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In partnership with the Read to Me! Program

Early Childhood Literacy Programs in Canada:

A National Survey

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Foreword

The evidence supporting early literacy is solid.

Research tells us to start early, empower parents, and engage children in literacy-rich activities. Yet there is a huge gap between what we know and what we do in Canada. We know that investing in early literacy is an investment in the future of Canada, yet there is no national strategy to ensure that every Canadian child is welcomed into the world with the message that literacy is their birthright.

The literacy landscape of Canada is dotted with programs often working in isolation and struggling with shared challenges. Over the last decade exciting new programs have been launched, but unfortunately we have also lost important programs like Newfoundland's Books for Babies because of a lack of sustainable funding. For those of us on the front lines there is little opportunity to share resources and expertise, so we often find ourselves "re-inventing the wheel" with the creation of program models and materials.

When the Read to Me! Nova Scotia Family Literacy program was launched in 2002, I looked to other early literacy groups across the country for guidance to help shape our program. I was surprised to find how difficult it was to find and connect with programs doing similar work. There was no national body to bring us all together. When I did find other groups I was struck by the similarity of our challenges: finding sustainable funding, sourcing high quality books and resources, and accessing and conducting research. I felt there was much to be gained by connecting across Canada to build a stronger voice for early literacy nationally.

In the spring of 2010 I met with Dr. Vivian Howard, Professor at Dalhousie's School of Information Management to discuss the possibility of conducting a national survey of early literacy programs. Dr. Howard was enthusiastic about the project and brought on two Dalhousie School of Information Management students, Deirdre O'Reilly and Naomi Balla-Boudreau. Deirdre and Naomi worked diligently to gather information from a variety of early literacy book gift and reading programs across Canada.

I hope this survey will help programs connect so we can begin to share research, resources and expertise. By connecting the dots and working together we can build a strong national voice to advocate for early literacy in Canada.

Carol McDougall

Director, Read to Me! Nova Scotia Family Literacy Program

Table of Contents

*To view Appendix D and E - List of Survey Respondents and the Annotated Bibliography, please visit **readtome.ca** and click on the Research link*

List of Figures

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of early childhood literacy programs in Canada by identifying programs and gathering information on their operations, programming and challenges. Targeted programs include those that offer literacy resources and/or programs to families with children under the age of five, and include book gift and reading programs. A literature review and national survey were used to generate data, determine trends and identify gaps between research and practice. This research project is a joint initiative between Read to Me! Nova Scotia Family Literacy Program and Dalhousie University's School of Information Management.

Background

Literacy

It has been established that literacy is linked to health, employability, and income (Canadian Language & Literacy Research Network [CLLRN], 2009; Grenier, 2008; McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). While there are many types and definitions of literacy, UNESCO (2004) proposed the following as a working definition to encapsulate the diverse literacies needed to function in today's society:

> Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society (p.13).

Additionally, the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) has defined literacy as: "the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community – to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential" (as cited in the CLLRN, 2009, p. 11). According to the OECD definition of literacy more than 42% of Canadians do not have adequate literacy skills for succeeding in Canadian society (CLLRN, 2009, p. 11).

Family and Emergent Literacy

Because a large portion of early learning takes place within the home environment, family literacy has a key role in early childhood literacy and development. In addition to intellectual learning, family literacy initiatives should promote social and emotional learning (CLLRN, 2009, p.24). The goals of family literacy programs include helping "parents understand the importance of the home environment in developing children's language and literacy skills, helping parents acquire learning resources for use with their children, teach[ing] parents specific activities that promote language and literacy development and build[ing] literacy skills of the parents "(CLLRN, 2009, p. 24). As noted by Pelletier, "[w]hen parents have knowledge about early literacy development, they are able to provide home environments that are rich with meaningful and embedded literacy experiences for preschool children" (2008, p. 9).

Methods

Literature review

A literature review was conducted to develop a foundational understanding of early childhood literacy development, as well as factors which influence practice. Topics included brain and language development, family and shared reading, health literacy, policy and economics, and research and practice. The literature review was also used to identify trends, including best practices and challenges facing families and early childhood literacy practitioners. Many articles discussed the significant gap between what is known and what is practiced. To read the literature review, see Appendix A.

Survey

The online survey was developed in partnership with the Read to Me! Nova Scotia Family Literacy Program, a hospital-based program which provides books and literacy resources to every child born in Nova Scotia. The survey was comprised of forty-nine questions, both qualitative and quantitative, that covered five key areas: program details, staffing, funding, outreach and partnerships, and research practices. The survey concluded with an opportunity for participants to share the primary challenges and successes their program has experienced, as well as space to make additional comments. The survey was created online using Opinio software. In order to test the accessibility and relevance of the questions a pilot survey was distributed to three programs that reflected the diversity of programming in Canada. These three programs were asked to complete the survey and give feedback. While the pilot did not result in significant changes it provided an opportunity to receive feedback from practitioners. To view the survey questions, see Appendix B.
A French translation of the survey was prepared and distributed to French programs operating across Canada, and approximately 7% of surveys were returned in French. Given the bilingual nature of many communities across Canada, however, the language of return does not necessarily represent the language of programming offered by respondents. In total 38% indicated that they target francophone families.

Population sample

Participants for the survey were identified through online searches and professional networks. Government and organization websites were the primary resources for contact information. The survey targeted programs and organizations that offered literacy and related resources and/or programming to families with young children, specifically children up to five years of age. Primary contacts were encouraged to share the survey link with other early childhood literacy program representatives. The survey link was distributed to approximately 200 contacts. In addition to those contacted by the research team, many individuals passed the survey link on to other early literacy practitioners. When the survey closed 55 respondents had completed the survey in full. An additional three respondents completed over 50% of the survey questions and were included in the final analysis, resulting in a total of 58 surveys. Thus our final return rate was approximately 29%. A list of survey respondents can be seen in Appendix C. Participants were able to quit the survey at any time. As a result some questions have fewer than 58 responses. Additionally, some questions asked participants to select multiple answers as needed; as a result some questions have more than 58 responses.

Survey respondents were asked to provide information regarding the geographic scope of their programs. Because the primary goal for this research was to gain a broad understanding of early childhood literacy programs in Canada, it was important that the survey sample included responses from across the country. Although the majority of complete surveys were returned from the province of Ontario, there were respondents from each province. While only one survey was returned from the territories, the program that completed the survey operates in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Figure 1 indicates the number of surveys returned from each province.
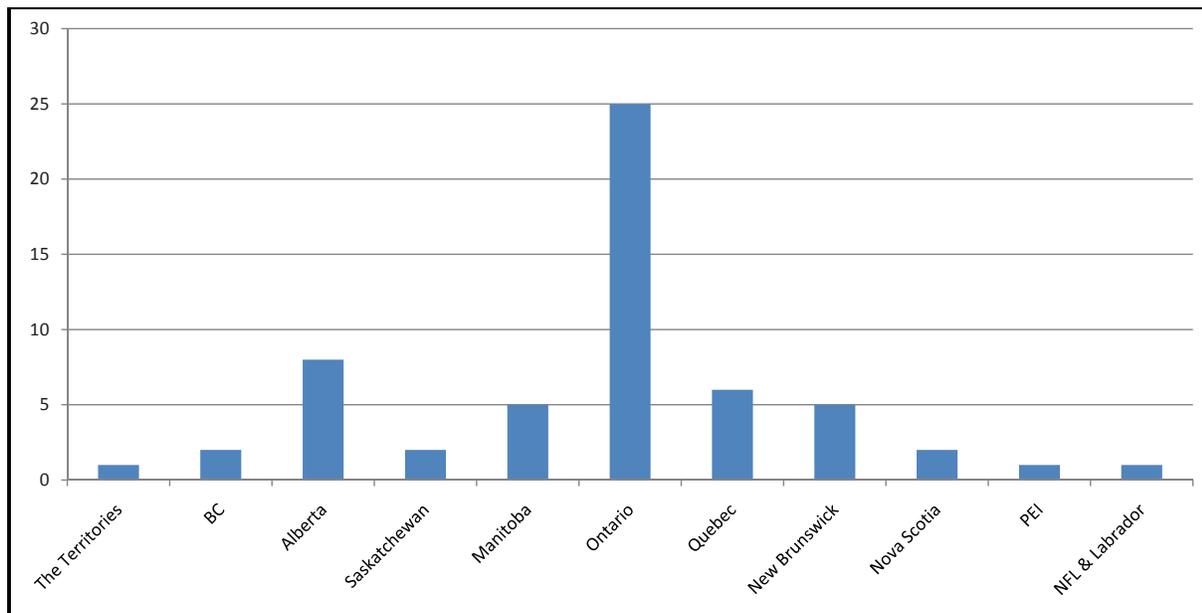
Figure 1: Survey distribution by province and territory

In addition to provincial distribution, survey respondents were asked to indicate if their program operates in urban or rural settings. Of the 58 respondents 34% (20) indicated that the region they serve is primarily urban, 34% (20) indicated the region they serve is both urban and rural, and 31% (18) indicated the region they serve is primarily rural. While the majority of respondents noted that their program operates at the municipal level, 3% (2) indicated national operations.

Ethics
Ethics approval was obtained from Dalhousie University and the School of Information Management. See Appendix D for a copy of the ethics application. There were no significant hazards associated with participating in the survey. The survey took between 20 and 30 minutes to complete and participants were able to save their responses and return to complete the survey at a later time. Additionally, participants did not have to complete every question in order to have their survey considered complete. A statement on consent and confidentiality was provided in a preface to the survey. Participants were able to indicate the level of anonymity they wanted regarding the data they contributed. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to give permission to Read to Me! to access survey data after the completion of this research to support the development of an early childhood literacy network. Participants were informed of their right to retract their contributions from the research. As part of their role as supervisors to this research project Vivian Howard, academic advisor from Dalhousie University, Carol McDougall, Director and Shanda LaRamee-Jones, Provincial Coordinator of Read to Me!, were advised regarding data analysis and therefore had limited access to the raw data.

Limitations
This study does not offer an exhaustive list but a broad survey of a variety of programs. The study captures basic information on size, scope, and model. Because this study was designed to generate a broad understanding of early childhood literacy programs operating in Canada, there is a limit to the breadth of conclusions that can be made. While a sample of 58 programs fulfils the goals of this research, generalizations may not be applicable to all programs in Canada. Still, results provide insight into the variety of operations and challenges faced by programs and highlight important opportunities for future studies.

Key Findings

Overview of programs
In order to garner an understanding of the type of programs that exist in Canada, we asked survey respondents a series of questions regarding their means of program delivery and the populations that they serve.

Program goals
In addition to providing books and literacy resources many respondents strive to connect families with local libraries, foster a culture and love of reading, and promote lifelong learning, for both children and their families. When discussing early childhood literacy programs in Canada it is important to stress that while many programs provide resources and services for young children and their families, the goals of these programs extend to the health of their entire communities.

Target populations
Because early childhood literacy programs and the communities they serve are diverse, the majority of respondents indicated multiple target populations. Figure 2 illustrates the range of populations served. Among the 24 respondents that indicated that they serve a variety of language and cultural groups, there was great diversity of populations, including Arabic, Chinese, Spanish and Inuttut. It is likely that the diversity in programming corresponds with the diversity within the communities being served. Programs targeting special needs and other at risk populations also specified families facing various barriers, including:

- economic
- social
- geographic (isolation)
- educational

Respondents also indicated that their programming serves those new to Canada, families dealing with stress, and families referred by public health and other community partners.
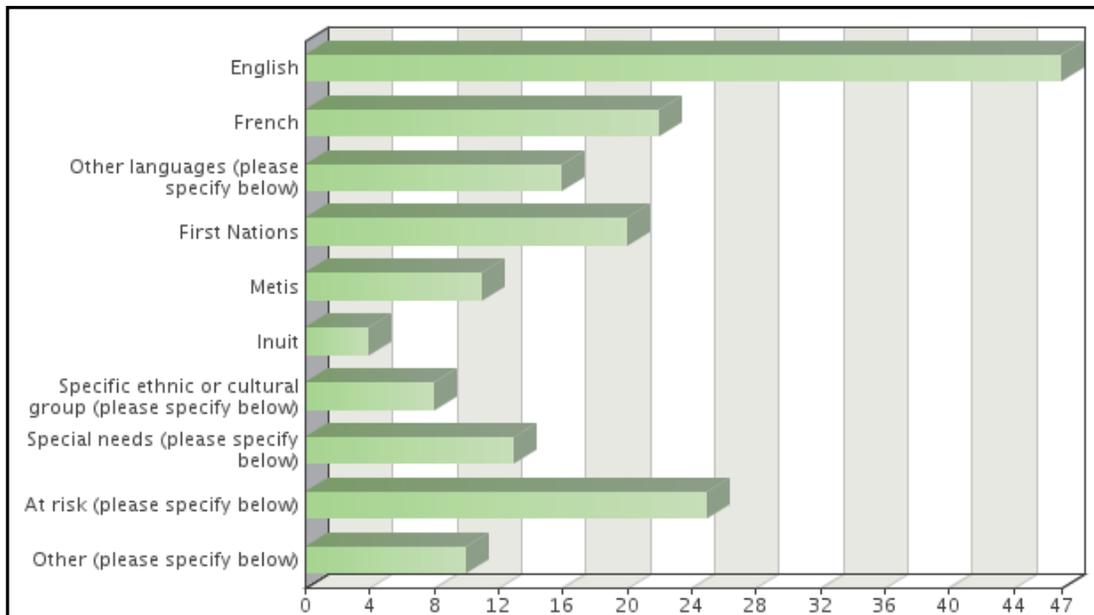

Figure 2: Target populations

While there was a range in age groups targeted by programs, the majority provided programming for children between six months and five years of age. Even then many respondents indicated flexibility regarding the age of program participants. This practice coincides with trends present in the literature review; Anderson & Morrison (2007) noted that even when programs are targeted to a specific age families often bring older and younger children. Because of this trend flexibility is an asset when working to meet the needs of a community.

Primary point of contact

Survey results showed a range in primary point of contact. While 31% (18) connect with their community through a library, 36% (21) indicated that their primary point of contact was not listed in the survey options. This latter category of respondents listed a variety of community organizations and centers, email, referrals, churches, immigrant services, adult learning council, service clubs, street, and door-to-door contact as their primary means of reaching their participants. Of the remaining respondents 10% (6) indicated that hospitals/medical centres are their primary point of contact, 8% (5) indicated public health, 10% (6) resource centres, and 2% (1) school boards.
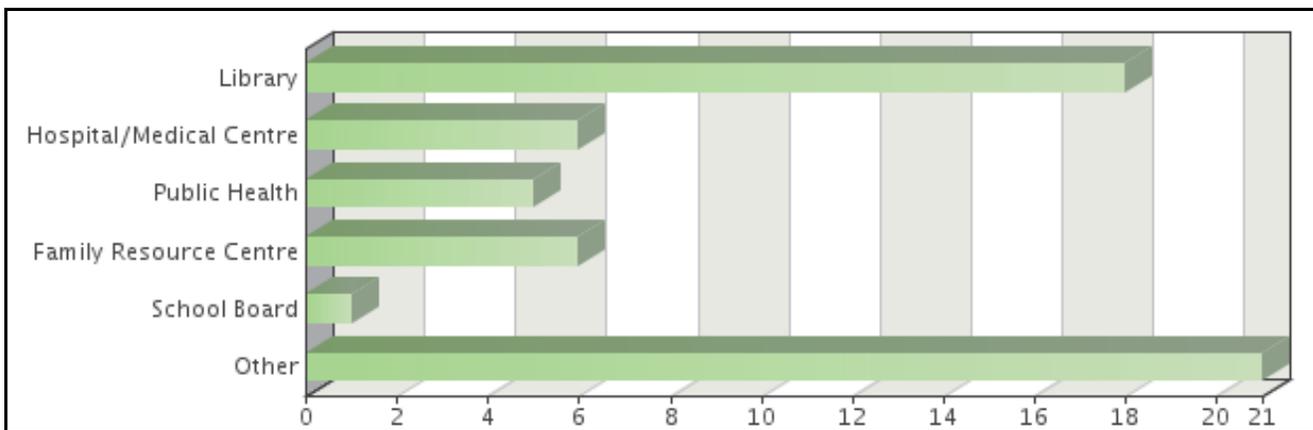
Figure 3: Primary point of contact

While these numbers underline some trends in points of contact for early childhood literacy programs, they also indicate that early childhood literacy programs connect with their communities through a variety of access points.

Type of programming

For the purposes of this survey we divided programming into two categories: book gift programs and reading programs. Given the diversity of programs surveyed, however, respondents could select multiple categories to best describe their work. Of the 54 programs that responded to this question, 46% (25) include book gifts as part of their programming and 59 (32) offer reading programs. Of the book gift programs, 52 (13) target newborns, 16% (4) target children between one and five years of age and 32% (8) target both age groups. Almost 33% (8) of book gift programs cite health-based centres (hospital, medical centre or public health) as their primary point of contact with the public. An additional 20% (5) name libraries as their primary point of contact. A large proportion of programs are reading-based. While some target specific age groups, most respondents offer reading programs to all three age groups; 69% (22) respondents offer reading programs for infants under 18 months, 78% (25) offer programs for toddlers aged 18 months to three years, and 94% (30) provide programs to preschoolers aged to five years.

5

Some respondents that selected "other" to describe their type of programming delivered book gift or reading programs for age groups that did not fit within our categories. Others described oral-based programming or programming oriented towards entire families, including rhyming programs, an interactive program for fathers, and a program that creates story packages with parents while providing child care.
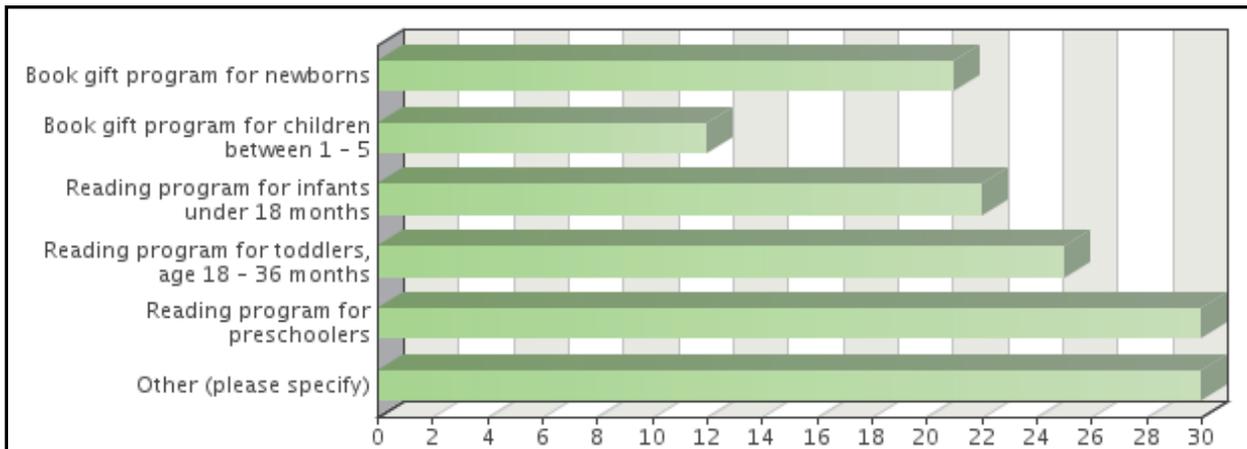
Figure 4: Type of programming offered

Materials

Survey respondents described using a range of program materials, undoubtedly reflective of the variety of programming approaches across Canada. Naturally, books are a core component for most programs. Many described particular attributes of books used, including:

- quality
- age-appropriateness
- geographically-specific or Canadian authors
- specific book formats such as board books, bath books and books that feature sound

Nearly 33% (19) of the 57 respondents specified that program participants keep their books, and another 25% (14) lend out books. Many respondents also listed program materials that relate to traditional storytime activities, such oral storytelling, rhymes, songs, CDs, DVDs, fingerplays, puppets, feltboards, crafts, toys and games.

The wide-ranging and diverse nature of program materials being used suggests that staff and volunteers are creative. Doing so is not without its challenges, however. A few programs noted the lack of quality and affordable materials, as well as difficulty obtaining French language materials. Importantly, most respondents indicated that they also provide literacy resources for parents. For the most part these resources fall into three categories:

- literacy information for parents
- information that connects parents to other community resources
- suggested activities for home, including craft ideas, song lyrics, and recommended book lists

The prevalence of these resources as a core component of program materials demonstrates how early literacy programs are at once direct service providers as well as a key point of access to information, support, and resources for families meeting their children's developmental needs. Some programs surveyed also listed opportunities for mentorship, access to resource people and the provision of snacks as program materials.

Resource sharing

Despite the diversity in approaches to early childhood literacy a significant amount of resource-sharing occurs. When asked about program materials many respondents named specific literacy resources developed by the programs themselves, in conjunction with other community partners, or resources based on templates used by larger organizations such as the American Library Association's (ALA) Every Child Ready to Read program (ECRR). Almost 75% (41) of respondents indicated that they share the resources that they create with other programs. Although respondents were not asked to specify which programs they share resources with, it appears that sharing occurs across the board. The 41 programs that share resources were evenly split between rural (29% [12]), urban (34% [14]) and both rural and urban (37% [15]) regions, between health-based initiatives (22% [9]) and library programs (24% [10]), and between book gift programs (54% [22]) and reading programs (49% [21]). Although not of direct correlation, when the partnerships of programs who share resources were examined, 73% (30) indicated that they partnered with libraries (of which 83% [25] had not selected libraries as their primary point of contact with their population), 83% (34) partnered with daycare centres and/or family resource centres, and 66% (27) partnered with health-based initiatives. These high numbers suggest both creative uses of limited resources and that various informal and regional networks of practitioners exist. Indeed, programs cite a number of diverse partnerships. The Literacy Action Plan, for example, partners with the Children's Museum, the University of Western Ontario, Ontario Early Years, before and after school care programs, Frontier College, N'Amerind Friendship Centre, Learning Disabilities Association, city staff and community resource centres. Further investigation into resources could help support the process of resource-sharing on a national scale.
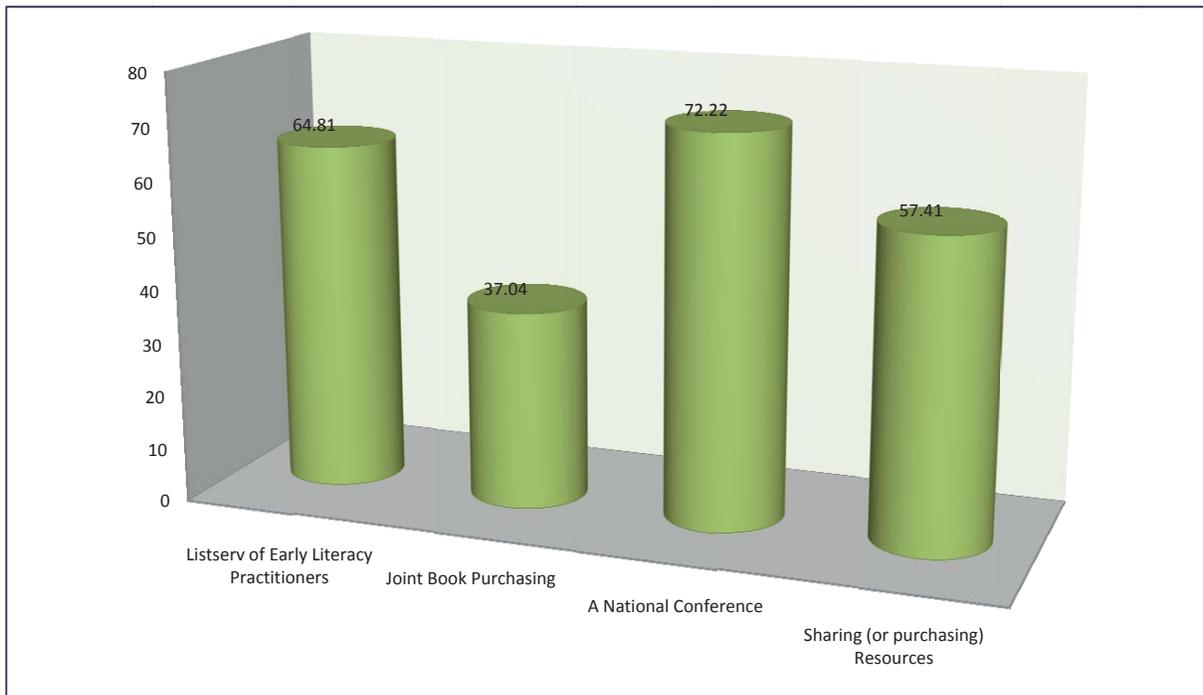
Figure 5: Interest in collaborating with other programs

Despite notable sharing of resources, only 5% (3) of respondents currently make joint book purchases. However, twenty programs did indicate their interest in joint book purchases. As joint book purchases could significantly reduce program costs, further research into joint book purchases would be beneficial. Over 72% (39) of the 54 respondents noted interest in attending a national conference of early literacy practitioners, 65% (35) would join a listserv/mailing list, and 57% (31) would consider sharing or purchasing resources

from other programs. Certainly programs are interested in connecting with their colleagues and building common resources. Not all programs who are interested in joint book purchases were interested in other forms of collaboration. This suggests the need to provide diverse opportunities for professionals to collaborate based on varying program structures and needs.

Governance model

The most common governance model used by programs was a board of directors, with 47% (27) of respondents indicating this model. While partnership models were also common (16% [9]), many respondents indicated other models. Some of the governance models specified include steering committees, subgroups and teams, library boards, municipal government, as well as combinations thereof.

Staffing

There was a wide range in the number of full-time staff members, from zero up to 105. While some respondents replied on behalf of individual programs others responded on behalf of larger organizations. The respondent that indicated 105 full-time employeesrepresented a provincial library system. Given the limitations   of the survey it is not possible to determine whether these numbers reflect the total number of staff involved in early literacy programming or a broader spectrum of responsibilities. While the average from the 55 respondents was 6.68 full-time staff members, 40% (22) of the programs employ five or fewer full-time staff members and 36% (20) have no full-time employees. There was similarly a wide range in the number of part-time staff members, with numbers ranging from zero to 105. While the average of the 55 respondents was 6.06 part-time staff, 49% (27) employ five or fewer part-time staff members and 29% (16) indicated that their program has no part-time staff. The variety of responses relating to staffing may be reflective of the diverse nature of programs, in both size and structure. Libraries, for example, reported an average of 17 full-time staff members and 14 part-time. Health-based initiatives, however, reported an average of 0.5 full-time staff members and 0.8 part-time.

Volunteers

Almost 64% (37) of the 58 respondents indicated that their programs utilize volunteers. While volunteers take many roles within early childhood literacy programs, the majority of respondents noted that volunteers support the preparation and execution of programming. Of the 37 programs using volunteers, 35 provided a breakdown in the number of volunteer hours given per week. While the range was large, from zero to over 3,000 hours in a week, 77% (27) of the 35 respondents stated that their program uses ten or fewer hours of volunteer help per week.

Training

Ongoing training for staff and volunteers is important for the development and maintenance of effective literacy, language and educational programming. Of the 57 respondents, 81% (47) indicated that staff and/or volunteers receive some form of ongoing training. Some programs noted that early childhood education (ECE) training is required of staff. The content of training provided by programs varies, and may incude general orientations to program resources and facilities for new staff and/or volunteers, an introduction to family literacy and child development theories, and/or information on particular models or "best practices". Other programs listed specific skills development such as event management, fundraising, and/or research and evaluation.

Training formats were similarly varied, ranging from informal training (brainstorming or research sharing at staff meetings, on-the-job experience, or by request) to a more formal approach that may include specific modules or resources, manuals, or training directed at an individual need. Many programs utilize professional development opportunities such as workshops and conferences, internal or external mentoring, or other learning opportunities that arise with parent organizations (libraries or hospitals) or partner

organizations. Three respondents noted cost as a barrier to participating in formal training opportunities. In general, programs appear resourceful in forming partnerships or skills-sharing in order to provide relevant training for staff and volunteers.

Research
It is well established in the literature that there is a significant gap between research and practice with regard to early childhood literacy and development. While research is vital to the continued development of early childhood literacy initiatives, research scenarios rarely reflect the diversity of realities experienced by families and early childhood literacy practitioners (Dunst & Trivette, 2009). Literacy programs and organizations may conduct or participate in research to develop greater understanding of community need and to lessen the gap between what is known and what is practiced in their community. When asked, 34% (20) of respondents indicated that their program has conducted research. Only 10% (6), however, indicated that their program has a longitudinal research strategy. One of the key challenges of measuring the impact of early literacy programming is that many benefits may not be seen for 20 years (Mustard, & Young, 2007). Longitudinal research is therefore important for long-term development of literacy initiatives. In addition, only 12% (7) of respondents have published their research, which indicates a need to increase knowledge transfer.
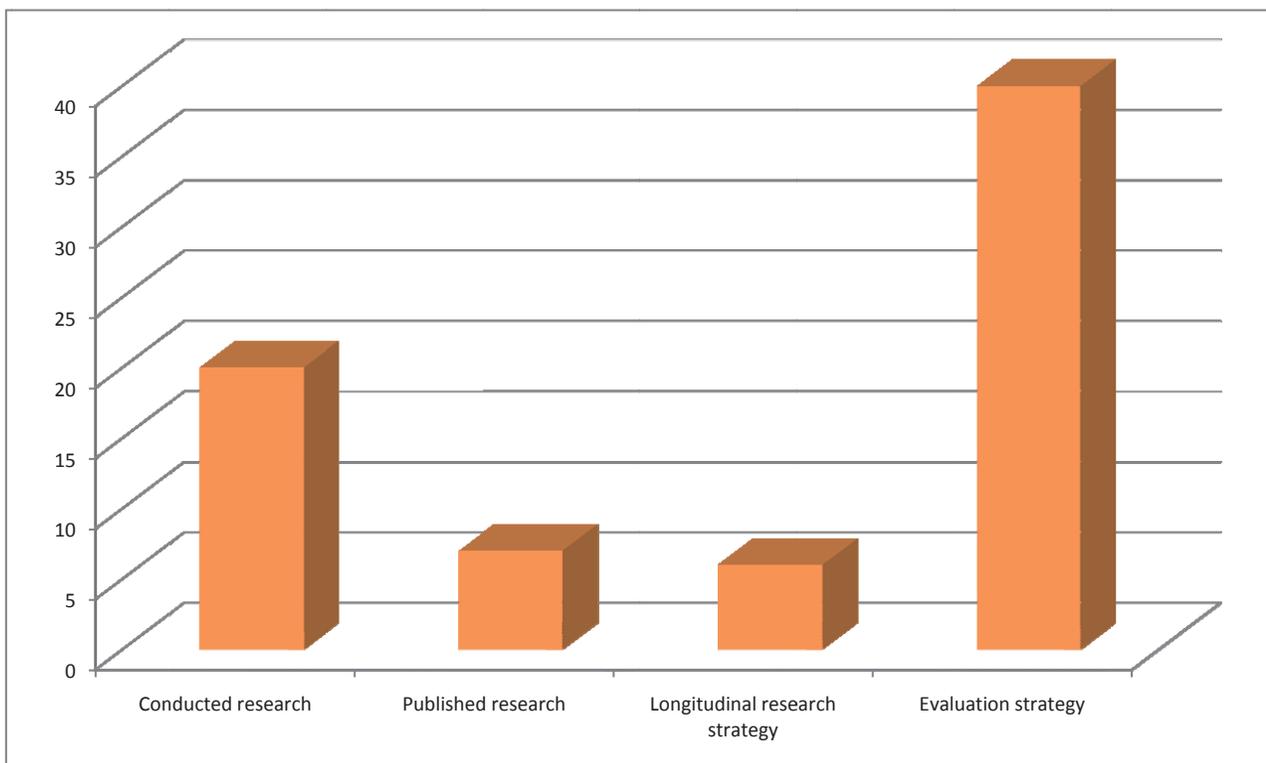
Figure 6: Program research

Annual Reports and Program Evaluation
Annual reports and program evaluations are also key components of research for many early childhood literacy programs. Approximately 62% (36) of 55 survey respondents stated that their program produces an annual report, and 69% (40) indicated that their program has an evaluation strategy.

While research and evaluation are central to insuring that programs and resources are effective at reaching set goals and the needs of a community, there are many factors that shape a program's ability to conduct or participate in research. When respondents were asked what factors impact their ability or interest in undertaking research the most frequently cited factor was time and human resources, followed by financial

resources. Respondents also noted a lack of expertise and the exclusion of research from their program's mandate.

As mentioned previously, partnerships are an important part of many early childhood literacy programs. Research partnerships help programs that may not have the resources to conduct research. While partnerships with colleges and universities were the most common form of research partnership noted by respondents, community organizations, hospitals, health care facilities and educational organizations were also noted.

Funding

Survey responses indicate that there is a great range in funding sources among early childhood literacy programs. Of the 55 programs which responded to this question, 45% (25) receive provincial grants, 31% (17) receive municipal grants and 44% (24) rely on donations as funding sources. An additional 33% (18) of respondents selected "other" as funding source.   While some who selected "other" mentioned corporate funding, the majority stated that their funding comes from a combination of government and library sources.
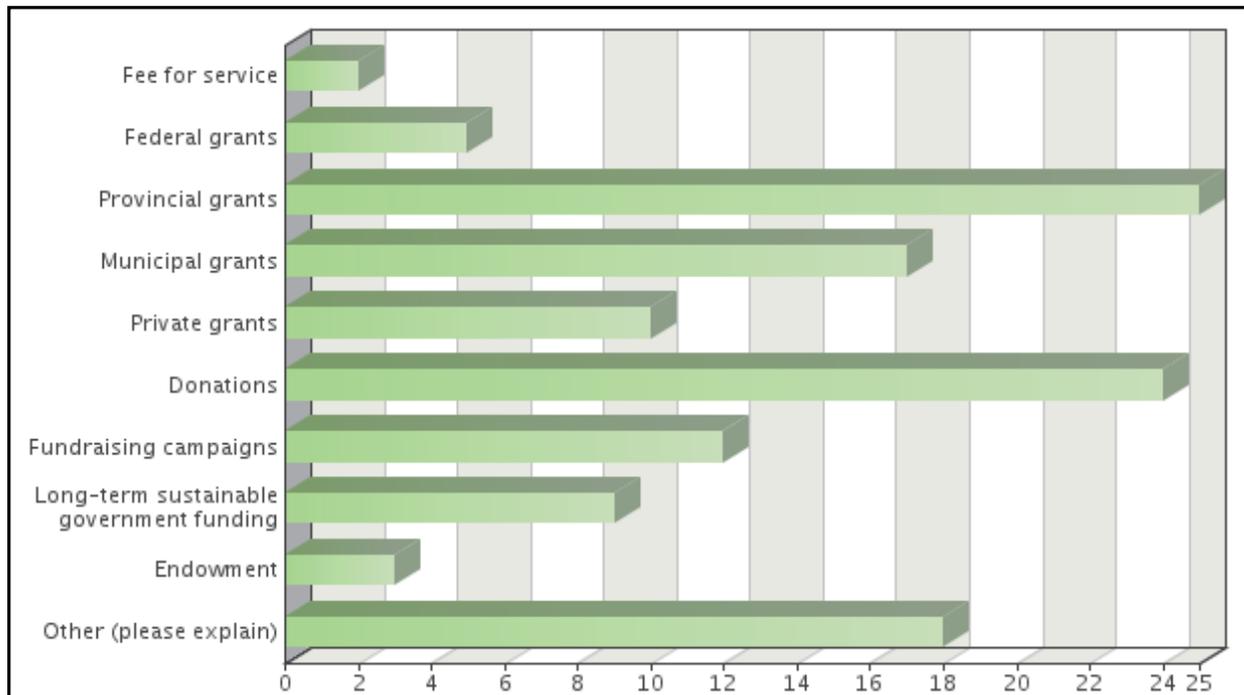
Figure 7: Program funding sources

As illustrated in Figure 8, nearly 40% (23) of respondents indicated that they believe their program funding is adequate (selected four or five on the Likert scale) and nearly 60% (33) indicated that their funding is less than adequate (selected three or less on the Likert scale). While further research regarding funding is needed, discrepancies between program funding needs may be due to differences in program structure, specifically programs that operate within larger organizations (who may receive in-kind support such as space, staff, and promotion) versus programs that operate independently and rely on grants. In the figures below, responses of four or five on the Likert scale were interpreted as true, and responses of one two or three were interpreted as false.
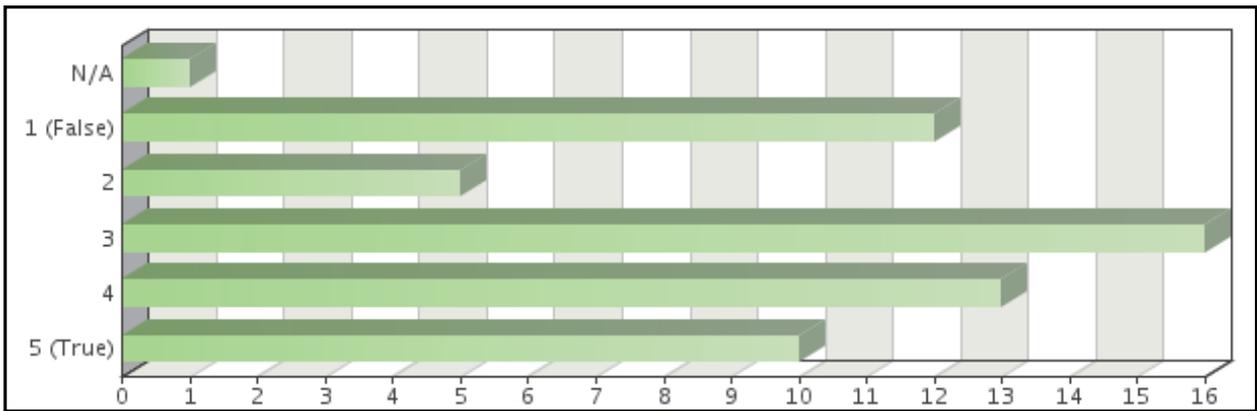
Figure 8: Is your funding adequate?

When asked whether they believe that their program funding was secure, approximately 56% (32) of respondents did not (selected three or less on the Likert scale), and approximately 40% (24) did believe that their funding was secure (selected four or five on the Likert scale). However, when asked, to respond to the statement "Lack of funding impacts program delivery", 68% (38) chose true (selected four or five on the Likert scale). Only 4% (2) chose false and 5% (3) chose nearly false.
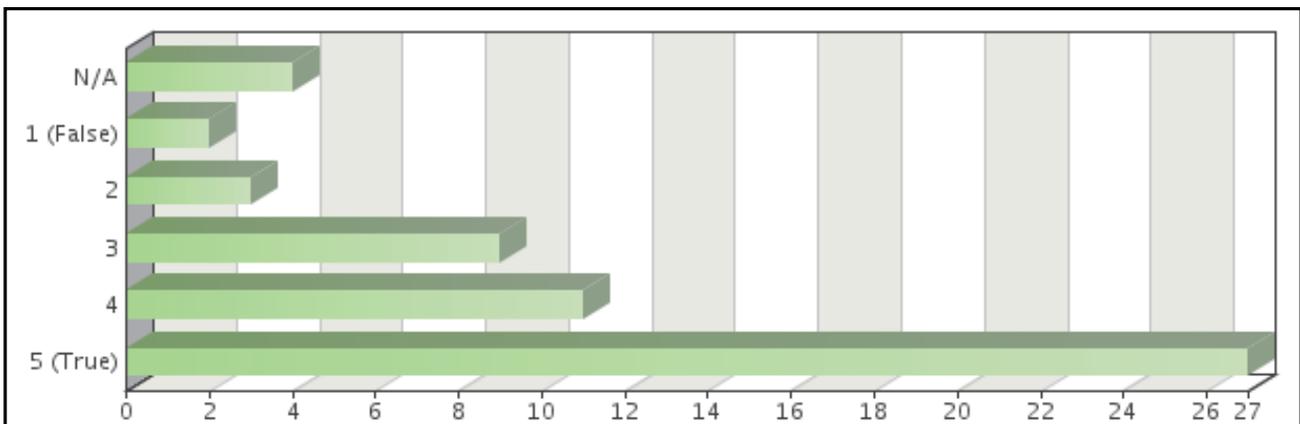
Figure 9: "Lack of funding impacts program delivery"

Due to the survey's goal of gathering baseline data the questions around funding were not specific enough to draw out explanations for the overlap in these categories. Based on survey responses it appears that programs at once believe that lack of funding impacts program delivery, yet may also believe that their funding is adequate and/or secure. These categories are subjective and can vary according to an organization's history, future goals, and current community context. Indeed, further research is required to determine how lack of funding impacts program delivery.

Given that most programs receive funding from multiple sources it is difficult to relate lack of secure and adequate funding to funding source. Although it appears that some programs receiving funding from multiple sources feel that their funding is secure, for others multiple sources may be an attempt to augment shortages. Generalizations are difficult to make; for example, 80% (4) of programs receiving federal funding also selected true (four or five on the Likert scale) when asked if lack of funding impacts program delivery. All four programs also receive funding from other sources. Similarly, 92% (11) of those who use fundraising campaigns also describe their funding as inadequate, 75% (9) describe it as insecure, and 100% (12) indicated that lack of funds impacts program delivery. Of the programs that receive long-term sustainable government funding, 66% (6) felt that their funding was secure. Surprisingly, 66% (6) also indicated that

lack of funds impacts program delivery. Of these two groups, four programs indicated that they had secure funding yet that funding had an impact on program delivery.

Furthermore, it is difficult to make generalizations based on type of organization or geographic region within Canada. Approximately 64% (7) of respondents who listed their primary point of contact as medical centres or hospitals felt that their funding was inadequate (selected three or less on the Likert scale), 73% (8) felt funding was insecure (selected three or less on the Likert scale), and 64% (7) said that lack of funding impacts program delivery. Family resource centres were more likely to feel that their funding was sufficient (60% [3]), yet also tended to describe funding as insecure (80% [4]). Sixty-five percent (11) of programs operating out of libraries felt that their funding was secure, while 67% (10) noted that funding impacts program delivery.

Although we cannot generalize about funding on a provincial level due to our sample size, we have made observations based on broader divisions. Lack of funding appears to impact equally programs operating in rural and urban settings. Of programs operating in both rural and urban areas, 78% (14) indicated that lack of funds affects program delivery, as did 69% (11) from rural areas and 72% (13) from urban areas.
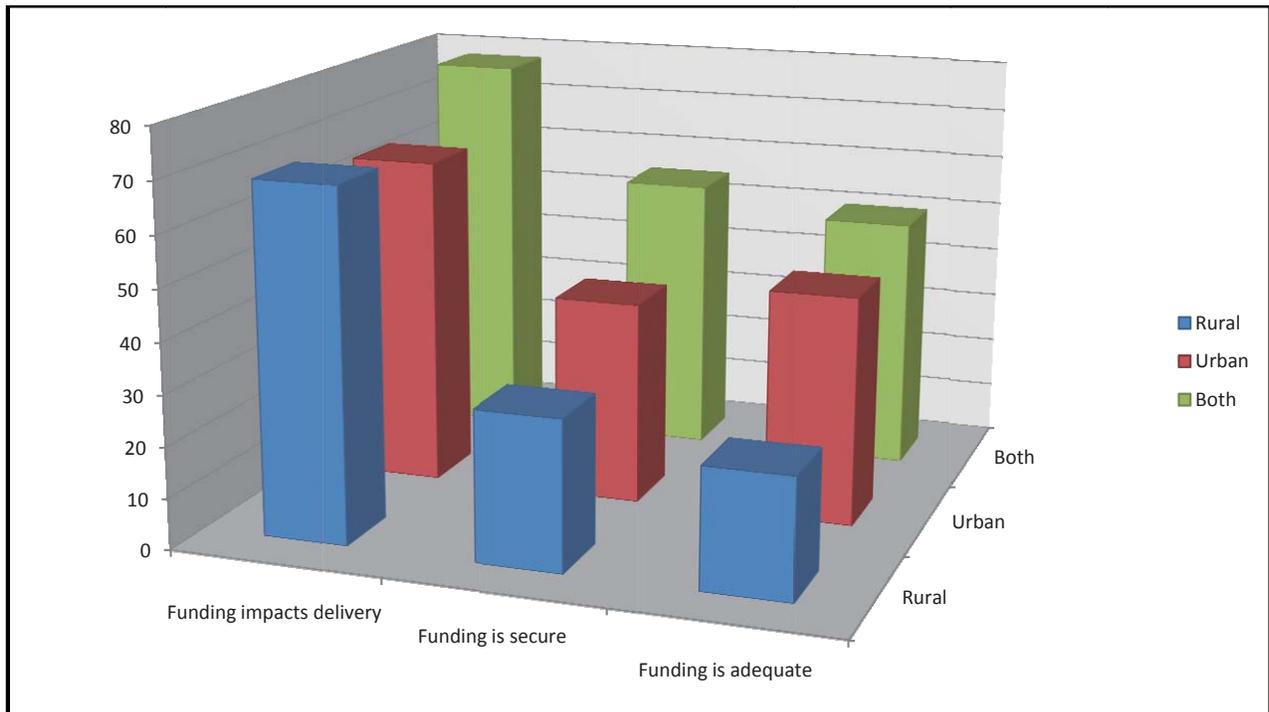
Figure 10: Funding by rural and urban settings

When examined according to geographic regions within Canada, 79 % (11) of programs from the Western provinces noted that lack of funding impacts program delivery. In Central Canada 70% (21) of respondents stated that lack of funding impacts program delivery, and in Eastern Canada 75% (6) of programs did. Because only one program from the Territories responded, they are not included in Figure 11.
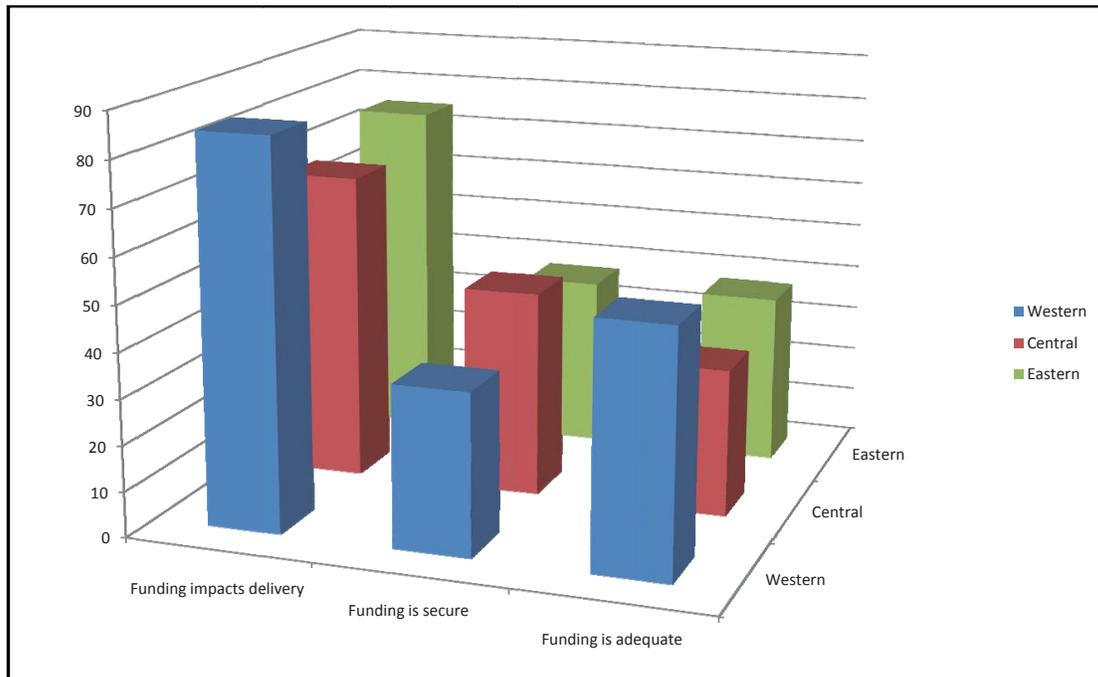
Figure 11: Funding according to geographic region

The complexity and diversity in responses listed above highlights the need for further research and suggests that programs are coping with funding issues using various tactics.

Outreach and Promotion

Although the most popular methods of program promotion were posters and flyers, websites, newspapers, and newsletters, respondents also noted social networking, radio, and television as promotional tools for programs. Twenty respondents specified other methods for promoting programs, including word of mouth, special events, and community partnerships. Of the 55 respondents 5% (3) indicated that they do not advertise publicly. One respondent stated that lack of advertising was due to grant restrictions while another stated that it was due to the fact that the program was at capacity and could not meet the needs of its community.
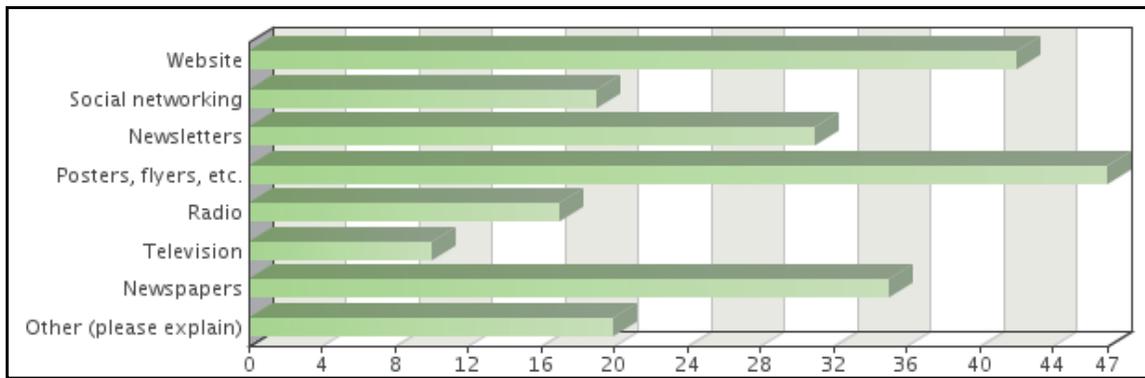
Figure 12: Program outreach methods

Successes

Practitioners were asked to share three of their greatest program successes. One of the successes cited most by respondents was the enthusiasm and positive response that their program had received from families and communities. In addition to responses from families, many practitioners highly value their ability to witness the broad spectrum of development in families and children who regularly participate in their programs.

Other key successes discussed by respondents included having strong and consistent attendance at programs, program growth, developing connections between communities and libraries, staff and institution awareness and enthusiasm, working with minority populations and isolated communities, being able to offer programming and resources for free, securing funding, and operating on little funding. Many respondents also noted the development of partnerships as one of their successes. When asked about partnerships respondents noted relationships with colleges and universities, hospitals and healthcare facilities, schools and educational organizations as well as a range of community agencies, associations and resource centres. From their responses it is clear that programs are invested in the communities that they serve, take pride in their programs' impact, and work hard to develop effective community partnerships to enhance their work.

Challenges

In order to better understand obstacles to early literacy program delivery, respondents were asked to list their three main challenges. Three key challenges were noted:

- funding
- staffing
- outreach

Funding Challenges

Adequate funding underlies all aspects of early literacy programming including outreach, staff capacity, and program accessibility. Indeed, financial issues were most cited as the greatest challenge to providing early literacy programs. Repeatedly programs cited lack of reliable core funding as a barrier; one program noted no budget increase within the last eight years. Many noted that program demand exceeds availability, and that they lack the funds to provide appropriate space and staffing levels to reach all potential participants. As noted above, staff training, staff retention, and ensuring adequate staffing levels are often issues of funding. As well, programs stated that lack of funding impacts their ability to purchase books and program resources. Some programs further specified that lack of funds made the selection of quality resources a challenge. The time and staff resources required to continually request, renew and administer funds was also cited as a challenge for many programs. One respondent noted that as soon as their ten week program ends each summer they must begin to look for funds again. Other programs noted challenges of funding restrictions, both in terms of limiting advertising as well as restricting programming to particular populations. Differentiating between target and other populations, especially in a small community, can be challenging and unrealistic. With sustainable core funding, staff skill and resources could be focused on the task at hand, providing valuable early literacy programming for their entire communities.

Outreach Challenges

After funding, programs listed issues related to outreach most frequently. This included engaging parents and connecting with specific target populations. Targeted populations might include parents with low literacy, non-traditional library users, busy parents, those new to Canada, families in remote areas, and families in disadvantaged communities. Within this category of outreach, respondents also indicated challenges in advocating the value of early literacy and advocating the value of their programs in particular. Especially given the common perception of Canada as a literate nation, some programs have met with difficulty in securing community understanding and support. Furthermore, some programs noted difficulty in obtaining support from referring agencies, as well as competition from other community organizations. Publicity, marketing and advertising were also cited as frequent challenges to reaching potential participants. Additionally, program accessibility and space were listed as obstacles by respondents. Some specified insufficient facility capacity, distance (especially in remote communities), and maintaining program attendance in poor weather conditions as barriers to program success.

Staffing Challenges

Staffing is also a key challenge for many programs. Recruiting and retaining sufficient staff and volunteers to meet program demand was a repeated theme, especially when many employee positions are part-time, and not well paid and salary funding is often insecure. Staff capacity was cited as a challenge by many respondents, both in terms of current skill level and/or the ability to provide training. A few programs cited competing priorities of busy staff in programs where early literacy is just one of the services provided.

Additionally respondents addressed issues of flexibility and consistency among staff. Some noted staff reluctance to make adjustments to meet the changing needs of clients or to reflect changes within their parent organization. Many also cited time and energy as significant challenges, whether for maintaining program momentum, expanding to meet community needs, or in fulfilling administrative requirements. As well it was noted that many programs place a heavy reliance on certain staff members or volunteers, who act as program champions and without whom the program would not continue. The responsibility of these champions to move programs forward with limited resources can result in staff burnout.

Despite these concerns, many programs are meeting their staffing requirements. As illustrated in Figure 13, when asked to rate how their current staffing levels (paid and volunteer) meet their program needs on a Likert scale, 24% (14) selected five (excellent) and an additional 38% (22) chose four. Still, nearly one third chose level three or below, indicating that adequate staff levels are a concern for many. While further research is required to develop an in depth understanding of staffing needs, the range in responses may reflect the diversity of programs, for instance programs that are a part of larger organizations (such as libraries) may have greater access to staff while programs that operate independently and/or rely on yearly grants may have greater difficulty in consistently meeting staffing needs.
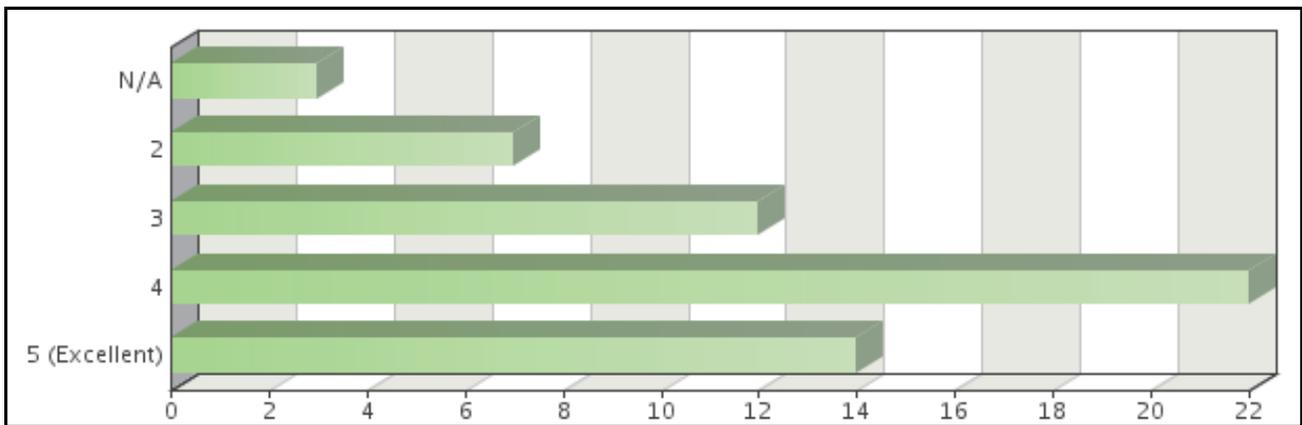

Figure 13: How staff levels meet program needs

Conclusions

Given that literacy is an issue of regional and national importance, government funding of early literacy programs is a sound economic, social, and political investment. It is worth noting that only 9% (5) of survey respondents indicated that they receive federal funding. When looking to invest in early childhood development it makes sense to support the success of programs already working on the front lines. Of the programs surveyed, 81% (47) indicated that their program was universal. According to the literature, 60% of children considered "vulnerable" come from upper or middle class backgrounds, thus universal programs are important in responding to needs across diverse populations (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007; CLLRN, 2009). However, these approaches need to be coupled with targeted programs, as the most socially or economically vulnerable are often the least likely to benefit from universal programs (Japel, 2009; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007). In his application of the Early Development Instrument in Vancouver neighbourhoods, Hertzman asserted, "although the highest risk is found in the poorest neighbourhoods, the largest number of children at risk is found more thinly spread across the middle class" (2004, p. 3). Providing long-term, sustainable and flexible funding that supports programs established in their communities yet also allows them to respond to identified needs, is a first step.

The lack of a cohesive network of early childhood literacy practitioners in Canada limits the possibility for collaboration. While many programs and practitioners have developed relationships with local organizations, there is little communication between municipalities and across provinces. In addition to the possibility of greater resource sharing, such as joint book purchases, an established network would allow for greater communication.

In the discussion on research it was noted that many practitioners have limited opportunity to participate in research due to time restraints and lack of funding. Dialogue between literacy programs and university research programs would open greater opportunities for research to be shared, and goals for future research and other initiatives to be established.

As new research and strategies emerge and community needs change, early childhood literacy practitioners need to develop their skills to meet new challenges and incorporate new approaches to effective practice. Staff capacity was cited as a key challenge for programs in Canada, and some respondents expressed the need for more formalized training. While ongoing training can be difficult to obtain, especially for part-time staff and volunteers, it is a necessary part of effective programming. McKend found that library systems that had adopted formal curricula that included training were also the most likely to offer it at a system-wide level (2010, p.19). Training can support and affect the quality of programming, which in turn influences the impact of learning (Makin, 2006 CLLRN, 2009; Japel, 2009).

Despite challenges, research regarding early literacy and child development is expanding. When examining early childhood literacy programs in Canada, funding and resource-sharing in particular require further in depth exploration. An understanding of whether programs share resources at a community-level or between programs of similar structure (through library networks, for example, or with other rural programs) could help establish best practices and expand upon the current work being done. In order to do so, further exploration of past initiatives as well as future possibilities must occur. Both funding and resource-sharing may contribute to the greater development of long-term sustainable initiatives.

The establishment of best practices could improve programming and facilitate program evaluation. Additionally, the development of partnerships between literacy practitioners nationally can strengthen early literacy in Canada and close the gap between research, policy and practice.

Throughout this survey there were a number of trends related to early childhood literacy in Canada that stood out to the research team. Practitioners' passion, in particular, was noted; their willingness to participate in the survey and their eagerness to contribute, learn and connect with others, despite busy schedules. One of the strengths of early childhood literacy initiatives in Canada is the diversity of approaches and strategies. Although there are many commonalties between programs across the country, programs are working to meet the unique needs of their communities through a variety of access points. We saw a remarkable range of survey respondents including programs operating in the neonatal care unit of a children's hospital, to a bus that serves remote areas, as well as various programs operating though public library systems.

Throughout the diverse programs surveyed it was clear that practitioners recognize the value of the contributions they make and are proud of their accomplishments. The wide range of programming and the creative approaches to challenges, resources and partnerships reflect diversity in Canada as well as the efforts of practitioners to meet community needs. Finally, while there are specific practices that contribute to a child's literacy and language development, a child's overall environment, especially their home environment, is key. Early literacy practitioners across Canada are working to foster a culture and love of reading among the children, families and communities they work with.

There is enormous opportunity to build upon the great work being done across Canada. While the early years do not define a child's future, current research indicates that it is during the first years of life that children develop the foundation for literacy and language skills, making those years crucial to development. A national strategy that supports early childhood literacy initiatives and the diverse needs of communities in Canada is critical to developing long-term sustainable approaches to literacy.

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Appendix A - Literature Review

Literature Review

Research regarding early literacy theory and practice comes from numerous disciplines and yet findings are interconnected. For the purpose of this report, we organized the literature into six main subject areas: brain and language development, shared reading and family environment, early literacy programming and development, health, policy and economics, and research practice.

Brain and language development

Advances in research throughout the 1990s revealed new understandings of brain development and, as a result, new considerations for child development practices. Halfon, Shulman, and Hochstein (2001) outline four main factors of early childhood brain development that inform practice, namely: the brain is immature at birth, it adapts in response to use and experience, the timing of these experiences is important as different regions develop differently over time, and relationships impact social and emotional development and are therefore essential in overall child development (p. 6). In Wolf's (2007) discussion of the human brain she notes that "[w]e were never born to read," emphasizing that the process of learning to read is not an innate human skill (p.3). Rather, reading is a learned skill that changes how the brain processes information. As noted by Bauderlain et al., Wolf indirectly makes the case for the benefits of frequent, voluntary reading; "[t]he secret at the heart of reading, is the time it frees for the brain to have thoughts deeper than those that came before" (2008, p. 205).

A number of studies (Petitto, 2009; Roberts, Makin, 2006; Jurgens and Burchinal, 2005) have examined brain functions in relation to linguistic development. Petitto (2009) determined that bilingual exposure has positive impact on multiple aspects of development and that children exposed to two languages from birth achieve linguistic milestones in each language at the same time as monolingual children. These findings contradict a common practice of "holding back" one language in early educational settings, and as such have implications for practitioners.

Hertzman (2004) aptly captures the influence of experience on brain development when he describes the child's brain as an 'environmental organ'. "Engaged, supportive emotional environments," Hertzman argues, "condition the developing brain in positive ways that, in turn, influence positively how children will perceive and respond to stressful experiences for the balance of their lives" (2004, p. 4). The social benefits of early childhood development programs are less well defined than the health and education benefits. As the brain needs to be wired properly for academic learning, so it needs to be prepared suitably for social learning (van der Gaag, 2002).

McKend (2010) applies these understandings to library services. When developing preschool programs, McKend (2010) remarks, children's librarians are increasingly conscious of creating positive, multisensory, and reinforcing environments as a way of influencing brain physiology. McKend (2010) further notes a growing emphasis on modeling early literacy behaviours to parents, with the idea that these skills will influence literacy practices at home. According to Halfon, Shulman and Hochstein (2001), "programs and policies that support families — especially those at risk for depression, poverty and substance abuse — can help parents promote optimal brain development" (p. 17).

Shared reading and family environment

Given the exponential rate of brain development before the age of five, the home (more than the school) environment provides the optimal learning context (Petitto, 2009; Roberts, Jurgens & Burchinal, 2005). Although further research is needed to confirm correlation between specific home literacy practices (shared book reading, maternal reading strategies, and the child's enjoyment of reading) and children's language and literacy development, Roberts, Jurgens and Burchinal (2005) confirm that the global measure of the home environment is the most consistent predictor of a child's skills.

The type of interaction in the home further affects development. Although adult language has been recognized as an important input for child language development, Zimmerman et al. (2009) argue that adult-child conversations are also key. The authors note that in conjunction with shared reading parents need to "engage their children in two-sided conversations" (2009, p. 342) in order to elicit talk from the child.

Shared reading practices between parents and infants have been studied for their value and specific characteristics of such practices have been examined (Ortiz, 2001; Makin, 2006; Berkule, Dreyer, Huberman, Fierman, & Mendelsohn. 2007; Berkule et al., 2008; Pan, Raikes & Duursma, 2008). Berkule et al. (2007) confirmed that shared reading at six months is a predictor of later reading activities. Both maternal intentions and resource access during the postnatal period have been found to predict shared reading at six months (Berkule et al., 2007). Socioeconomic characteristics such as education, marital status, ethnicity, and the baby's sex, correlate with maternal attitudes towards shared reading with newborn babies (Berkule et al., 2008). These and other studies suggest that early literacy interventions need to target parents prenatally. Understanding and addressing the range of social and economic factors that affect attitudes towards shared reading can assist practitioners in providing anticipatory guidance (Berkule et al., 2008).

Shared reading must be enjoyable and empowering for all participants. A child's interest in reading often impacts later reading achievement (Ortiz, 2001). As Makin (2006) argues, during shared reading experiences "child and adult co-construct the foundations of literacy concepts and behaviours" (p. 268). Research has suggested that increasing shared book reading with children who are not interested may even be detrimental to their children's literacy development (Bus, van Ijzendoorn, & Pellegrini, 1995 as cited in Ortiz, 2001).

Within the literature there are conflicting perspectives regarding which has the greatest impact on child development: quality or frequency of specific practices. Despite varying views there is research that indicates that the quality of interactions impact the value of literacy practices (CLLRN, 2009; Pan, Raikes, & Duursma, 2008; Makin, 2006). Teaching specific skills, for example, proved six times more effective than just reading to a child (CLLRN, 2009, p. 24). However, an analysis of national survey data by the National Center for Education Statistics found that preschool children who were read to three or more times per week were significantly more likely to be able to recognize all the letters of the alphabet, count to 20, write their names, and read or pretend to read, and were "nearly twice as likely as other children to show three or more" of these emergent literacy skills (Needlma, Toker, Klass, Dreyer & Mendelsohn, 2005, p. 2). It appears that intervention strategies are most effective for those that need it most. Regardless of quality or quantity, parental involvement is essential in establishing a culture of reading in the home. Early literacy programs that support parental involvement are thus vital in developing shared reading practices. Renea Arnold once stated that "the parent is the child's first teacher. The librarian is the parent's first literacy coach" (in Albright, Delecki, & Hinkle, 2009 as cited by McKend, 2010, p. 14). As illustrated by a number of programs across Canada, "early literacy practitioners" similarly act as literacy coaches.

Early literacy programming and resources

Parenting programs can promote "confidence and skills in parenting and associated improvements in child behaviour" (Bayley, Wallace, & Choudrey, 2009, p. 28). Programs, however, must be inclusive, relevant, and consider familial context when developing resources. Authors caution against practitioners directing a "right way" to teach literacy to participants of different socioeconomic backgrounds (McKend, 2010; Anderson & Morrison, 2007). Bayley, Wallace and Choudhry (2009), Hertzman (2004), and McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2004) identify further barriers to program participation, including a lack of parental knowledge of child development, conflicting work/home schedules, transportation constraints, and language barriers.

In a study of mothers with low socioeconomic status, grandmothers, books, and other family members were cited as the three most important sources of parenting information (Dreyer Huberman, Klass, Mendelsohn, Berkule-Silberman, 2010, p. 564). Interpretation of parenting information is thus mediated by previously attained attitudes and intentions (Dreyer et al., 2010). When developing programming practitioners should consider that families from all backgrounds recognize the importance of literacy for their children (McKend, 2010, p. 15). Through effective program design and implementation, barriers can be reduced (Hertzman, 2004).

Despite significant anecdotal support for the positive impacts of early literacy programs, evidence-based evaluation of programs has been limited. In part, this is due to difficulty in measuring long-term impacts of literacy, both in terms of conducting research over time, as well as isolating a particular consequence over time. That said, an American study found that library programs for preschoolers grounded in research-based practices led to increased literacy behaviours across demographics (ALA News Release, 2004 as cited by McKend, 2010, p. 4). Other short term research has further established that specific programs are associated with increased reading aloud between primary caregivers and children, such as the Ready to Read program in the United States (Needlman et al., 2005).

There has been considerable evaluation of the effectiveness of specific program materials from literacy initiatives (Floyd & Vernon-Dotson, 2009; Wallace & Zeece, 2009; Anderson & Morrison, 2007; Burts & Dever, 2002). The Family Literacy Bag in the United States, for example, was successful in encouraging shared reading in the home and educating parents about new books, book reading, children's language development, and teaching strategies (Burts & Dever, 2002). Wallace and Zeece (2009) found that early literacy kits can develop parents' confidence. Although there are many benefits associated with well-developed program materials, practitioners should be cautious when developing and communicating the purpose of kits for children to take home. Under some circumstances parents have interpreted such kits as homework that has to be done, rather than an opportunity to engage with their child and promote development (Burts, & Dever, 2002).

McKend (2010) discovered that 346 out of 400 Canadian libraries surveyed had formally or informally adopted elements of the American Library Association's (ALA) Every Child Ready to Read (ECRR). The ECRR program includes training, program scripts and booklists, and emphasizes the role of librarians as "literacy coaches". McKend recommends adoption of ECRR as a base for national best practices (2010). Evaluation of the Parents As Literacy Supporters (PALS) program, on the other hand, highlighted the importance of addressing the nuanced position of families and communities when developing literacy programs (Anderson & Morrison, 2007). This study points to the importance of grounding programs and program materials within community context, and suggests the need to provide for flexibility of system-level curriculum given that the success of some materials may not translate to others.

Health

Literacy is increasingly understood to be a determinant of health, and the prevalence of early literacy programs in health-based settings furthers this point. Health-based discussions within the early literacy literature reviewed centered on issues of health literacy and/or the link between childhood and human development. According to Klass, Dreyer and Abrams (2009), the best way to improve health literacy among children is to promote education in health literacy and self-efficiency throughout development. Children's unique needs must be considered when working towards health literate communities because they are dependent on the literacy of their caregivers (Klass, Dreyer & Abrams, 2009).

New developments in health research provide ample evidence of a link between early childhood development and human development (van der Gaag, 2002). van der Gaag (2002) identifies health as one of four key pathways to connect child and human development. According to Mustard (2000), those who have failed to recognize the importance of the early years did so, in part, because they failed to bring together findings from the natural and social sciences. The tendency to divide child development into debates between "nature" and "nurture", Mustard argues, is not helpful. One is not more important than the other. Child development is complex, and is dependant on both for healthy development.

Policy and economics

The impact of literacy on the economy, the labour market, innovation, social engagement, and the democratic process is now widely accepted by educators, economists, health professionals, business professionals, and government representatives. The importance of early childhood literacy as a foundation for adult literacy success is also well-established (CLLRN, 2009; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007; Dodge, 2003). As such, literacy is a key component of both individual and national success, and an area of policy concern. Experts from across the disciplines have called for "a system of publicly-funded, universal access to opportunities for development, learning and care for children from birth until school age" (Hertzman, 2004, p.3).

In its 2008 report card on early childhood education UNICEF ranked Canada last among 25 developed nations (Friendly, 2009, p. 43). Indeed, Canada spends less of its Gross Domestic Product on early childhood development than all other developed nations (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007). As a "prudent and productive" use of public resources (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998, p. 5), and when the return on investment is highest for young children, this failure to invest is short-sighted (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007; Japel, 2009; Hertzman, 2004; Dodge, 2003; Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). Every dollar invested in early childhood education yields three times the return as for school-aged children and eight times that as for adults (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007, p. 136). Young children have a longer period to incur the benefits and build upon their skills (Dodge, 2003). Despite this evidence, spending on children from birth to five years of age remains a fraction of that spent on later education (Hertzman, 2004).

As Cleveland and Krashinsky (1998) note, market-based service "works for chocolate, not children" (p. 8). Families' financial constraints, unavailability of care, and an inability to make informed decisions all complicate selection, as outlined throughout the literature (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007; Coffey, 2004). Furthermore, the current market-based approach fails to acknowledge that early childhood education and care is a mixed good; its benefits are both private and public (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998). Investment has been shown to affect parental leave, lower child poverty rates, and result in better health for families and communities (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998; McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007). Various methods for financing such an investment have been proposed (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998; Dodge, 2003; Hertzman, 2004). Hertzman (2004), for example, recommends a "demographic harvest"

for British Columbia, or holding real spending on education relative to the GDP as the number of school-aged children decline. The surplus could then be reassigned to preschool programs.

Given Canada's changing demographics, as baby-boomers retire and fertility rates decline, a highly literate youth is essential to ensuring a competitive workforce in the future (Dodge, 2003; CLLRN, 2009; Cleveland & Krashinsky, 2004). Although early childhood education is everyone's issue, policy change often requires business buy-in (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007). While Manuel (2009) found that arguments of fairness or vulnerability have little impact on public interest in children's issues, arguments that highlight prosperity and ingenuity garner the greatest public support for investment in children.

The benefit of early childhood development (and hence public return on investment) is dependent on the quality of care provided. Staff training, staff to child ratios, staff stability and the care environment impact a child's learning, all of which are shaped by funding (Friendly, 2009). Although local initiatives must reflect specific community needs, government involvement is essential for establishing best practices and ensuring universal access. Indeed, governments "alone have the policy and financial levers to take up the best and most effective community models and promote replication" (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007, p. 134).

A number of policy propositions have been discussed or dismissed throughout the literature. The OECD recommends a systematic and integrated approach to policy development that emphasizes universal access, public investment in services and infrastructure, and various levels of partnerships (Friendly, 2009, p. 49). McCain, Mustard & Shanker (2007) outline past government blunders, including a piecemeal approach to funding that reinforces competition between service providers, replacing or destabilizing existing and effective models, and retracting or downsizing proposed initiatives and thereby creating fatigue amongst practitioners and their communities (p. 156). Hertzman's (2004) research reiterates many of these points. According to Hertzman the National Longitudinal Survey for Children and Youth (NLSCY) study underscores the importance of universal access, addressing children's environments holistically rather than as one-on-one service, and improving intersectoral collaboration (2004). Family literacy programs are one example of such collaboration. In order to move this agenda forward all stakeholders must become involved, from families to local service providers to federal funders.

Canada's approach to early childhood education and care has been makeshift at best, and a patchwork of programs has emerged in response to community need. According to the OECD, Canada's ad hoc approach has resulted in varied accessibility to programs and disjointed administration (Friendly, 2009). Weak policy and inadequate funding have further contributed to this precariousness (Friendly, 2009). The top ranking OECD countries had executed a national plan for early childhood literacy and care, yet none of the six ranked the poorest had such a strategy. As noted above, Canada came in last. Hertzman (2004), Dodge (2003), Cleveland and Krashinsky (2004), McCain, Mustard & Shanker (2007) and others call for the establishment of an institutional framework to respond to the various components of early child development and to push forward its mandate. McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2007) note that all communities are interested in providing opportunities for their children. Indeed, many identify similar means to this end, including quality childcare, parenting advice, recreation programs, toy/book lending sources, family supports, and stronger links with health, education and social services (p. 130). Communities are already responding to early literacy needs; they now need the resources to continue forward. Service collaboration does happen, but at present it is dependent on the individuals involved (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007, p. 129). According to McCain, Mustard and Shanker (2007) "existing mandates and government funding streams are typically not suited to innovation, but community leaders are" (p. 133). An institutional framework coupled with a national strategy to advance early literacy issues is imperative to supporting the important work occurring across the country.

Research

Population statistics and program evaluation are key factors in understanding the importance of early childhood programs as well as advancing policy initiatives. Mustard and Young (2007) advocate for the use of the Early Development Instrument, developed at McMaster University, to measure early childhood development on a national level. Measuring the outcome of early childhood development programs, however, is challenging for many reasons. Evaluations require multiyear studies and extensive ethical consideration because participation by children is required. Additionally, many of the benefits associated with early childhood development programs are long-term; some benefits may not be seen for over 20 years (Mustard and Young, 2007). Still, a common assessment tool can help to stimulate discussion, evaluate early childhood development initiatives, and establish best practices and informed polices.

Throughout the literature many authors note the impact of the lack of longitudinal research regarding early literacy practice and highlight areas for further investigation (Roberts et al, 2005; Ortiz, 2001; Berkule et al, 2008; Halfron, Shulman & Hochstein, 2001). Roberts et al. (2005) advocate for further research into the impact of specific home literacy practices. Ortiz (2001) calls for greater investigation into interest-related reading interventions. Berkule et al. (2008) identified the need for further research on the impact of guidance on shared reading during pregnancy and early infancy. All three noted the difficulties of measurement without long-term studies. Anderson and Morrison (2007) on the other hand, describe how while there are challenges common in many family literacy programs, problems identified in the literature were not as great as they are often suggested to be.

Anderson and Morrison highlight the oft-noted gap between research and practice. Odom (2009) remarks that although the field of early intervention has grown with a focus on using science to identify effective approaches, gaps remain between what is known from research and what is done in practice. Dunst and Trivette (2009) discuss how research evidence can be used as a benchmark to evaluate early childhood intervention practices. Practice characteristics, they argue, need to relate to desired outcomes and benefits. By "mirroring the research evidence", or using successful practice characteristics as core features of an intervention, researchers can ensure that the practice makes sense to professionals and parents while also remaining true to the original design (Dunst & Trivette, 2009, p. 40). They argue further that when translating information from one setting to another, less complex approaches are often the most effective (Dunst & Trivette, 2009). Odom (2009) offers strategies for connecting evidence with practice. Research must be based on real environments and teachers must implement the practices in their classroom as intended by purveyors (Odom, 2009). Odom (2009) also suggests the need for enlightened approaches to professional development as a support to effective implementation; knowledge gleaned from "one-short workshop" rarely effects practice.

Sparkman, Wesley and Buysse (2003) state that conventional methods for identifying best practices are not efficient and often do not result in relevant recommendations. Rather, the authors explore the integration of educational research and practice using the communities of practice (CoP) model. This model encourages partnership between researchers and consumers, and reinforces that research production and research understandings are part of the same process. Although these partnerships are often motivated by funding they are also motivated by a genuine desire to understand issues important to consumers and identify methods for creating useful policies and practices.

Finally, communication of research findings to the public is important. The OECD noted "early childhood policy development in Canada is ably supported by a vibrant research community and stakeholder constituency" (OECD, 2004, p. 56). According to the OECD report, researchers should thus be involved in

development planning. Economist David Dodge identified the communication of research findings to the business community as one means to engage their interest and support (Dodge, 2003). This could apply to practitioners, parents and other public stakeholders.

Appendix B - Survey Questions

National Inventory of Early Literacy Programs

Introduction

Early literacy programs are the foundation for life-long learning. There are many programs across Canada providing early literacy support in neighborhoods, cities and provinces. This survey is being conducted to give a comprehensive look at what exists nationally.

Definition of an early literacy program: For the purpose of this survey, an early literacy program will be defined as a group or program that delivers books and literacy resources, and/or programming to families with children between birth and five years of age.

What is the purpose of this study?

The primary purpose of this survey is to identify early literacy programs across Canada as well as gather information on best practices and program materials. Your participation will help build a comprehensive report that will provide valuable insight into the struggles and successes of early literacy programs. Once the final report is complete, it will be distributed to all participants.

Who is conducting the study?

This survey is conducted in partnership with Read to Me! Nova Scotia Family Literacy Program and Dalhousie University's School of Information Management.

If you have any questions about the survey or would like to speak to the researchers directly, please contact: Deirdre O'Reilly and Naomi Balla-Boudreau at earlyliteracysurvey@gmail.com

For more information about the research partners, please visit Read to Me! or Dalhousie's School of Information Management.

Completing this survey should take approximately 15 minutes. You can stop and save your answers to return at a later time, or quit the survey at any point.

Consent

All information obtained from this survey will be kept strictly confidential.

Only the student researchers and their advisors will access specific or identifying information from your answers. The results of this survey will be analyzed as a group and no individual participants will be identified. In some instances, however, direct quotes may illustrate key points emerging from the survey.

By completing this survey, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in the study as indicated below.

Survey Questions

1.   Do you agree to be directly quoted?

      No, I would like the information presented to remain anonymous

      I agree to be quoted directly (name and organization)

      I agree to be quoted directly if my name and organization remain anonymous

2.   After completion of this project, Read To Me! Nova Scotia Family Literacy Program will store the raw data so that it can continue to be used to support the development of a network of early childhood literacy programs in Canada.

      Do you agree to have your responses stored by Read To Me?:

      No, I would like my survey responses to be deleted after the report is published.

      Yes, Read To Me! can keep my survey responses.

      If your responses to question one or two change at a later date, please contact us at earlyliteracysurvey@gmail.com and we will modify your consent for quotation and/or data storage.

Contact Information

3.   Program Name:

4.   Organization Name (if different from above):

5.   Name of Contact Person:

6.   Title of Contact Person:

7.   Contact E-mail Address:

8.   Contact Telephone Number:

9.   Program website:

Program Information

10.   What geographic area does your program serve?

       a.   Municipal
       b.   More than one municipality
       c.   Provincial or Territorial
       d.   More than one province or territory
       e.   National
       f.   Other:

11.   The region that you serve is primarily:
       a.   Rural
       b.   Urban
       c.   Both

12.   What year was your program established?

13.   Please outline briefly the main goal(s) of your program. This could include your vision or mission statement, or other information that you feel appropriate:

14.   Approximately how many families do you serve annually?

15.   Approximately what percentage of your target families do you reach annually?

16.   What is your primary "point of contact" with the population that you serve?

       a.   Library
       b.   Hospital/medical centre
       c.   Public Health
       d.   Family Resource Centre
       e.   School Board
       f.   Other (please specify):

17.   What type of programming do you offer? Please check all that apply:

       a.   Book gift program for newborns
       b.   Book gift program for children between 1 – 5
       c.   Reading program for infants under 18 months
       d.   Reading program for toddlers, age 18-36 months
       e.   Reading program for preschoolers
       f.   Other (please specify):

18.   Is your program universal (provided to every baby/family in your target group)?

19.   Is your program offered for free?

20.   What is your fee for service?

21.   What age group does your program serve? Please check all that apply:

       a.   Prenatal
       b.   Birth
       c.   Birth to 6 months
       d.   6 months to 1 year
       e.   1 to 5 years
       f.   Other (please specify):

22.   What target population(s) does your program serve? Please check all that apply:

       a.   English
       b.   French
       c.   Other languages (please specify below)
       d.   First Nations
       e.   Métis
       f.   Inuit
       g.   Specific ethnic or cultural group (please specify below):
       h.   Special needs (please specify below):
       i.   At risk (please specify below):
       j.   Other (please specify below):

23.   Please describe your program materials. What do you provide to your families?

Administration & Staffing

24.   What governance model do you use to administer your program?

       Please select the answer that best describes your program administration.

       a.   Board of Directors
       b.   Advisory Committee
       c.   Partnership(s)
       d.   Other:

25.   How many full-time staff members does your program currently employ?

26.   How many part-time staff members does your program currently employ?

27.   Does your program use volunteers?

28.   How many hours of volunteer help do you use per week?

29.   In what capacity do you use volunteers to support your program?

30.   Please rate how your current staffing level (paid and volunteer) meets your program needs. *(On a scale of 1 – 5, with one as poor and 5 as excellent)*

31.   Do staff and/or volunteers receive ongoing training?

32.   What does staff training entail?

Funding

33.   How do you fund your program? Please check all that apply:

    a.   Fee-for-service
    b.   Federal grants
    c.   Provincial grants
    d.   Municipal grants
    e.   Private grants
    f.   Donations
    g.   Fundraising campaigns
    h.   Long-term sustainable government funding
    i.   Endowment
    j.   Other (please explain):

34.   Do you believe that your program funding is adequate? *(On a scale between one and five, with one as false and five as true)*

35.   Do you believe that your program funding is secure? *(On a scale between one and five, with one as false and five as true)*

36.   Please select your response to the statement: "Lack of funding impacts program delivery." *(On a scale between one and five, with one as false and five as true)*

Outreach and Partnerships

37.   What promotional activities does your program engage in? Please select all that apply:

    a.   Website
    b.   Social networking
    c.   Newsletters
    d.   Posters, flyers, etc.
    e.   Radio
    f   Television
    g.   Newspapers
    h.   Other (please explain):

38.   Does your program produce an annual report?

39. Do you partner with any of the following organizations in your community? Please select all that apply:

    a. Libraries
    b. Schools
    c. Hospitals
    d. Healthcare workers
    e. Public Health
    f. Department of Education
    g. Department of Health
    h. Department of Community Services
    i. Daycares
    j. Family Resource Centres
    k. Literacy organizations
    l. Other:

40. Do you share resources created by your program with other programs?

41. Joint book purchases with other programs can results in reduced costs per unit.

    Do you make joint book purchases with other early literacy programs?

42. Which of the following would be of interest to your program?

    a. Joining a listserv/mailing list of early literacy practitioners
    b. Considerations of joint book purchasing to reduce unit costs
    c. Attending a national conference for early literacy practitioners
    d. Sharing or purchasing resources from other programs

Research

43. Has your program conducted research?

44. Has your program published research?

45. Does your program have a longitudinal research strategy?

46. Does your program have an evaluation strategy?

47. Has your program developed research partnerships?

    a. Community organizations
    b. College or Universities
    c. Hospital or Healthcare
    d. School or Educational organizations
    e. Other :

48.   What factors impact your ability and/or interest in undertaking research?

Conclusion

49.   What are the three greatest challenges to providing your early literacy program?

50.   What are your three greatest successes in providing your early literacy program?

51.   Additional comments:

Thank you for your participation!

If you have any questions, please contact us at earlyliteracysurvey@gmail.com

Appendix C - Ethics Approval

DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY
Inspiring Minds

Faculty of Management
School of Information Management

APPLICATION FORM FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROJECTS

Complete the required fields (in grey) using Microsoft Word, save the file for your records, print the form, sign it, and forward the completed form to the SIM Administrative Assistant, who will forward copies to the SIM Ethics Committee.

TYPE OF RESEARCH

Project Title National Survey of Early Literacy Programs

Type of Research
Please check one:

☐ Staff Research

Name

Other investigators involved in this project, if any, and their institutional affiliations:

☒ Student Research (Reading course or thesis)

Name Deirdre O'Reilly & Naomi Balla-Boudreau

Name of supervisor Vivian Howard

☐ Student Research (Course Project or Assignment)

Course number:

Course Title:

Instructor's name:

Approval sought for:
☐ One course offering
☐ Up to three course offerings (normally three years)

Please detail:

1. Type of project/assignment
   Survey and report.

2. Expected learning outcomes
   Students will have the opportunity to develop their time management, problem solving and teamwork skills. They will gain valuable experience related to developing a research plan and survey, networking with organizations on a national level, data analysis, and developing a research report for a diverse audience. Finally, the student researchers will gain an understanding of early childhood development and literacy strategies found across Canada.

3. Expected final product (e.g. report, summary, analysis)
   Summary report, annotated bibliography of relevent literature, and presentation at National Reading Summit in January 2011.

4. Who will be involved in the data gathering? (check as many as apply)

☐ Instructor
☒ Students
☒ Other participants (e.g. interview participants)

5. If other participants are involved, who are they?
In addition to survey participants, Carol McDougall will be involved throughout this project. As the Director of Read to Me! (an early childhood literacy program operating in Nova Scotia) Carol McDougall initiated this research.

6. What are their roles?
Carol McDougall's role is to help guide the research by identifying goals and helping to set priorities. All major deliverables (survey, literature review, and final report) will be reviewed by Carol to insure they meet the needs of this project.

RESEARCH DETAILS

Is ethics approval required by any other body or institutions?

☐ Yes   If yes, by whom?
☒ No

Briefly outline:

1. Objectives of the research

Gain a comprehensive understanding of early childhood literacy programs in Canada by identifying newborn book-gift programs across Canada and gathering information on best practices and program materials.

2. Method(s) of data collection

National survey (qualitative and quantitative) distributed to programs and organizations that offer literacy programming and resources to families with young children.

3. Benefits/scientific value of the research (also comment on the value to the participants)

Canada lacks a national early childhood literacy strategy and/or network. By developing a better understanding of early childhood literacy programs (including identifying best practices), this research will produce data that could be beneficial to all early childhood literacy organizations. This research also aims to connect early childhood literacy programs as a first step in establishing a national network. All those who participate in the survey will be sent a copy of the final report so they can benefit from the data they contributed.

4. Characteristics of the participants

Individuals who represent programs and organisations that offer resources and/or programming to families with young children.

5. Method of recruitment

Contacting organizations and programs via e-mail addresses found through online searches and through "network" sampling. As organisations are contacted they are asked to recommend or contact other programs and organizations that might be interested in this research.

6. Payments to be made or expenses to be reimbursed to participants

Participants will not be reimbursed for their participation.

7. Other assistance to be provided to participants (e.g. meals, transport)

Those who participate in this research will have the final report sent to them directly upon completion of this project.

8. Special hazards and/or inconvenience (including deception) that participants will encounter

   Participants should not encounter any hazards while taking part in this research. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participants' input can be saved at any point and they do not need to respond to every question before submitting their answers, thereby allowing for flexibility in how or when they complete the survey.

9. How informed consent is to be obtained. Append a copy of information sheets and consent forms for participants.

   There will be a statement at the beginning of the survey with details regarding data access and use. Participants will be informed that by beginning the survey they are giving consent; however, participants will be able to detract consent at any point by contacting the research team and different options for anonymity are provided. Contact information will be provided so that participants can contact us with questions regarding the research.

10. How data will be kept confidential and/or anonymous

    The two student researchers (Deirdre O'Reilly and Naomi Balla-Boudreau), academic advisor (Vivian Howard), and director of Read to Me! (Carol McDougall) will have access to the raw data generated by the survey. Any identifying information will be kept out of the final report unless those who are identified have given permission.

11. Procedure for storage of, access to, and destruction of data, both during and at the conclusion of the research

    The two student researchers, academic advisor, and director of Read to Me! will have access to the raw data generated by the survey. Survey results will be transferred from Opinio (survey program used to collect survey results) to the student researchers computers by September 2010. Once that is complete the Opinio account will be deleted. Raw data will be kept by the student researchers until February 2011. After which they will transfer the raw data to Carol McDougall, the Director of Read to Me. Once the transfer has been made the student researchers will delete all raw data with identifying information from their personal computers. Carol McDougall will store the raw data so that it can continue to be used to support the development of a network of early childhood literacy programs in Canada. If a survey respondent would not like to have the content they have contributed to be kept by Carol McDougall they can indicate their preference at the beginning of the survey. If a respondent changes their mind regarding how the data they have contributed is used they can contact the research team at any time to have data that identifies them deleted.

12. Feedback procedures

    We will first test the accessibility and relevance of our questions by sending the survey to three or four organizations. Using guideline questions (or a mini-survey regarding the program survey), we will solicit and incorporate their feedback. All participants will be encouraged to contribute additional comments at the end of the survey. In addition, they will be given contact information for the research team (student researchers, academic advisor, and Director of Read to Me!) so that they can provide feedback, ask questions, or express concerns they may have.

13. Reporting and publication of results

    The distribution of the final report, which will be compiled by the student researchers, is open ended. It will be distributed to early childhood literacy programs in Canada and may be distributed through other means.

14. Any unusual circumstances or concerns about which the Committee should be aware?

    ☐ Yes   If yes, please specify:

☒ No

SIGNATURES

Signature of investigator(s) or instructor(s) _____   Date _____

Signature of supervisor (if student research) _____   Date _____

Note: Signatures certify that the SIM Guidelines for Ethical Research have been consulted and understood. The investigator(s), and supervisor or course instructor(s) (if applicable) take responsibility to uphold the principles of ethical research as detailed in the Guidelines.

If approval is being sought for research being conducted by students as part of a course assignment, please APPEND a copy of the course syllabus for the course in which the activity will occur.

Please forward this application to the SIM Administrative Assistant, who will forward copies to the SIM Ethics Committee.