsidy mechanisms toward operational funding and an entitlement for children, as in the traditional education model’.

Additional themes within the research literature extend to the linkages between funding strategies and the broader concepts of efficiency, equity and public accountability for how funds are used. Canadian researchers Cleveland and Krashinsky used the term ‘efficiency’ to refer to getting the most services while ensuring high-quality, good accessibility and controlling costs. Using a number of international illustrations, they conclude that supply-side approaches better meet the efficiency test (2004).

White and Friendly expand this concept, using a case study approach, to conclude that spending public funds through demand-side mechanisms often means that goals for children’s learning and parent support may not be met because, although substantial sums of public money may be invested, ‘marketized’ approaches are not structured to deliver high quality, accessible services (2012). Barnett and Hustedt (2011), commenting on funding models in the US, caution that the ‘various streams of public funding are not easily harmonized’ and that as a result opportunities to ‘maximise the public’s investments are invariably lost’ (P.3).

Seeking a broader perspective on why jurisdictions place a greater emphasis on supply or demand-side funding

approaches, Cleveland and Krashinsky (2004), and other researchers, note that these differences reflect deeper political preferences for markets over direct public investment and management of services, with supporting arguments around the benefits of consumer choice and the efficiencies of competitive service markets. Such a preference for the operation of markets is more evident in American, UK and some former Commonwealth countries than it is in Europe. It is also commonly associated with government concerns around increasing public expenditures during times of fiscal restraint.

In addition to *how* ELC funding is arranged, ensuring quality and access requires an adequate level of funding for the provision of the service itself, for staff remuneration, facilities and equipment and developing and maintaining a support infrastructure (OECD, 2001; 2006). As many young families find it difficult to afford the full cost of high quality ELC (given their other household expenditures) a number of researchers point to the need for additional levels of public investment to ensure that services are accessible (Kershaw and Anderson, 2009).

The amount of public funding jurisdictions allocate to ELC reflects, in large measure, their position on whether or not it is best thought of as a public good or whether they consider it more of a private service and responsibility. Jurisdictions must also take into account the heightened political challenges of increasing public expenditures during times of fiscal restraint. Thus, within the Canadian context, while all the provinces have increased their investments in ELC over the last decade, most remain unwilling or unable to allocate funding for ELC in the same form with which they fund public education for older children – despite the arguments of specific advocates for these public investments (McCain and Mustard, 1999; McCain, Mustard and Shankar, 2007). Cleveland and Krashinsky (2004) note the challenges provinces face in significantly increasing their investments in ELC in the absence of dedicated financial support from the federal government.

Across Canada, as a whole, public investments in ELC fall short of the commonly used international minimum benchmark for public funding, set at *at least* 1% of GDP for ELC for children aged 0 – 5 years (European Commission, 1995; UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2008).

One final argument in respect to financing ELC considers the economic impacts or benefits from public investments. Moving away from the often complex, longitudinal cost-benefit calculations developed for targeted service interventions, a number of researchers highlight broader community economic benefits that flow from investments in ELC. Prentice and McCracken (2004) and Prentice (2007) found significant local economic returns in both Winnipeg and rural Manitoba from direct investments in ELC. Similarly, Fairholm (2009) reports significant economic multiplier effects linked to investments in ELC, while Fortin et al (2012) report additional tax revenues from increased labour force participation rates for women with young children, which exceed the public expenditures on services.

4.5 Ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework

The following final section outlines some possible ELC financing ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework. The ideas are sketched in preliminary form and intended to generate discussion. The list of ideas is not exhaustive and other further ideas also likely merit consideration.

I. Commitment to increase the level of public investment over time

The Alberta government has significantly increased the level of public investment in ELC over the last five years. This increase has contributed to the creation of new early learning and child care spaces, the stabilization of the work force, as well as an increased focus on program planning and development through a provincial accreditation process.

The closer integration of services (with a common focus on early education and care) requires additional sustainable investments in community-based ELC services over time, however, if the level and quality of service is to be improved. A longer term investment plan for ELC would need to reflect clearly articulated goals around both the level and nature of ELC services considered appropriate in Alberta – including clear

guidelines on how these services might best be financed in terms of public and private expenditures and accompanying estimates of the costs associated with the delivery of services. Given that staffing costs represent the largest single program expense, specific consideration would need to be focused on determining the nature of these costs.

II. Shift to a primary focus on supply-side funding models

Research and practice findings indicate that supply-side funding models, with appropriate public management controls in place, are more likely to support the delivery of high quality ELC services and provide for the more effective use of public monies than demand-side funding models. The shift to a greater focus on supply-side funding for ELC services under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human Services would bring some measure of greater alignment with the funding models used under Education and potentially stream-line existing funding models.

One possible supply-side option is to consider is that of funding services based on the number of children served with supporting regulations and guidelines around the quality and accessibility of services for all eligible children (including those with special needs). Additional funding could be provided for children with special needs similar to the models in place under Early Childhood Services within the Ministry of Education. Based on the premise that families would still be required to cover a portion of service costs, some guidelines would also need to be considered in terms of service affordability (see below) and some direct fee subsidies maintained for families on low incomes.

III. Management of service costs for families

To ensure that additional supply-side funding supports increased service access for families, the Ministry of Human Services would work in partnership with local service providers to establish maximum parent fee schedules for services delivered through regulated and/or approved service providers. As noted above, some parent subsidies would likely need to be continued to ensure that families with lower household incomes have access to services. The current maximum province-wide

parent fee protocols in place in Quebec, Manitoba, and PEI provide examples of this particular approach for consideration. Establishing a set parent fee, together with a province-wide salary scale for early childhood educators (as proposed in the human resources section), has the potential help to establish more cost stability and affordability for service users.

As proposed in PEI, operators may be eligible to opt out of the proposed fee threshold guidelines but as a result would then not be eligible for supply-side service unit funding.

IV. Accountability and transparency around the use of public monies

Additional public funding for service providers would need to be supported by higher levels of reporting on service delivery which build on the reporting requirements already in place as part of accreditation. Service providers would need to account on a periodic basis for the use of public monies and provide information on key aspects of service delivery including the nature and level of services provided, the number of children served and the quality of services provided.

V. New funding partnerships with municipalities to support service delivery

The Ministry of Human Services might consider new funding partnerships with municipalities to both expand services and to improve their local integration and management (as proposed under the organizing services section). Using a funding model similar to that used in the Family Community Support Services Program, the Ministry of Human Services would enter into funding agreements with municipalities to support the delivery and management of ELC services.

5.0 Organizing early learning and care service delivery

Co-operation between different services – centre-based services, family day care, school and out-of-school - helps to create a continuum of services that is reassuring for parents and can meet the needs of young children (OECD, 2006: 55)

5.1 Introduction

Across Canada (and other countries as well), early learning and care (ELC) services (kindergarten, centre-based child care, and family child care) are delivered in a number of ways. For example in some jurisdictions, kindergarten is offered for a half school-day – equivalent to about 2.5 hours; in others for a full school-day – or about 4.5 to 5.5 hours; in Ontario, kindergarten is offered to all four-year olds; in other provinces and territories, kindergarten is offered to four year olds who meet specific criteria or who are within the catchment area of a particular school board; child care centres may be independent stand-alone centres or part of a network of centres or chains; in some provinces/territories, regulated family child care providers are monitored and supported by licensed agencies which are responsible for ensuring that providers meet the regulations; in other provinces/territories, individual providers are licensed by the government.

These services, under the oversight of community service and/or education ministries, operate largely independently of each other. Further, while school-based early learning services are managed at a local school board, or individual school site level, community-based services in a particular locale (for example, pre-school, centre-based child care and family day home services) largely operate more independently. And while some larger organizations (e.g. the YMCA) may operate multiple programs or types of service in a given community, with linkages between them, these arrangements are limited with a more likely scenario two or more smaller programs operating as one business with little supporting infrastructure.

Envisioning ELC services as part of a more integrated system suggests that in some form local services will become more closely linked or connected. As outlined in the discussion of governance, it also requires some level of local or regional management of services to ensure their most effective provision. This section considers some options for linking, connecting and over time integrating local services. It presents an initial summary of how services are currently arranged, followed by some examples from Canada and beyond of services that are more closely connected or integrated. It concludes, with some ideas for consideration as part

of an Alberta early learning and care framework to support the greater connection or integration of services at a local level.

5.2 The landscape of early learning and care services in Alberta

Early Childhood Services (ECS) including kindergarten

The Ministry of Education is responsible for Early Childhood Services (ECS) for children 2.5 to 6 years. ECS is delivered by public or separate school boards, private schools or by private non-profit ECS operators, who may also provide child care, sometimes to cover the remainder of the day for five year olds in kindergarten. Kindergarten, which forms the mainstay of ECS programs, is primarily part-day and is available to all children the year prior to beginning formal schooling at age 6. School authorities and private ECS providers are required to provide access to at least 475 hours of kindergarten programming at no charge to parents. The Ministry of Education also funds ECS programs for younger children with additional support needs (for example children with disabilities).

Centre-based child care

Centre-based child care refers to group care for children 0-12 years of age outside their own home and outside school hours. It is licensed and monitored by the Ministry of Human Services (through regional authorities) and organized into three program areas:

- The child care program provides care for seven or more children for more than four hours a day. Non-profit and for-profit centres may be stand-alone operations or part of multi-site operations or chains and may or may not have connections to other child care centres, schools, ECS programs, or other community and/or educational services. Parents pay user fees for child care; eligible parents receive a subsidy which is paid to the service provider.
- The preschool or nursery school program provides care to preschool and kindergarten-age children for fewer than four hours per day. Preschools are

non-profit or for-profit operations and may be free-standing or part of a larger group or chain. Some regulations for nursery schools are different from those for child care centres (staff: child ratios and training requirements are lower, for example). Parents pay fees for service and subsidies are not available.

- The out-of-school care program provides child care to kindergarten and school-aged children under 13 in any or all of the following periods: before and after-school; during the lunch hour; when schools are closed. Parents pay user fees; subsidies may be available for eligible parents.

Family day homes

Regional Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSA) enter into contracts with non-profit or for-profit agencies to coordinate and monitor child care in the private home of one or more child care providers. Up to six children under age 12 are permitted in each family day home. Agency staff visit homes six times a year for monitoring purposes. Parents pay user fees; subsidies may be available for eligible parents. Provincial standards are in place for family day homes; the agencies agree to approve and monitor providers according to the standards. Agencies are not licensed.

Group family child care

Group family child care is provided in the private home of a licence holder. A maximum of 10 infants, preschool, kindergarten and school-aged children are permitted, with no more than two infants or three children under three. Group family child care programs must have two providers on record; when more than seven children are in attendance, there must be two providers on the premises. The licence holder must have taken the basic level ECE training course and ensure that additional child care providers have as well. Parents pay user fees; subsidies may be available for eligible parents.

Parent Link Centres

Forty-six Parent Link Centres are operated by the Ministry of Human Services, Children and Youth division. And while these centres do not fit within the common definition of early learning and care services, they provide related supports and services. Parent

Link Centres provide supports in four service areas: early childhood development, parent education, family support and information and referral. The overall goal of these programs is to facilitate parents' 'access to information about community services, obtain referrals, meet other parents and families, and take part in quality learning activities with their children' (Government of Alberta, 2012). There are no fees for services which are often located within community organizations. The staff who work in Parent Link Centres must have the skills and competencies needed to support families and foster child development. Early Childhood Educators have a minimum of a one year early childhood development certificate or equivalent. Parent Educators have a minimum of a human service diploma or equivalent.

5.3 Alternative ways of arranging early learning and care services

How ELC services are arranged at the local level impacts on the level and nature of service integration that is possible. Across Canada, and beyond, individual jurisdictions have introduced or supported the development of various local service structures that integrate one or more aspects of service delivery. The examples discussed below show ways in which a range of services can be organized at the local level, sometimes under the overall management of a regional entity, to support better options for families and more equitable access to an integrated continuum of high quality services. Some form of local arrangement or organization of services is consistent with the idea that local service management can help ensure that services match local community and family needs while recognizing that all levels of government have key roles to play in supporting service delivery.

Quebec's neighbourhood networks of centres and family child care

Quebec's provincially mandated centre de la petite enfance [CPE] model offers a useful illustration of more integrated service delivery. CPEs are small local (neighbourhood) non-profit agencies that oversee

networks of child care options for children from 0 to 4⁵. Following Quebec's ECEC reforms in the late 1990's, CPEs were created out of the non-profit child care centres and family child care agencies that formed the cornerstone of the system until 1997. They provide a local integrated delivery system that includes two types of regulated child care programs—centre-based (all full-day) and family child care. Described as 'the ideal place to begin a true process of integration and harmonization of the regulated child care services in Québec' (Tougas, 2002: 44), each CPE's single infrastructure allows the two forms of regulated child care⁶ to consult with, and influence each other, as well as making it easier for parents to navigate between services. All CPEs are base funded according to a province-wide formula.

Sweden - Blending kindergarten, pre-kindergarten and centre-based child care

Sweden's ELC programs provide a different approach to integration—integrated service delivery from birth to age five, managed at the local level by municipal governments. Programs for children from birth through 5 years are organized in 'preschools' that fully integrate the concepts of 'early childhood education' and 'child care'. Swedish children in this age group are educated and cared for in one kind of program, *forskola* or preschool, by the same staff team (all with early childhood training) for a full parental work day, or a shorter day, if the parent chooses.

There is no distinction between 'child care' and 'education' for this age group; the day from opening to closing is treated as one program. In addition, for six year olds (the year before compulsory schooling, which begins at 7 years of age), there is a voluntary 'preschool class' for part of the day that is part of the school system (somewhat similar to kindergarten in Canada). The goal of all programs below compulsory schooling in Sweden regardless of the child's age is to 'support children's development and learning and enable parents to combine parenthood with work or study' (Johansson,

5 At five years of age, Quebec children start full-school day kindergarten in the public education system. Wrap-around before and after-school child care is provided for a \$7 /day fee for children in kindergarten and elementary school.

6 Quebec does not have nursery schools. Instead, children whose parents are not in the labour force attend CPEs if they choose at the same \$7 a day fee.

2004). Family day care, provided by municipally-employed providers, is part of the ELC system but its share of enrolment has been steadily diminishing since the 1980s (Martin Korpi, 2007), and particularly since 1998 when child care moved to an education aegis at the national level.

The 'extended day' for four and five year olds proposed in Ontario in 2009 (Pascal, 2009) had both commonalities and differences to this model. It was proposed as a full school-day early learning program extended by before-, after-school and summer provision in the same space with the same educator team so as to meet parents' work schedules. A fee was proposed for the 'extended' part of the program outside regular school hours but none for the school-day part of the day (Swedish programs instead charge the geared-to-income fee for the whole program day). The proposed Ontario program⁷ was described as a 'single program with a single pedagogical and curriculum approach planned and delivered by qualified educators using common spaces and resources' (Pascal, 2009), as in Sweden.

City of Toronto - Multiple centres and family child care under one public body

As an Ontario municipality, the City of Toronto has multiple roles in child care, most of which are mandated in provincial legislation. Municipalities in Ontario are provincially designated as child care service System Managers, managing public financing and developing provincially mandated service plans on a regular basis. Like about half of Ontario's 47 Municipal Service Managers, the City of Toronto operates a number of child care centres (53) and one City-wide family child care agency; in these services, the City is the employer for all child care staff and management and the license holder of record. As well, the City has a program of ongoing quality improvement using a Toronto-developed and validated tool, engages in research and has a well-developed data collection and analysis system.

⁷ The 'extended day' program was not implemented except in a few school boards in Ontario. Instead, as full school-day kindergarten (FDK) for four and five year olds is being phased in, before and after-kindergarten care will primarily be delivered in separately-provided child care programs by third party operators who are required in the provincial regulations to be non profits. School boards may continue to opt to deliver the proposed "extended day" but few have.

City of Vancouver, Vancouver Society of Children's Centres (VSOCC) – Service oversight and delivery through a non-profit umbrella organization

The City of Vancouver does not have provincially mandated responsibility for ELC but has been a leader in support of a comprehensive, integrated approach for many years. A Civic Child Care Strategy was adopted by the City of Vancouver in 1990, which included planning for child care, capital funding, operating assistance for selected programs, development and administrative support and advocacy. As part of this strategy, a fund was created to provide start up and operating subsidies for new child care centres in high density neighbourhoods.

The Vancouver Society of Children's Centres (VSOCC), a non-profit, charitable organization, was created to work with City of Vancouver staff to design, develop and operate City child care facilities built as part of the land-use development process, with developers paying for the capital costs of construction and providing space rent-free. The City covers the major administrative costs associated with operating VSOCC. Since 1995, VSOCC has expanded to its current operation of 550 licensed spaces at 11 sites, with three more sites under development. A variety of other kinds of family services such as parenting workshops are also offered.

Churchill Park Family Care Society (Calgary) - Multiple site, multiple service community organization

Calgary's Churchill Park Family Care Society is a multi-site, non-profit child care and family support agency. As an agency, it works in some ways that are similar to CPEs in Quebec, the City of Toronto or Vancouver by providing centralized administration for different types of regulated child care and/or family support. However, it is not mandated or initiated by the provincial (Quebec, Toronto) or local government (Vancouver) to do so as in other jurisdictions. Churchill Park operates six child care centres, three out-of-school centres, and up to 60 family day homes and connects them in a network that shares resources and allows parents to access a number of child care options through one organization.

There are other similar non-profit multi-site, multi-program child care agencies across Canada, including others in Alberta.

5.4 Ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework

The following section presents some possible options to better connect and integrate ELC services at a local level. The ideas are sketched in preliminary form and intended to generate discussion. The list is not exhaustive and other ideas also merit discussion.

I. New Provincial-Municipal partnerships in support of early learning and care

To expand existing services, especially in communities not well-served by the current market model, the Ministry of Human Services might consider new partnerships with municipalities to re-engage them in the delivery and support of ELC. Through the use of a funding model similar to that which underpins the Family Community Support Services program, the Ministry would enter into partnerships with local municipal governments to support the introduction and operation of a range of ELC services (primarily some combination of child care, family day homes and out-of-school care).

As part of the partnership the municipal government would oversee and manage the delivery of services in accordance with provincial guidelines around accessibility, affordability and quality. The province would provide funding support through a grant model and also capital support to cover the cost of developing ELC spaces at the community level. At least initially, the Ministry would focus on partnerships with municipalities in which existing services fall significantly short of meeting community needs.

II. Additional supports for local public or non-profit multi-site, multi-service providers

Drawing on examples from other provinces (as well as in Alberta) the Ministry of Human Services could

look to support the expansion and greater integration of services through additional supports for multi-site, multiple program ELC service organizations. In return for additional supply-side funding support, these organizations (limited to non-profit and public entities in the initial phase) would develop and add new service options that meet local community needs. These new service options would be added to the organization's existing service infrastructure and be operationally linked with them.

As with the previously described new relationships with municipalities, these new supply-side funding resources would target service providers willing and able to develop or expand services in communities that are significantly underserved. Service providers would be required to meet agreed service standards and guidelines around accessibility, affordability and quality to receive additional funding support.

III. Development of Local Early Learning and Care Service Networks

Building on the ideas presented for connecting service providers at the community level proposed by the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and the Early Childhood Educators of BC, the Ministry of Human Services would work with local service providers in designated geographic communities to develop ELC service networks.

These ELC networks would, in the first instance, bring together existing service providers (e.g. child care centres, family day homes, preschools and out-of-school care programs) to more closely connect and integrate their services. Organizations which choose to participate in the network would receive additional base funding support to connect their services at the local level. They might, for example, implement strategies to share resources, to jointly develop new service options that meet community needs, to support complementary approaches to ELC, provide a single point of entry for families accessing services in the community (including referrals and wait-list management), as well developing improved connections with other child and family support services.

Organizations that come together in a local service network would be required to meet provincial guidelines

around the accessibility, affordability and quality of services provided.

IV. Integration of possible full-day kindergarten and community-based early learning and care services

The possible introduction of full-day kindergarten suggests the need to consider options to better connect school-based full-day kindergarten and community-based out-of-school care services. At present, there are often only informal links between schools and community-based organizations.

Working jointly, the Ministries of Education and Human Services would look to support the development and maintenance of service linkages between local school boards and service providers. School boards and their potential community organization partners would be eligible for capital and short term operational support to ensure the integrated delivery of full-day kindergarten and supporting community ELC services. Where appropriate school boards would have the option to work directly with approved Early Childhood Service operators to deliver kindergarten services or to support kindergarten delivery in community sites where school space is not available. Kindergarten programs delivered in community sites, or through approved ECS operators, would be required to meet all applicable provincial regulations and standards.

6.0 Human resources in early learning and care

Adults responses to children's activities – whether they respond, and the creativity of their responses – affect young children's early learning capacities and their growing sense of themselves as members of their communities. Adults who are skilled at supporting early learning and development are careful observers of children and encourage them to go beyond their current level of understanding or skill. (Government of British Columbia, 2008: 10)

6.1 Introduction

Research and practice are in good agreement that the positive outcomes for children provided by high quality early learning and care (ELC) depend heavily on the educators who implement the programs. UNICEF's Innocenti Resource Centre's child care report card notes the consistency in the available research, concluding that the quality of ELC depends 'above all else' on the caregiver's ability to build relationships with children as well as offering a 'secure, consistent, sensitive, stimulating, and rewarding environment' (2008: 23).

A broad definition of the 'early childhood workforce' may include all those who are part of or contribute to an ELC system: frontline early childhood educators, family child care providers, centre directors, program and local managers, local, provincial/territorial and federal policy makers, post-secondary early childhood instructors,

researchers and experts. Friendly, Doherty and Beach (2006) argue that, when considering a quality system, all these should be included and that leadership, innovation, creativity and a strong knowledge base are foundational at all levels.

The definitions ordinarily used in Canada are not this broad, however. The Child Care Human Resources Sector Council (CCHRSC) defines both the "child care workforce" and the "broader ECEC workforce"; their definition of the child care workforce includes trained early childhood educators, untrained staff ('assistants') working in child care programs and child care administrators such as directors or supervisors. The broader ECEC workforce⁸ includes educators and assistants, babysitters, family child care providers, nannies and parent helpers, teaching assistants working with children 0 to 12 years, and kindergarten teachers.

Drawing on these definitions, this section first discusses the ELC workforce in Alberta, including some Canada-wide contextual information. This is followed by discussion of some key human resource issues, and examples from inside and outside Canada of ways in which ELC human resources are integrated. The section concludes with some ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework.

6.2 The ELC workforce in Alberta and across Canada

In Alberta, as in the rest of Canada, the ELC workforce comprises a mix of teachers and child care staff with various levels of training and different working conditions. The workforce is split between teachers who work in Early Childhood Services (ECS) including kindergarten in publicly funded education settings, and early childhood educators (certified staff and service providers) who work in regulated centre-based child care, preschools, family day homes and group family child care.

The vast majority of staff in ECS programs are certified teachers, part of a respected and established profession. They must hold a valid Alberta teaching certificate, which requires four years of university study including

⁸ These categories generally follow the NAICs and NOCs codes used by Statistics Canada.

a basic teacher preparation program (B.Ed.), or a bachelor's degree supplemented with basic teacher preparation (two years post-degree for course work and practica). As a group, teachers have a shared training experience and work with a common approach to teaching under similar working conditions. They may be supported by educational assistants who they supervise. University level training and organized professional structures provide teachers with a secure professional status and environment as does working within a publically funded education system. ECS teachers, however, are not required to have early childhood training (Only one province, Prince Edward Island, requires kindergarten teachers to have early childhood education training⁹).

The second main component of Alberta's ELC workforce consists of Child Development Assistants, who complete a post-secondary three credit early learning and child care (ELCC) course or equivalent; Child Development Workers, who hold a one year college-level ELCC certificate; Child Development Supervisors, who have a two year ELCC diploma, pre-school staff who require certification at the Child Development Assistant level, family day home providers who do not require formal certification and group family child care license holders and service providers who must be certified at the Child Development Assistant level.

These staff (and service providers) work in a range of early learning and care settings: centre-based full-day care, part-day preschool programs, family day homes, group family child care programs and out-of-school programs. Generally, their remuneration and benefits are lower than those of certified teachers, with average salaries for the highest qualified Child Development Supervisors estimated to be around half those of certified teachers. By comparison to teachers, child care staff have more limited access to professional development opportunities (Doherty et al., 2000).

The child care work force across Canada (using the CCHRSC's definition) is one in which almost all ECEs and assistants (96 per cent) are women. Child care is the

9 Kindergarten teachers in PEI were hired from the ECE pool as part of PEI's new ELC policy. They are now required to add a teaching credential through further training organized by the provincial government.

sixth most female-dominated occupation in the country and although 67 per cent of ECEs and assistants have a post-secondary credential (one year certificate, a two year diploma or a three or four year university degree), they earn much less than other workers and less than most women in other occupations (CCHRSC 2009).

Unlike certified teachers who work within a unified system of programs and are connected through a common training program, and professional associations, the child care workforce works in largely unconnected programs with differing goals and philosophies and often limited professional support. A review of the child care workforce across Canada remarked, 'child care staff who work in small centres are often isolated and interact with a limited number of colleagues, while family child care providers usually work alone' (CCHRSC, 2004: 10).

Oberhuemer, in a cross-national analysis of ECEC systems, notes that 'the market model [of child care]... generates highly differential systems of training, payment and employment conditions' (2005: 9). A more recent comparative analysis of ELC workforces concurs with previous analyses that a split ELC workforce has significant negative implications for the professionalism and remuneration of the staff members who work with the youngest children (0 – 3 year olds) (Urban and Vandenbroek, 2011). Ultimately, the historic divide between care and education influences how each component of the broader ECEC workforce is viewed, what is expected of them, how they're supported and financed, and what remuneration and working conditions they are deemed to merit. The observation that 'early childhood educators working closest to the school gate are better trained and rewarded' (OECD, 2006: 158) – with isolated exceptions¹⁰, can generally be applied in Canada.

Some Observed Challenges Around Staff Training

There is agreement in the research literature that the quality of early childhood is closely linked to staff who are 'well-educated, experienced and 'competent'

10 Quebec's school-age child care program can be considered to be 'close to the school gate' as the Ministry of Education is responsible for it and school boards deliver it. There are, however, no training requirements and its funding is similar to child care's (\$7 a day parent fee).

(Urban and Vandebroek: 2011: 7). Although there are significant differences across Canada between teachers in the school system and child care staff with regard to educational requirements, training is considered to present differing problems for both of these segments of the broader ECEC workforce.

For certified teachers, some researchers identify the lack of specific early childhood training as a barrier to delivering high quality kindergarten and pre-kindergarten. In its review of Canada, the OECD noted that 'it is problematic' that teachers working in kindergarten have not been 'trained for the role', as the university degrees required for Canadian teacher certification do not include specialization in early childhood (2004: 68). The 'best practice' for educators of young children is considered to be specialized post-secondary training¹¹ in early childhood education (UNICEF, 2008).

Canada's requirements for staff training in regulated child care are, based on research and international standards, also considered to be less than optimal. The OECD identified Canada's post-secondary training requirements for child care staff as problematic, especially in the absence of a developed pedagogy, the isolation of many child care centres, low level of resources and absence of an 'immediate wider professional reference group for staff or a tradition of professional development, as in a school' (2004: 67). While there are some differing perspectives in the research, early childhood educators are considered to require formal educational preparation at a post-secondary diploma level (or above) if the goal is to support child development in a multiple range of domains (Barnett, 2004; Beach and Rochon, 2007; and Whitebook, 2003).

Ultimately, the level and type of training required depends on how the ELC workforce is conceptualized, and what the purposes and goals are; that is, whether the task is to provide safety and nurturance for children in their parent's absence, to transmit knowledge and skills, or to be a 'co-constructor of knowledge' with the child. Each conceptualization requires different content, while the necessary level of training increases

¹¹ Some studies such as Whitebook, 2003, suggests that this training should be at four year degree level.

with the complexity of the role. Simply, it takes much greater professional education and preparation to develop an ability to be self-reflective and able to mobilize children's curiosity, exploration, questioning and problem solving than to provide good custodial care (Friendly, Doherty and Beach, 2006).

Challenges around the Remuneration of Early Childhood Educators

A number of studies highlight the challenges that flow from the generally low rates of remuneration for staff in child care services, including those of attracting and retaining staff with higher qualifications (CCHRSC, 2009). The low rates of remuneration for early childhood educators, outside of education, are linked in large part to the funding model that supports ELC.

With the exception of early education programs such as kindergarten, which are publicly funded, all Canadian provinces rely to some degree on a market model for child care services. This model draws much of its revenue from parent fees, which if they are too remain affordable, places downward pressure on staffing costs the main component of program and service budgets. The capacity of services to pay staff wages commensurate with the level of knowledge and skill required to provide high-quality programs is therefore compromised (CCHRSC, 2004), with staff receiving lower rates of remuneration than the demands and responsibilities of their work require.

Individual provinces have responded to this challenge by investing additional public monies in operational (or supply side) funding, which appears to have had some positive impacts on staff salaries and by extension their qualifications and working conditions. Doherty et al (2000) reported wages to be higher in provinces that provide more significant base funding compared to those where public spending is primarily on fee subsidies. The introduction of wage enhancements in Alberta, for example, linked to accreditation, significantly increased the salaries of staff in accredited programs and also helped to address issues around staff recruitment and retention. The province currently invests an estimated \$70m per year in wage enhancements for early childhood educators through the accreditation process.

Well trained educators, educated specifically for

working with young children at the post-secondary level, are the heart of any high quality ELC program, regardless of aegis or auspice. Wages, benefits and working conditions are the biggest part of a child care centre budget by far, with 75 to 85 per cent of budgets in high quality centres commonly committed to staff remuneration. With this in mind, the connections between the amount and form of public funding, qualifications and wages are foundational in an ECEC policy framework.

6.3 Alternate models for structuring the early learning and care workforce

A number of jurisdictions have considered and made changes to the ECEC workforce consistent with the goal of more closely integrating services within and across school and community settings. The examples sketched below, from New Zealand, Sweden and Prince Edward Island, outline the different approaches these three jurisdictions have taken. They also highlight some of the challenges they have encountered in introducing change.

New Zealand's integrated training for separated services

Following transfer of child care to the Department of Education in 1986, New Zealand moved to integrate child care and kindergarten training in post-secondary education institutions. Although child care centres and kindergartens remain separate programs, the training course leading to a Diploma of Teaching in early childhood education has come to be regarded as a benchmark for teachers working in both kindergartens and child care centres (Meade et al, 1998). The early education diploma programs were designed to be comparable to diploma programs for primary teachers. Although this was largely viewed as a positive development, there have been some concerns about the content of the training. Kaga, Bennett and Moss observe that some commentators are concerned that the training programs do not provide adequate content regarding infants and toddlers (2010).

The national early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*, which is shared across all services, has also contributed to integration of the ECEC workforce, as has amalgamation of the teachers' and child care

unions (Dalli, 2010). A summary of the outcomes of integration in New Zealand observed that one of the most striking of all the workforce changes, however, were wage improvements for trained child care teachers, who were supported in this by creation of a combined early childhood educator and primary school teacher union. In addition, there have been changes in how the ECEC workforce views itself, with growing professionalism among early childhood teachers noted. Indeed, staff who were once regarded as 'child care workers' are today 'increasingly well-qualified early childhood teachers'. While in the past they had 'collided with those who believe that training and qualifications are not important for those who "mind babies"'...today these educators follow a code of ethics and many engage in life-long learning' (Dalli, 2010: 82).

In 2002, the New Zealand government made a push to bring child care staff training in line with kindergarten teacher training. Meade and Podmore (2010) describe the range of initiatives that were part of the government's policy decision (at that time) to require all staff in child care centres to be qualified and registered as were kindergarten teachers. These initiatives including scholarships and Ministry payment for supply staff to cover for staff taking in teacher education courses (2010). Kaga, Bennett and Moss, calling it a 'very bold strategy in international terms', comment that government commitment to fund this strategy has been key because additional funding (as well as regulation) is fundamental to creating a better qualified and paid workforce (2010: 83-84).

Mitchell (2012), however, comments that while trained child care staff have benefited from higher levels of professionalism and remuneration, New Zealand's market model of provision allows for a continued reliance on untrained staff and assistants who do not share these benefits. A change in political power in 2009 reduced the target for qualified and registered teachers in child care centres to 50 per cent, a decision supported by many for-profit providers, who, Mitchell observes, 'have been strong opponents against high regulated standards for qualified teachers' (2012: 6). Other analysts point out that while owners of private centres often match the pay scales achieved through pay parity and union activity to recruit qualified and registered early childhood teachers, this only applies to staff who are trained and, therefore, part of professional

associations or unions (Meade and Podmore, 2010: 35).

As well as leaving out untrained child care staff, the home-based part of the ELC sector has also largely been left out of the workforce reforms in New Zealand. Family child care network coordinators are required to be qualified but home carers are not. This is noted as a matter of concern, especially as family child care networks have been the fastest growing segment of all ELC services, representing a substantial part of enrolment (15.5%, while child care centres represented 16.2%) (Dalli, 2010). Thus, where family child care fits and how it operates as part of an ECEC system, is a significant issue which, some suggest, needs a full debate (Dalli, 2010).

One workforce, one training: Sweden's Early Childhood Specialists

In Sweden, ECEC for children 1 to 5 years old is fully integrated. It is delivered by 'preschools' that are substantially publicly funded and primarily publicly delivered by municipal governments. Trained specifically to work with young children up to compulsory school age (7 years), the main ELC staff in Sweden are called by several titles— 'early childhood specialist', 'pedagogue' and 'teacher' (OECD, 2006). The OECD remarks that the approach of the early childhood specialist is founded on the notion of 'pedagogy' – a broader view of fostering early learning that includes 'care, upbringing and education' (2006: 126).

The workforce is united by a shared national curriculum framework, shared understanding of the profession, and shared experiences in comparable work environments and conditions. Within this system, there are several kinds of roles or positions; each centre has a director, educational pedagogues/preschool teachers and child minders or trained assistants. Overall, 98 per cent of staff in Swedish centres, however, have specialist training to work with children. Centre directors must have a university teaching or pedagogue qualification while pedagogues for both preschool and school-age children (7 – 14 years) are required to have a three- or four- year degree from a 'higher level university college'. Most assistants, who work with pedagogues, have completed a three year post-secondary professional diploma (OECD, 2006).

After child care services were moved from the social welfare ministry to the national education department in 1998, Sweden further integrated early learning educator training with primary training for school teachers and leisure time pedagogues (school-age child care educators). The new teacher training program has three integrated parts: basic—the 'general field of education' dealing with knowledge considered important for all student-teachers regardless of their eventual specialism. A second part of the program provides a choice of subject area to study, followed by 'specialisation', which concentrates on 'deepening, broadening, supplementing or providing new approaches to the knowledge that students have previously acquired' (Johansson, 2003: 15). These changes brought what was already a relatively well qualified ECEC workforce, with post-secondary training and a professional orientation, into a common framework that encompasses education for other ages more broadly and recognizes the preschool as a type of school in its own right with an acknowledged place in the education system (Kaga, Bennett and Moss, 2010).

Prince Edward Island - Upgrading the ECEC workforce

PEI illustrates another approach to upgrading and integrating the ECEC workforce. Publicly funded kindergarten was introduced in PEI in 2000. Between 2000 and 2010, kindergarten was offered in child care centres (similarly to some of Alberta's ECS centres, which may be operated by non-profit organizations). Kindergarten staff working in child care centres were required to have a two year ECE diploma, whereas the staffing requirement for children below kindergarten age in child care remained a one year ECE training program for centre supervisors and one staff. When kindergarten was shifted to a full school-day program and into the public education system in 2010, the requirement for ECE training shifted with the program. Additionally, a plan was put in place to upgrade these kindergarten educators' training to a full teaching credential through a specifically designed university-based program to be offered part-time over a 5-6 year period. This initiative makes PEI the only Canadian province to require kindergarten teachers to have specialized ECE training.

The provincial government also commissioned the *Early Years Report* (2010) which proposed a plan

for restructuring child care provision as kindergarten programs and children moved into the public education system. A number of its recommendations pertinent to the child care workforce have since been implemented:

Training requirements have been upgraded for the whole child care workforce;

- A certification system with three levels requiring different levels of ECE training credentials has been established: Level 1 requires a one year certificate in early learning and care; Level 2 requires a two year diploma in early learning and care; Level 3 Director is a post diploma credential in ECEC administration (Flanagan, 2010).
- Entry level training (90 hours or three post-secondary ECE courses) is now required for all staff in Early Years Centres (newly developed child care programs for children younger than kindergarten age);
- A province-wide wage scale (similar to Manitoba's) now determines salary levels for staff in Early Years Centres. The scale, created in collaboration with the Early Childhood Development Association of Prince Edward Island, takes level of certification and years of experience into account. (Early Years Centres receive substantial public base funding so as to implement newly established province-wide maximum parent fees and staff remuneration according to the provincial wage scale).

The *Early Years Report* also recommended upgrading qualification requirements in school-age child care and family child care for infants, two sections of the workforce that had no training requirements. In May 2010, the PEI government report, *Securing the Future of our Children: Preschool Excellence Initiative* confirmed that some of these workforce reforms may be expected in the next few years (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2010).

6.4 Ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta for early learning and care framework

The following final section outlines some ideas for more closely integrating (and strengthening) the ELC

workforce as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework. The ideas are sketched in preliminary form and intended to generate discussion. The list is not exhaustive and additional ideas also merit consideration.

I. *Development of a comprehensive workforce strategy for early learning and care*

The ability of the province to move towards a more integrated approach to early learning and care will rest in large measure on developing and investing in a well-trained, appropriately supported and fairly compensated workforce. The move toward this larger goal demands the design and implementation of a comprehensive workforce strategy that considers the key requirements for such a workforce and identifies the larger strategies required to develop and sustain it over time.

The development of a comprehensive workforce strategy is a medium to long-term goal which may be supported in the shorter and medium terms by the individual strategies sketched below.

II. *Early childhood education for kindergarten teachers*

One initial option to consider is the provision of specific early childhood education for all kindergarten teachers in the public school system. This specific educational requirement appears particularly important given the possible introduction of full-day kindergarten.

Until recently, none of the provinces or territories required kindergarten teachers to have formal educational preparation for working with young children, although the research and international benchmarks suggest that this is a best practice. There are, however, now several approaches to this issue within Canada that individual provinces have introduced as full-day kindergarten has been adopted. These include Prince Edward Island's plan to require and facilitate early childhood educators to take additional education and training to gain teaching certificates; Ontario's certificated teacher and early childhood educator 'teams' in full-day kindergarten classrooms; and the recommendation by Ontario's Early Learning Advisor to develop a new certificated teacher category with early childhood specialist preparation. Other options might

also be considered including specific post-educational professional development for kindergarten teachers.

III. Increased minimum formal education and professional development requirements for early childhood educators

The strong links between the delivery of high quality early learning and care and staff training requires that all staff in regulated child care programs complete a reasonable level of formal educational preparation which is then augmented by ongoing professional development. Different options for formal preparation are suggested in the research literature (and practice) with broad agreement on a two-year post-secondary diploma as the minimum education requirement.

The introduction of a higher minimum education requirement would need to be supported by strategies to help existing staff upgrade their qualifications while they work. It may also be prudent, to enable existing staff who do not wish to (or are unable to) upgrade their educational level to remain in their current positions until such time as they leave the field. New staff entering would be required to meet the higher educational standards.

To complement increased formal preparation requirements, improved ongoing professional development opportunities are required for certified early childhood educators. Overtime, all certified staff would be required, with appropriate support, to complete ongoing professional education requirements to maintain their level of certification.

IV. Development of a common early learning and care post-secondary credential

Another idea to consider for Alberta is that of including a common early learning and care post-secondary credential in the early childhood policy framework. This credential could include those working with young children at all levels from birth to age 6 or 8 years and may provide one vehicle to help develop early childhood specialist teachers who can best lead all parts of an integrated early learning and care system.

The Swedish integrated teaching approach has been well documented, as has the New Zealand model, both of

which are rooted in national policy. There are, as well, a number of Canadian and North American examples of integrated university level early childhood/teacher training programs.

V. Developing appropriate linkages between formal education, position roles and responsibilities and remuneration for early childhood educators

A key idea for consideration for an Alberta early learning and care framework is how to develop appropriate linkages between the education requirements, position responsibilities and remuneration for early childhood educators. Establishing these linkages will take time, and require discussion between the various stakeholders, as well as adjustments in the funding model for service delivery. It is not feasible to require staff to meet higher education requirements, and take on more demanding roles in support of early learning and care, without improved levels of remuneration and benefits.

Possible options to consider include the establishment of province-wide salary scales for staff in regulated child care settings. This approach was adopted some years ago in Manitoba and more recently in PEI. Both provinces link the salary scales to their jurisdictions' approach to base funding of services and to province-wide parent fees, and both provinces worked with the provincial early childhood educators association to develop appropriate scales.

A provincial salary scale for early childhood educators has the potential to both assist in the recruitment of higher qualified staff and to support their retention in the field. The introduction of such a scale would, however, change the 'economics' of providing ELC services and result in significant new public costs. The salary scales for early childhood educators would further need to be determined by comparisons with equivalent scales for related professions (with similar levels of educational preparation, workplace roles, responsibilities and position competencies).

7.0 An early learning and care curriculum framework

A statement of the values and goals that should guide early childhood centres . . . an outline of the knowledge, skills, dispositions and values that children at different ages can be expected to master . . . and pedagogical guidelines outlining the processes through which children achieve these goals, and how educators should support them.(OECD, 2004: 11)

7.1 Introduction

Over the past 20 years, governments worldwide have increased their policy initiatives in early childhood education and childcare (ECEC) particularly in relation to children birth to four. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), through extensive country reviews (OECD, 2004), and three *Starting Strong* reports (OECD, 2001; 2006; 2012) has contributed significantly to this increasing focus on our youngest children. Other international organizations including the UN, UNESCO, UNICEF and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation have similarly added to these ongoing conversations.

As part of its review of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Canada, the OECD (2004) recommended the development of a national framework including clear goals for early learning and care (ELC) as well as ‘pedagogical guidelines’ outlining how children would work towards these goals with the support of early childhood educators. At the time of this recommendation, most OECD countries had curricula or pedagogical frameworks for children 3 to 6 years of age, and since it a number of provinces (including Saskatchewan, British Columbia and New Brunswick) have moved to follow suit.

This section considers the use of curriculum frameworks in ELC. It provides a broad scan of their current use across Canada, including some initial developmental work underway in Alberta, and outlines the major research findings in respect to the rationale for them, their development and use. It concludes with some ideas for how a curriculum framework might form a key integrative element within an Alberta early learning and care framework.

7.2 Curriculum frameworks for early childhood education in Alberta and Canada

Across Canada, and internationally, curricular initiatives have been taken up for our youngest children. The growing practice of creating and using a curriculum framework recognizes, amongst other things, the complementary and complex nature of care, learning

and development; that child care is much more than custodial work; and, that early learning is much more than the ‘pushing down’ of school subjects upon very young children - or ‘schoolification’ as this practice is termed. Learning starts at birth, if not before, and care, learning and development are integral to each other.

In all provinces ELC curriculum frameworks for children below school age are either in place in some form (or for some services) (Langford, 2010), or in a pilot or development phase. These frameworks, in the main, parallel more well-established curricula for kindergarten delivered as part of public education; although the linkages between the two are not well-developed, given the separate evolution of ELC services under education and community or family service ministries.

The Ministry of Family and Children in Quebec was the first to develop a broad ELC framework in 1997 (subsequently revised), followed by Ontario’s Ministry of Children and Youth Services in 2006. Three provinces released frameworks in 2008: New Brunswick’s Department of Social Development, Saskatchewan’s Ministry of Education and British Columbia’s Ministry of Education in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Most recently, the Department of Education and Early Childhood in Prince Edward Island has undertaken work on an early learning framework for children 0 to 4 years of age which forms one element of the larger work underway to integrate ELC services.

These broad curriculum frameworks move away from more narrowly defined curricula. They draw on some of the key understandings of, and approaches to, early learning outlined in the widely considered New Zealand *Te Whariki* framework as well as the ideas around what an early childhood education curriculum framework should include outlined in the OECD’s larger body of work (Bennett, 2004). Individual provinces have emphasized flexibility within their respective frameworks enabling them to be adapted for use at the program level by well-trained early childhood educators while remaining consistent with broader visions, values and principles (Langford, 2010).

The provincial frameworks in place draw on understandings from educational and child development research of how children learn, of how development

shapes learning and the roles of families and social groups in supporting early learning. There are differences in approach between the frameworks. Those in New Brunswick, British Columbia and Saskatchewan are informed more by socio-cultural theories around learning that emphasize children as active, engaged learners; as is the most recent curriculum framework under development in Prince Edward Island. The earlier Ontario framework (*Early Learning for Every Child*) takes a more developmental approach.

There are common content and process areas across the frameworks that include guiding principles, visions and/or values; the representation of children as active learners, with agency identified as a key component of the image of children; a strong emphasis on the quality of interactions and relationships between adults and children, children and children, and adults and adults; the importance of play; the environment as a third teacher; reference to the Convention on the Rights of Children and/or children’s rights as citizens; and, in spite of often-significant jurisdictional issues, a recognition of the unique place of the First Nations in Canada and our collective responsibilities to them.

The more recent frameworks place an emphasis on broad development goals for young children rather than the more traditionally used developmental outcomes. The New Brunswick framework, for example, identifies four goals: well-being; play and playfulness; communication and literacies; and diversity and social responsibilities. These are emphasized to move away the focus on developmental outcomes as well as deficit-based assessment (Whitty, 2009). The British Columbia framework, informed by the work in New Brunswick, similarly has four main areas of early learning: well-being and belonging; exploration and creativity; languages and literacy; and social responsibility and diversity. By contrast, the frameworks in Quebec, Saskatchewan and Ontario place a greater emphasis on developmental domains linked to stages of development (Langford, 2010); although the Saskatchewan and Quebec frameworks also draw on broader understandings of children’s learning and the social and cultural contexts in which it takes place.

Perhaps, not surprisingly, most of the frameworks acknowledge, in differing ways, the diversity of cultures in children and their families, including references

in the New Brunswick framework to rural and urban populations (Government of New Brunswick, 2008). The British Columbia framework makes reference to ‘geographic, social, cultural, linguistic and economic diversity’ (Government of British Columbia, 2008). The Saskatchewan curriculum framework identifies the need for culturally appropriate practice (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008), while the New Brunswick, Ontario and British Columbia frameworks each makes reference to Aboriginal children and their cultural identities.

The implementation of the frameworks varies (as well as the strategies which support their implementation) – with those in New Brunswick, British Columbia and Saskatchewan still relatively new to the field of practice. The longer standing Quebec curriculum is in place province-wide; although the support for early educators to assist in its use is considered by some commentators to be not well-developed (Langford, 2010). In Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Education sponsors workshops in partnership with the Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association (SECA) to support early childhood educators’ use of the curriculum framework. The project team that developed the New Brunswick curriculum framework created specific resources to support its implementation across the province as well as professional development for staff. Assessing the overall level of early childhood educators’ use of curriculum frameworks across Canada, however, remains difficult given the absence of reliable data on program practice (Langford, 2010).

One characteristic of the various curriculum frameworks (including the more narrowly applied guide in Manitoba) is their separation from Kindergarten curricula. In all of the provinces in which early learning curriculum frameworks are in place there are also parallel kindergarten curricula or curriculum guides. To date, only British Columbia appears to have developed a specific resource that links the two (Government of British Columbia, 2009).

In Alberta, there is no overarching curriculum framework for ELC below the mandatory school age. While the child care regulations state that programs must be developmentally appropriate, and the provincial accreditation program includes standards around program planning and strategies for program

implementation, there is no broad guide that informs practice.

A small number of service providers, including those that highlight a particular approach to early learning (for example, a Montessori model and Head Start programs), draw on other curriculum resources. The YMCA has also undertaken work on a curriculum guide for its programs while the Edmonton Catholic School Board has developed program/curriculum guides for their ELC programs informed by research and practice from Reggio Emilia. The demonstration child care program at Grant MacEwan University has similarly drawn on curriculum innovations from a number of approaches including Reggio Emilia, *Te Whariki* (New Zealand) and the New Brunswick curriculum framework. These and other cases aside, however, most ELC programs draw on more informal program or practice guides.

Kindergarten, as part of the public education system, follows a provincial curriculum (*The Kindergarten Program Statement – Government of Alberta, 2008*). The statement includes guiding principles for programming as well as a program organizational structure that outlines learner expectations in seven learning areas. The learning areas are broad and include socio-cultural areas (for example, citizenship and identity, and environment and community awareness) as well as more traditional areas of focus (for example, early literacy and numeracy).

The Ministry of Human Services has recently supported the development of a provincial curriculum framework resource for ELC. The ministry has contracted with Grant MacEwan University in Edmonton and Mount Royal University in Calgary to adapt the New Brunswick Curriculum Framework–English (NBCF-E, 2008) for use in Alberta. GMU is leading the adaptation of the framework with MRU selecting the pilot sites and developing the pilot processes and protocols. The two universities will work jointly on a supporting document that brings the draft curriculum framework and the piloting process together.

At this point, Alberta Human Services anticipates that the framework will be drafted for use in a range of ELC programs. Alberta Education has responded positively to the idea that the curriculum framework link with the principles of the Alberta *Kindergarten Program Statement* which has the potential to support

early learning continuities for children and families. A final goal around the development of the curriculum framework is to engage various ELC stakeholders in its discussion and consideration. This will help to position the framework as a shared, 'living resource' accessible to a range of stakeholders.

7.3 Research and practice around the development and implementation of curriculum frameworks

The growing emphasis on early childhood policies, programs, and practices, has resulted in an extensive body of research on what constitutes exemplary curricula for infants, toddlers, and young children. Within this research, two key practices are highlighted: first, the articulation of broad based learning goals, and second, attention to the social and cultural contexts of children's lives, and that of their families. An open-ended framework, rather than a more prescriptive approach to early learning is seen to help early childhood educators work more effectively with young children and their families, supporting a broader range of pedagogical approaches.

The intent within a 'social-cultural' curriculum framework approach is to highlight and respect the capacities, passions, knowledge, and creativity of children, families and child care educators; to embed ELC in the context of everyday, local knowledge and resources; to remain responsive to children's individual, social, and cultural experiences, and those of their families; and to emphasize social inclusion practices that support diversity and equity (Ashton, Hunt and White, 2008).

The thinking of policy makers, researchers and educators around ELC curricula has been informed by the extensive work of the OECD, particularly the multiple country reviews on Early Childhood Education and Care. Recommendations from the Early Childhood Education and Care unit of the OECD on the structure of curriculum frameworks for young children emphasize the need for a statement of principles and values to guide staff working with infants, toddlers, and young children; a short outline of the content and nature of the dispositions, values, knowledge, and skills that children

can be expected to learn at different ages and across broad developmental goals; pedagogical guidelines outlining the process through which children learn; and, a summary of program standards, that is, how curriculum can be supported through quality features such as ratios and qualifications (Bennett, 2004).

The *Starting Strong: Curricula and Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education and Care* report (OECD, 2004), brings together five curriculum outlines that exemplify promising policies, provisions and practices for young children. The countries and locales highlighted with exemplary curricula and pedagogies include Belgium, High Scope, New Zealand, Reggio Emilia and Sweden. The key features or approaches emphasized include the following:

- The *experiential nature* of children's learning (Belgium) and the key role of *interactions* in supporting their *well-being, involvement and contribution*;
- Active learning through *creation, expression and representation through languages, literacies, visual art, music and movement* (USA High Scope);
- The *hundred languages of children* (Reggio Emilia) reflected in children's *relationships* with the people, places and materials in their local environments, the *documentation of their learnings* for the purpose of making their thinking visible and for engaging with families and communities about learning;
- The vital role of *responsive and reciprocal relations for children's learning*, and a bi-lingual, bi-cultural framework that uses *learning stories as a means to document children's learning*, to create connections with home and community, and to evaluate and plan for time, space and materials (New Zealand); and
- The Swedish framework's emphases on the joint creation of knowledge, the importance of play, the influence of the child, and values such as *democracy and social justice*.

The recent Canadian curriculum frameworks (for example, New Brunswick and British Columbia) incorporate many of the key features or approaches highlighted above. There is a shift in the image of children with their strengths, interests, and passions as the focus of care, learning and growth. In re-thinking

the relationship between learning and development, Hatch (2010) observes that these curriculum frameworks place the emphasis on children's potential, recognizing that "learning leads development" (p.259) rather than focusing on measuring learning against a set of developmental milestones.

7.4 Challenges around the development and implementation of curriculum frameworks

The development and implementation of curriculum frameworks for our youngest children is complex, however, and not without challenges. Researchers raise some key cautions that merit consideration – including 'schoolification', the need to incorporate broader literacies, and the difficulties of implementing and supporting curriculum frameworks in service environments with modest resources and infrastructure.

Schoolification

The assumption that the downward extension of school-like practices can prepare all children to enter school with a high level of particular skills is considered incorrect by many early childhood education researchers. Many skills 'in demand' by schools are also considered as counter-productive to the long-term growth, development and scholastic achievement of young children, and may also contribute to the marginalization of minority children as well as children with special needs (Nason and Whitty, 2007). A more narrow focus on ELC as 'school readiness' can limit, or stifle children's early learning and place blame on children and their families if the anticipated outcomes are not realized (Nason and Whitty, 2007)

Support for a broad range of literacies

An explicit focus on narrower understandings of literacies is further seen to overlook the many ways in which children communicate and make sense of their worlds. Multimodal literacies recognize that "young children express fluent understandings through combinations of language, gesture, gaze, and body movement, and how their choice of modes is shaped by social and cultural processes (Flewitt, 2008, p. 215).

Such a broad definition of literacies recognizes the richness of children and educators' communications, and values the different ways in which children and adults interact (Carr, 2001; Lee 2006; Rinaldi, 2006; Taguchi, 2007; Bearne, 2009). This approach challenges the narrower 'unimodal definition of literacy', and encourages early educators to engage children and their families in many different ways (Flewitt, 2008). The recently developed New Brunswick curriculum framework emphasizes these multimodal literacies (Rose and Whitty, 2010).

Implementing and Supporting Curriculum Frameworks

A number of researchers further speak to the challenges of implementing curriculum frameworks in ELC settings with limited infrastructure and resources. Bennett (2004) outlines three operational 'conditions' necessary for the successful implementation of a curriculum framework: first, the presence of well-trained, motivated staff who are appropriately supported to understand and implement the framework; second, the appropriate infrastructure including staffing, learning materials and physical site resources; and third appropriate systems to provide information on quality and service delivery.

As other commentators note, these conditions are not common in many ELC settings (including those across Canada) (Japel, Tremblay and Cote, 2005; Friendly and Prentice, 2009). Moss (2006) specifically notes the challenge of implementing curriculum frameworks that require more critical practice skills in environments in which staff have lower levels of formal education and training. He cautions that the effective use of such frameworks requires staff to approach ELC in different ways from those with which they may be familiar and comfortable.

Drawing on these findings, the implementation strategies for the curriculum frameworks in New Zealand and in New Brunswick paid specific attention to the need for professional support for service delivery staff as well as ongoing professional development. Both strategies further placed an emphasis on consultations with stakeholders (in the initial and ongoing curriculum-making) as well as the development of networks and alliances to engage stakeholders in the curriculum framework. These strategies form part of the work

underway on an Alberta curriculum framework.

While recognizing these challenges, a number of commentators see a curriculum framework as a key integrative element that can move services closer together and better connect community-based and school-based ones. (Moss, 2007; Centre for Community Child Health, 2008). Yaga, Bennett and Moss (2010) note that one aspect of joining up prior to school services for children and their families with public education is the role that curriculum or similar guidelines can play as an integrative tool. A curriculum framework is further seen to have the potential to support families' role in early learning in the home, to provide information on children's care, learning and development, and to serve as a resource for staff in other programs and services designed for young children and their families.

7.5 Ideas for consideration as part of an Alberta early learning and care framework

The following section outlines some possible ideas for consideration around the inclusion of a curriculum framework as one element of a proposed Alberta early learning and care framework. The ideas are sketched in preliminary form and intended to generate discussion. The list of ideas is not exhaustive and other further ideas also likely merit consideration.

I. The development of an Alberta early learning and care curriculum framework

The development of an Alberta curriculum framework has the potential to form a key integrative element that moves community-based early learning services closer together (in terms of their program structure and approach to early learning) and which better connects them with school-based services. A common curriculum framework that draws on research findings could further contribute to improvements in the quality of programs and services and provide children and their families with some continuity of early learning experiences as they transition between services. Over time, and with appropriate implementation support, it would be

reasonable to anticipate that all regulated ELC services (that receive public funding) be required to use a common curriculum resource.

II. Support for the implementation and use of a framework

The successful implementation and use of a provincial curriculum framework will require significant public support for professional development for staff in regulated ELC services as well as the addition of infrastructure and supporting resources consistent with improved program practice. Professional development for staff could be provided through the existing infrastructure organizations (including Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement, Alberta Child Care Association and Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services) with additional public funding support.

Existing educational programs and training institutes would also require some supports to prepare early childhood educators to work with a broad curriculum framework.

III. Integrating approaches to early learning and care in school and community settings

A curriculum framework for ELC could be used to more closely align community-based and school-based services. The use of an ELC curriculum framework might be anticipated to inform practice in kindergarten programs as may the key principles and program areas in the Kindergarten Program Statement inform the ELC curriculum framework.

Flowing out of these connections, there may be the opportunity to develop common training and joint professional support vehicles for staff in both community and school-based settings (early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers).

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