

**Assessing Quality and Value  
of Municipal Led Early Learning  
within a Social Policy Context**

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## Executive Summary

### Assessing Quality and Value of Municipally- Led Early Learning within a Social Policy Context

With the advent of New Public Administration, government has become a partner in the leadership of social policy. Nowhere is that more evident than in the Province of Ontario's position on early learning. Through comprehensive research and investigation into early learning, a framework for the province was commissioned for development by Dr. Charles Pascal in 2009. Based on researched early intervention models that aimed to increase educational attainment for children and increase connectedness for families, one of Pascal's key visions included free drop in programs for families,. As of January 1, 2018, the Province has mandated the responsibility for the management of early learning to municipalities. With the mandate of management, also comes accountability and the responsibility to ensure both quality and value through thorough program evaluation. Current evaluation frameworks are reviewed and analyzed against the provincial pedagogy document *How Does Learning Happen?* and a locally developed *How Does Learning Happen? Assessment Discussion Tool* is presented. Value is defined as being both societal (achievement of the perceived goals) and economic (measurement of return on investment). It is concluded that municipalities must continue to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to define both quality and value and to develop determinant frameworks for each.

## Scope and Method

This paper investigates the concept of quality in early learning programs and value of said programs, within the context of municipal government in a New Public Administration environment.

### Methodology

Through literature review and data analysis (EDI, Educational Attainment, Population Health, Community and Economic), the following will be provided:

- An overview of social policy planning and current context of New Public Management
- A history of early learning and overview of recent leadership transfer to municipalities
- An evidence-based review, including best and promising practices in regard to Early Learning
- An analysis of current evaluation methods juxtaposed against ministry pedagogy
- A review concept of “value” within societal and government context
- Recommendations for evaluation and determination of value

### Scope

Midsized municipality (City of Brantford) within the context of the province of Ontario

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# Assessing Quality and Value of Municipal Led Early Learning within a Social Policy Context

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Municipal government belongs to, and is a function of its citizens. Historically, responsible for delivering services, “old public administration” became “synonymous with bureaucracy, hierarchy, and control”.<sup>1</sup> New Public Management, while intended to demonstrate less government, has generated increasing calls for community collaboration, in turn creating an expectation to ensure services delivered are reflective of current community social policy requirements. Citizens are no longer viewed as just customers, and policy is developed that will serve both those who are and those who are not actively seeking service. This includes those who are future generations of service participants, with an increasing recognition that the delivery of effective social programs now, will result in decreased dependency and need of corresponding future services. The government, in turn becomes a partner in the leadership of social policy, and can be seen as the means to articulate social policy platform.

As described by Bryson, et al, the public sphere has broadened. “What is public is seen as going far beyond government, though government has a special role as a guarantor of public values. Common good [is] determined by broadly inclusive dialogue and deliberation informed by evidence and democratic and constitutional values.”<sup>2</sup> One must only look as far as Wellbeing Toronto<sup>3</sup> and Vancouver’s Healthy City Strategy<sup>4</sup> to see the emphasis being placed on social development within progressive communities.

Policy objectives must be attained through the establishment of cross sector collaborations and engaging citizens through the creation of groups and agencies to guide and maintain overall effectiveness and accountability. As a result of this shift, accountability has become increasingly complex. Government has become responsible not only for efficiency and cost effectiveness, but there is also recognition of the significant role of government in directing social change.

## History of Early Learning

The concept of early childhood education began in 1800’s Europe as some children began to receive education outside of their homes. A British industrialist set up an infant school for the children of his cotton mill workers, and a German educator, Freidrick Froebel, started the school for children, calling it “Kindergarden”. During the Industrial Revolution, the idea came to North America, with schools set up in churches, factories and private homes to care for the young while parents were working. Preschools

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<sup>1</sup> (Denhart and Vinzant Denhardt 2000)

<sup>2</sup> (Bryson, Crosby and Bloomberg 2014)

<sup>3</sup> (City of Toronto 2018)

<sup>4</sup> (City of Vancouver 2018)

and daycares spread, with the concept becoming enmeshed into public policy that was led by the demand for enriching preschool education for a growing middle class. Preschools and daycare provided both a significant economic benefit in meeting the needs of the growing number of mothers entering the workforce and also in increasing and preparing children's readiness for primary schools. More recently, in the US, the Head Start program was also founded in 1965, as a means to ready low income children, over the summer months, for kindergarten.

As society has become increasingly aware of the benefits of early learning, based on fifty plus years of experience, with the concept of early learning, varying theories have become popular, many based on the studies of Jean Piaget. These theories have led to a number of methodologies for early learning, albeit with some controversy over approach.

## The Montessori Method

Maria Montessori developed an early learning model based on her belief that every child is born with potential and that children should be allowed to be free to explore and play within their environment. The focus of Montessori teaching is attentiveness to the child and to follow the direction of the child as they play and learn in their environment, which ultimately leads to the child's optimal development.

## Reggio Emilia Approach

The Reggio Emilia approach is based upon the belief that children are strong, capable and resilient. The Reggio school of thought believes that children have internal motivation to demonstrate competence. This motivation manifests itself in a desire to do something that he or she couldn't do previously. Infants and children repeat new and successful skills. And external reinforcement is not believed to be necessary because the demonstration of competence is its own reward. There are five key elements to the Reggio Emilia approach to early learning:

1. Children's learning is based on their interests and they acquire knowledge within themselves through their own curiosity and creativity.
2. Teachers and parents are co-learners; listening, observing and reporting as their child learns.
3. The classroom environment is a "third teacher" and as such must be open, comforting and welcoming; offering access to various learning tools for exploration.
4. Children's learning progress is to be documented visually for all to follow their learning path.
5. Children have a multitude of ways to learn and teachers must focus on multiple learning tools and opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> (education.com n.d.)

## Play-Based Learning

The concept of learning through play has become commonplace in early learning and in schools. With a natural environment, children will discover concepts and begin to solve problems independently. This “hands off” approach encourages teachers to allow children to lead themselves through problem solving and discovery with minimal intervention.

## Direct Instruction

Often seen in formal elementary and secondary schools, the concept of direct instruction is not new. Direct instruction consists of teachers leading activities that are focused on specific learning goals. This includes drilling and rote learning. Activities are often fast paced, with active involvement between teachers and children. Positive reinforcement is offered and mistakes are corrected immediately.<sup>6</sup>

There continues to be controversy regarding the elements that constitute the best educational experience for young children. With common goals regarding education and learning, it is the means by which they are achieved that continues to be debated. There has been recent pressure for formal elementary learning environments to return to the “Three R’s” of education: reading, writing and arithmetic. A narrow focus on these elements precludes play based approaches and brings forward the dissonance between children’s ability to direct their own learning and teacher directed learning.

## Early Learning in Ontario

With an increase demand for child care over the past forty years, the focus on quality child care has evolved into quality early childhood education. No longer is a safe, caring environment the preferred child care option. That safe and caring environment must also now teach our children fundamental skills and behaviours and ensure that they are ready for a formal elementary educational system.

Government administration of early learning is reflective of the model of New Public Management. Education and success of children is notoriously a primary topic in the provincial community, with increasing discussions regarding best practices and value for the ever increasing investments into the education system. In Ontario, provincial policy on early learning has been significantly informed by the research of Mary Gordon and Charles Pascal.

Mary Gordon founded the school-based “Parenting and Family Literacy Centres”, at pilot sites within the Toronto District School Board. The centres were situated in inner city schools, with a focus to improve academic outcomes for inner city children. (Gordon 2010) By locating within schools, children and families became acclimated to the school environment. Programs were offered on a drop-in basis and the program philosophy was that parents are a child’s first and most influential teachers. It was felt, that the provision of support for the parenting role would increase parental and familial strengths.

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<sup>6</sup> (Lipoff 2018)

Dr. Charles Pascal, an internationally respected Canadian educator with expertise in early and higher education, was commissioned in 2009 by the provincial government to develop an early learning vision. (Pascal 2009) His recommendations included that programs for children and their families to be integrated under a single municipal system manager and provide:

- Flexible, part-time and full-time early learning / care options for children up to 4 years of age;
- Prenatal and postnatal information and supports;
- Parenting and family support programming, including home visiting, family literacy, and playgroups;
- Nutrition and nutrition counselling;
- Early identification and intervention resources; and
- Links to special needs treatment and community resources, including libraries, recreation and community centres, health care, family counselling, housing, language services and employment / training services.

In 2010, the Pascal vision came to fruition when the *Full Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment* (Bill 242) received Royal Assent in Ontario. This ensured that full day early learning kindergarten became available to all children between the ages of 3.8 – 5.3. In 2014 the province of Ontario took a significant position in shifting the responsibility for childcare and early childhood learning from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to the portfolio of the Ministry of Education. Additionally, the province recognized the College of Early Childhood Educators, a self-regulating body, in response to public recommendation.

Buttressed by the research of Mary Gordon, and following the recommendations of Dr. Pascal, these initiatives demonstrated the belief that higher levels of education can be achieved through quality early learning and child care, and that early childhood education should be treated as an equal contributor in the education system.<sup>7</sup> The research and program changes also became a clear reflection of the direction of social policy in Ontario.

## **Role of the City of Brantford as Consolidated Municipal Services Manager**

As outlined in the *Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014*, service system managers must:

- Establish, administer, operate and fund early years programs, including providing assistance to operators and evaluating and assessing the impact of public funding;
- Deliver and administer local policies respecting the operation of early years programs and services;
- Coordinate the planning and operation of early years programs and consult with school boards and other prescribed persons or entities in accordance with legislation; and
- Assess the economic viability of early years programs and facilitate changes to make programs more viable.

On January 1, 2018, the role of administrator of early learning programs was delegated by the province to the municipalities. Municipalities were charged to:

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<sup>7</sup> (Winick 2014)

- Conduct local needs assessments and facilitate meaningful engagement with key community partners, parents, and caregivers to integrate early learning into local service system plans for early years programs and services;
- Enhance, relocate and/or reconfigure early learning programs and services to meet community needs, as required;
- Manage provincial funds and any third party contracts associated with the delivery of early learning programs and services; and
- Manage provincial funds related to early years community planning groups.

The City of Brantford as the Consolidated Municipal Services Manager (CMSM) for the City of Brantford and the County of Brant has worked with community partners to develop an early learning plan that meets the following goals and objectives:

- Parents and caregivers have access to high quality services that support them in their role as children’s first teachers, enhance the child’s well-being, and enrich their knowledge about early learning and development;
- Children have access to play-based and inquiry-based learning opportunities and experience positive developmental health and well-being;
- Parents and caregivers have opportunities to strengthen their relationships with their children;
- Indigenous children and families have access to culturally responsive programming;
- Parents and caregivers are provided with timely, relevant and up to date information about community and specialized services; and
- Local service providers collaborate and integrate services to meet community needs in an efficient and accessible way.

To achieve the goals and objectives, the Ministry of Education has identified three mandatory core services for all early learning sites that must be provided at no fee to the participants. These include:

<b>Engaging Parents and Caregivers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Discussions and information sharing about child development, parenting, nutrition, play and inquiry-based learning, and other topics that support their role</li> <li>✓ Pre- and post-natal support programs to enhance parent and caregiver well-being and to support them in their role(s)</li> <li>✓ Targeted outreach activities directed at parents and caregivers that could benefit from OEYCFC programs and services but are not currently accessing services for a variety of reasons</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting Early Learning Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Drop-in programs and other programs and services that build responsive adult-child relationships and encourage children’s exploration, play and inquiry, supported by <i>How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the</i></li> </ul>

	<i>Early Years</i>
<b>Making Connections for Families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Responding to a parent/caregiver concern about their child’s development through conversation and observation supported by validated tools and resources</li> <li>✓ Information sharing about and facilitating connections with specialized community services, coordinated service planning, public health, education, child care, and child welfare, as appropriate</li> <li>✓ Information sharing about programs and services available for the whole family beyond the early years</li> </ul>

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Municipalities benefit from internal resources that assist them to manage community-led programs that will fulfill provincial requirements. These include:

- Human Resources expertise pertaining to all staffing issues
- Financial expertise in regard to the procurement process used to determine local facilitation, as well as ongoing financial reporting
- Legal expertise in regard to the contracting of service and expectations
- Planning resources that inform both social and physical considerations to the placement of early learning sites
- Data availability to inform planning and to determine community and neighbourhood need
- Strategic planning, where early learning is considered part of the larger social policy platform of the municipality (i.e. Community Hubs, Child Care)
- Community engagement and collaboration expertise in complementary areas of social planning

In the City of Brantford and the County of Brant, community engagement, through consultation, surveys and focus groups, has determined that the targets of early learning services will be:

<b>Affordability</b>	<b>Access</b>	<b>Quality</b>	<b>Responsiveness</b>
Ensuring that early years programs and services, including licensed child care, are within affordable reach for families	Increasing access to early years programs to give families more opportunity to benefit from high-quality early childhood programs and services	Enabling safe and reliable programs built on positive, responsive relationships, engaging environments, and meaningful	Providing a range of early years and child care programs that are inclusive and culturally appropriate, located in schools, communities,

<sup>8</sup> (City of Brantford 2017)

		experiences for children and families, delivered by educated and well-supported staff	workplaces and home settings so that parents – including parents who work irregular hours – can choose the options that work best for their family
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Local community providers were determined and with that, the need for collaborative work where previously little was required. With the support of the City, those providers are moving beyond cooperation and coordination ( sharing information, undertaking coordinated initiatives under a planning framework, demonstrating organized efforts to clarify roles) along the continuum to collaboration ( engaging in the process of shared creation, interacting to create a shared understanding), and to convergence (co-creating strategies or solutions, addressing problems or issues through merged authority and capabilities).<sup>9</sup>

## Measurement of Quality

It is extremely challenging for early childhood educators and researchers to find a way to determine if early learning programs are achieving their objectives. With new municipal roles for the oversight, management and administration of early learning and child care programs, the expectation is not only that the municipality demonstrate pedagogical expertise, but that it coordinate a community of practice, ensure educator knowledge and pedagogical understanding and use, and finally, demonstrate that the efforts are indeed, making a difference.

Program evaluation in any context where the ultimate goal is a behavioural change that either increases a particular opportunity or decreases a particular risk is difficult enough on its own. Evaluating early learning programming at the program level, within a context of a period of time where children are developing at monumental rates, influenced by a multitude of factors, can at best demonstrate trend. It is recognized evaluation at the population level would require long term study.

Within the resources of a municipal structure and the collective and collaborative community facilitation of early years programs, evaluation must be multi-type and multi-level in order to begin to tell the story of effective programming.

Quantitative measurement points are primarily related to attendance and program offerings. The perceived community value of early learning programming will be completely dependent on the uptake of that programming. The numbers of children and families attending said programming must be tracked, both as unique numbers in attendance, but also in individual repetition. Those data outputs will better inform the community of the percentage of families that take advantage of such programming.

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<sup>9</sup> (Human Early Learning Partnership, University of British Columbia 2015)

But by developing benchmarks, we will be able to determine which families are attending, and which are not. The quantitative data quickly leads to further qualitative or process questions. Of the families who attend, are they returning? What are the barriers to attending an EarlyON early learning site? Are they welcoming, culturally relevant, accessible?

Early Learning evaluation has to date, been primarily centered on child care. A number of measurement scales have been determined to demonstrate quality.

## Rating Observation Scale for Inspiring Environments (ROSIE)

ROSIE was developed by the Children’s Discovery Centre, an early care and education provider located in Ohio. ROSIE helps to evaluate the environment using three stages;

- Sprouting (beginning to understand the basic principles of making an environment attractive)
- Budding (becoming aware and skilled as the environment continues to grow)
- Blooming (where educators have reached their fullest potential)

The assessment is based upon the belief that nature inspires beauty, colour generates interest, furnishings define space, texture adds depth, displays enhance environment, elements heighten ambiance, and focal points attract attention.

ROSIE encourages teachers to examine their classroom through an observation scale, evaluating the environment of young children, as well as, inspiring teachers to create their classrooms to be aesthetically beautiful. ROSIE provides examples of textures, naturalistic colours, displays, furnishings, and lighting that may be integrated into classrooms of all ages to create a variety of stimulating and unique environments. These environments are aimed at inspiring and promoting learning in young children. It is based on the belief that the quality of the physical environment correlates to the quality of the learning taken place in an Early Childhood Education (ECE) facility. The physical environment consists of the environment both inside and outside an ECE facility. Key characteristics of physical environment of an education setting are location, accessibility, safety, flexibility, scale, and visibility.

When compared to other child care quality assurance programs, it is evident that ROSIE focuses solely on the environment. However, high quality early learning and child care programs are comprised of many elements, including infrastructure, curriculum, governance, physical environment, planning and policy development, and data research and evaluation. Despite this, ROSIE addresses aesthetic concepts of the environment that most quality rating scales do not, such as colour, texture, lighting, displays and the use of space. In order to ensure early learning child care facilities are reaching the highest qualities, ROSIE is informative and may be useful if incorporated with key aspects of other quality assurance programs however, it is not sufficient on its own.

## Reggio Emilia Approach

The Reggio approach, as previously discussed, believes that children learn from adults, other children and the environment. In fact, it is often heard that “the environment is the third teacher”.

The Ontario pedagogy document for the Early years, *How Does Learning Happen?* calls for educators to “provide environments and experiences for children to explore ideas, investigate their theories and interact with others in play”.<sup>10</sup> The College of Early Childhood Educators recognizes the importance of the environment and emphasizes the role of the educator to “design and modify indoor and outdoor learning environments to support children’s self-regulation, independence, reasonable risk-taking, meaningful exploration and positive interactions”.<sup>11</sup>

## Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale Revised (ECERS-R)

The ECERS-R is the revised edition of the original ECERS, an assessment first made available in 1980, that has since been globally used. ECERS-R is derived from an ecological perspective that states that the child and the child’s context mutually influence each other in a bi-directional method; therefore, they cannot be studied in isolation. It is believed that the physical environment is composed of two aspects; behavior setting and standing patterns. ECERS-R is designed to measure quality of preschool environments for research and program improvement. The assessment consists of a seven-point scale consisting of 43 items, organized into 7 subscales

- Space and Furnishings
- Personal Care Routines
- Language – Reasoning
- Activities
- Social Interactions
- Program Structure
- Parents and Staff

Parent involvement is linked to children's school readiness. Greater parent involvement in children's learning positively affects the child's school performance, including higher academic achievement.<sup>12</sup> There is no universal agreement on what parental involvement is, as the concept of participation varies widely by context. However, there are two broad strands; parents’ involvement in the life of the school, and their involvement in support of the individual child at home and at school.<sup>13</sup> ECERS-R also places significant emphasis on important and emerging issues in early childhood education such as the inclusion of children with disabilities, family concerns, and cultural diversity.

Measures of child-care quality can be categorized as either structural or process indicators. Structural characteristics include the child to staff ratio, the group size, and the education and specialized training of teachers. The features of structural quality can be regulated, and the Ministry of Education in Ontario sets minimum standards for many aspects of structural quality for child care centres. Studies that assess structural quality are most useful in evaluating the impact of features that can be regulated. Although understanding the links between structural indicators of quality and children’s development is important, we also need to understand the mechanisms by which structural quality affects children’s development, which requires examining what actually happens in the early-care setting. How do adults

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<sup>10</sup> (Province of Ontario 2014)

<sup>11</sup> (College of Early Childhood Educators 2017)

<sup>12</sup> (Topor, et al. 2011)

<sup>13</sup> (Department for Children, schools and families 2008)

and children interact? What materials are available for the children, and how do adults support children’s use of those materials? Process quality refers to the nature of the care that children experience—the warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness of the caregivers; the emotional tone of the setting; the activities available to children; the developmental appropriateness of activities; and the learning opportunities available to children. Unlike the features of structural quality, most aspects of process quality are not subject to provincial or local regulations, and are more difficult to measure. ECERS-R assesses multiple aspects of process quality. Such multidimensional process measures tell us much more about the quality of care that children receive than do structural measures alone. Among studies published in the past 15 years, those that applied multidimensional measures of quality, such as ECERS-R consistently found that higher process quality is related to greater language and cognitive competence, fewer behavior problems, and more social skills.

## Early Learning and Care Assessment for Quality Improvement (ELCAQI)

The ELCAQI was developed by the City of Toronto and serves as a self-evaluation and planning tool for child care operators and educators. Toronto Children Services began using the ELCAQI for annual assessments in 2014.<sup>14</sup> ELCAQI is based on research in the area of early learning that indicates there are six key elements essential for high-quality child care programs. These include:

- Sound management
- Training
- Group size
- Family involvement
- Health and safety
- Program content and development

This assessment measure uses the program, environment and interactions collaboratively to advance quality in child care. Six unique assessments including infant, toddler, preschool, before and after school, nutrition, and playground assessments, are available for evaluating the early learning of children.

In comparison to other quality assurance programs, the ELCAQI developed by the City of Toronto proves to be a strong tool. The ELCAQI addresses several elements of a child care environment, creating a multidimensional assessment. When compared to ECERS-R, another multidimensional quality assurance program, ELCAQI appears to be advantageous as it may be applied across a broad spectrum of ages. The ELCAQI prescribes clear expectations, service standards and guidelines for early learning programs in addition to child care facilities

## Kei Tua o te Pae

*Kei Tua o te Pae*/Assessment for Learning: Early Childhood Exemplars is a series of books that help teachers to understand and strengthen children’s learning, showing how children, parents and whānau<sup>15</sup> can contribute to ongoing learning.<sup>16</sup> This best practice assessment is widely used in New

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<sup>14</sup> (City of Toronto 2018)

<sup>15</sup> Extended family

Zealand early childhood centres. The framework for the development of the exemplars emerged from the philosophy of *Te Whāriki*. The philosophy sets out four broad principles, which include

- Empowerment
- Holistic development
- Family and community
- Relationships

The core framework of noticing, recognizing and responding is at the heart of this assessment and teaching practice. Research and evaluation of *Kei Tua o te Pae* has found that the professional development had a positive impact on assessment practices over the timed period of the professional development and beyond. There is evidence from the evaluation that the assessment had strengthened sociocultural practices in early childhood services. Educators had established processes for linking assessment to curriculum planning, and there was extensive collaboration between educators in the noticing, recognizing and responding aspects of formative assessment practice.

*Kei Tua o te Pae* is a quality assurance program that may be comparable to ECERS-R and ELCAQI. It is a multidimensional program consisting of 20 individual books ranging from inclusion, to academics, to community and culture. Similar to ELCAQI, *Kei Tua o te Pae* provides guidelines for a range of ages, specifically birth through six, and provides additional details regarding infants and toddlers. Additionally, *Kei Tua o te Pae* is unique from the previously mentioned programs as it does not provide a checklist but rather guidelines and recommendations with examples for educators to follow to ensure the highest quality care. When considering *How Does Learning Happen?* in correlation with *Kei Tua o te Pae*, the assessment directly covers two of the four principles of *How Does Learning Happen?*; belonging and well-being. The assessment also focuses on communication, exploration, and contribution which are all in line with the remaining principles of engagement and expression. As one of the key principles of *Kei Tua o te Pae* is family and extended family, and their role in ongoing learning, aspects of this tool may fit well with Early Learning Program assessments.

## How Does Learning Happen

*How Does Learning Happen?* Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years, 2014 is not itself an evaluation tool. However, as the Ministry of Education's vision for early years, it defines the basis upon which early learning is being facilitated. The term pedagogy refers to the process of understanding and supporting learning. Pedagogical approaches that support quality programs are those that: build positive and responsive relationships; focus on children's social, emotional, physical, creative, and cognitive development in a holistic way; provide environments in which children learn through exploration, play, and inquiry; encourage self-reflection, discussion, and ongoing collaboration and learning among educators; engage with families, and value their strengths, contributions, and unique perspectives; and use pedagogical documentation to study, interpret, make visible, and help inform children's learning and development.

Key elements of *How Does Learning Happen?* include goals for children, expectations for programs and questions to encourage reflection among educators and administrators. *How Does Learning Happen?* is organized around four foundational conditions that are important for children to grow and flourish:

- Belonging

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<sup>16</sup> (Ministry of Education n.d.)

- Well-being
- Engagement
- Expression

These foundations are a vision for all children’s future potential and a view of what they should experience every day. These four foundations apply regardless of age, ability, culture, language, geography, or setting. In early year’s settings, it supports pedagogy and program development that is shaped by views about children, the role of educators and families, and the relationships among them. It builds on foundational knowledge of children and is grounded in new research and leading-edge practice from around the world.<sup>17</sup>

## Developing a Quality Assurance Discussion tool based on *How Does Learning Happen?*

*How Does Learning Happen?* is not a checklist of tasks to complete or a template for a “one-size-fits-all” approach. Nor is it a rating scale for measuring quality. Rather, *How Does Learning Happen?* describes effective practices and emphasizes positive relationships as critical for quality early years programs. It is meant to promote deeper reflection on how to create places and experiences where children, families, and educators explore, question, and learn together.

In order to ensure *How Does Learning Happen?* is impacting all children it is necessary that a quality assurance program incorporates infants, toddlers, preschoolers and before and after school programs. Ensuring this, allows the assessment to be applied to both child care facilities and early learning Programs. The four foundations: belonging, healthy development (well-being), engagement, and expression are the key to how does learning happen and therefore are necessary for every age and aspect of early learning. *How Does Learning Happen?* provides clear goals for children and program expectations for each of the foundations. These goals will be useful when developing a quality assurance document as they include ways in which children may demonstrate the foundation, ways in which programs can create a sense of the foundation, and additional considerations for educators.

When comparing *How Does Learning Happen?* with quality assurance programs in child care and Early Learning Programs, it is evident that a common goal is the needs of the child. Additionally, recognizing its importance in the success of Early Years Programs, a quality assurance assessment on parent engagement is key. *How Does Learning Happen?* consists of subcategories based on principles of foundations for learning while child care and Early Learning Programs base subcategories on Ministry guidelines and provincial standards such as the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014.

Locally, an *Assessment Discussion tool based on How Does Learning Happen?* has been developed for community consideration.<sup>18</sup> (Appendix A) In order to ensure that the discussion tool for *How Does Learning Happen?* remains thorough, yet simple and easy for educators to work with, a five-point rating scale ranging from does not meet expectations to meets expectations, has been used. The document consists of four categories; belonging, well-being, engagement, and expression. These categories reference the four major principles of *How Does Learning Happen?* The categories are further divided into subcategories derived directly from the goals and expectations of *How Does Learning Happen?*

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<sup>17</sup> (Province of Ontario 2014)

<sup>18</sup> (Dickens 2017)

## Value

While it is often assumed that quality of programs are an indicator of value, this is not necessarily the case in social policy. Programs based on social policy must demonstrate value to stakeholders.

Programs such as early learning initiatives are ultimately developed to satisfy the needs of society. In this case, it is the belief that early learning provides opportunity for “upstream” solutions to complex social problems. There are well known linkages between a lack of education and societal issues such as poverty<sup>19 20</sup>, poor health<sup>21</sup>, and crime.<sup>22</sup> There is significant research regarding the value of early intervention. The demonstration of value to society, however, must be more concrete

The Early Development Instrument (EDI)<sup>23</sup> and the Kindergarten Parent Survey (KPS)<sup>24</sup> are two Ontario tools that provide data related to childhood risk and circumstance by community and neighbourhood. With this data, it is possible to draw linkages between risk and circumstance, providing a guide for potential intervention and longitudinally it may demonstrate a decrease in risk, positively impacting educational attainment. This data could thus be an indicator of the overall value of programs to society

New Public Management has led government to become a partner in the leadership of social policy. However, with government as a coordinator of social change, the development of local social policy becomes greatly influenced not only by provincial and national trends but also by the local community, and the need for investment in effective and efficient programs. With the continued drive for accountability at all three levels of government, fiscal responsibility is a significant driving factor in programs affecting social change, most often occurring at the municipal council level. Financial value of social programming is extremely difficult to measure and as such, is being researched with a focus on Return on Investment (ROI).<sup>25</sup> While studies to date show differing results, it is becoming apparent that there is a financial ROI to early learning programs. Unfortunately, ROI can only be determined long term, beyond that of the usual election cycle, and initiatives can be lost without long term vision.

## Conclusion

Where governments now have the responsibility to collaboratively enact social policy, new public management has also given government the responsibility to demonstrate the effectiveness of social policy.

From larger municipalities such as Vancouver and Toronto who are using population data to exemplify social policy progress to mid-sized municipalities such as Brantford, with an ambitious social policy platform, municipalities are required to gather their internal resources coupled with external and community expertise to develop evaluation methodologies for social programs.

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<sup>19</sup> (Raffo, et al. 2007)

<sup>20</sup> (Ferguson, Bovaird and Mueller 2007)

<sup>21</sup> (Phipps 2003)

<sup>22</sup> (Epstein 2016)

<sup>23</sup> (Offord Centre for Child Studies Hamilton Health Sciences McMaster University 2016)

<sup>24</sup> (Offord Centre for Child Studies Hamilton Health Sciences McMaster University 2016)

<sup>25</sup> (Heckman 2016)

Investments being made in early learning, with their history in both child care and education, have become a vanguard of social policy reform, increasing opportunities for all with a long term goal of positively affecting education, poverty and the disconnectedness inherent in the marginalization that leads to generational disadvantage. While evaluation frameworks currently exist for child care and some are demonstrating promising results, it is imperative that municipalities continue to work with partners to develop the means to define both quality and value of early learning programs. This requires a vision that embraces investment beyond any election cycle.

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**Appendix A: *How Does Learning Happen?* Assessment Discussion Tool**

How Does Learning Happen? Assessment Discussion Tool				
Foundation: Belonging				
Goals & Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectation	
	1	2	3	4
				5
Being attuned to the physical and emotional states of each child, and responding in a warm and sensitive manner	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff shout at children <input type="checkbox"/> Staff use sarcasm, mocking or harsh words <input type="checkbox"/> Staff are repeatedly not welcoming <input type="checkbox"/> Staff repeatedly do not model appropriate positive social behavior.	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff maintain a positive tone of voice <input type="checkbox"/> Staff are patient <input type="checkbox"/> Staff direct positive attention to all children.	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff model positive non-verbal communication skills <input type="checkbox"/> Staff use teachable moments to further develop positive social behaviours <input type="checkbox"/> Staff display empathy.	
Planning for ways to support smooth transitions: between the home and the early years setting, in daily routines, across early years settings	<input type="checkbox"/> Extended waiting during transitions <input type="checkbox"/> Staff do not prepare children prior to transitions <input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator does not welcome families as they arrive in the program.	<input type="checkbox"/> Transitions are conducted in a smooth and seamless manner <input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator often welcomes children and adults as they arrive in the program.	<input type="checkbox"/> Transition play materials are available. <input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator welcomes all families and greets each child as they arrive. <input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator has welcoming strategies for transitioning into the program regardless of when a family arrives during the program.	
Creating opportunities throughout daily experiences that enable children to explore, wonder about, care for, and make connections to the natural environment	<input type="checkbox"/> No interest areas are available that encourage inquiry and exploratory play. <input type="checkbox"/> Areas are set up with activities that do not allow for exploration (i.e. work-sheets)	<input type="checkbox"/> Some but not all interest areas include open ended items that encourage inquiry and exploratory play.	<input type="checkbox"/> Interest areas encourage inquiry and exploratory play. <input type="checkbox"/> Materials are open ended and set up to invite inquiry and exploration.	
Inviting community members to contribute to the program, and providing opportunities for children to participate and make meaningful contributions to the community	<input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator does not connect with community organizations and agencies.	<input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator connects with other early childhood community organizations and agencies.	<input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator is aware of and regularly connects with a wide variety of early childhood community organizations and agencies in planned and meaningful ways.	

How Does Learning Happen? Assessment Discussion Tool					
Foundation: Well-Being					
Goals & Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectation	Exceeds Expectations	
	1	2	3	4	5
Providing healthy meals and snacks and establishing positive eating environments that are responsive to children's cues of hunger and fullness	<input type="checkbox"/> Menus are not planned in accordance with the DNA standards <input type="checkbox"/> Individual children's needs are not met during meal and/or snack times <input type="checkbox"/> Food is used as a reward or punishment. <input type="checkbox"/> No conversations or interactions occur during meal and/or snack times		<input type="checkbox"/> Children are offered food in proportion to their time in care <input type="checkbox"/> Water is available at all times <input type="checkbox"/> Menu planned according to age group. <input type="checkbox"/> Meal and/or snack times are viewed as a time for socialization and conversation <input type="checkbox"/> Staff serve food while sitting with children during meal and/or snack times.		<input type="checkbox"/> Three or more types of foods are offered weekly <input type="checkbox"/> A dark green or orange vegetable is offered in meal and/or snacks daily <input type="checkbox"/> Staff use meal and/or snack times as opportunities for enhanced language learning <input type="checkbox"/> Children are encouraged to serve themselves
Providing regular daily opportunities for children to be physically active and explore the world around them with their bodies, minds, and senses	<input type="checkbox"/> No planned physical play learning experiences <input type="checkbox"/> Staff are not engaged in planned physical play learning experiences with the children <input type="checkbox"/> No designated safe space for indoor physical play		<input type="checkbox"/> Physical play learning experiences are planned for both the morning and afternoon <input type="checkbox"/> Developmentally-appropriate physical play learning experiences are planned and/or documented to ensure all children are able to participate		<input type="checkbox"/> Children are given a choice of two or more planned physical play learning experiences for both the morning and afternoon <input type="checkbox"/> Two or more types of gross motor equipment are accessible to children in the room
Limiting activities where children are sedentary for an extended period of time	<input type="checkbox"/> The environment is not set up to encourage children to interact with each other.		<input type="checkbox"/> A portion of the environment can support interaction.		<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the program environment is organized to support child interaction.
Creating safe and stimulating outdoor spaces for intentional active play that is individualized and adapted as needed to support children's varied abilities	<input type="checkbox"/> Play space is not defined <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor play space is not in a state of good repair <input type="checkbox"/> No shade is accessible on the playground		<input type="checkbox"/> Three or more different types of learning materials accessible <input type="checkbox"/> Learning materials reflect the interests of children <input type="checkbox"/> Learning materials are developmentally appropriate		<input type="checkbox"/> Playground includes seating area <input type="checkbox"/> Each age group has their own designated play space <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor play space accessible in all weather conditions <input type="checkbox"/> Three or more types of learning materials are accessible to explore nature <input type="checkbox"/> Two or more learning areas are extended to the outdoor environment
Facilitating children's efforts to take reasonable risks and test their limits through active	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff repeatedly do not provide time for children to complete tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Staff repeatedly do not allow children to make their own		<input type="checkbox"/> Children are provided with choices <input type="checkbox"/> Staff consistently follow the children's cues.		<input type="checkbox"/> Children are provided with choices within their interests <input type="checkbox"/> Staff respond to children's interests

play and social interactions to foster independence	decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Staff repeatedly do not encourage developmentally appropriate self-help skills		<input type="checkbox"/> Staff create opportunities for enhancing self-help skills through play.
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**How Does Learning Happen? Assessment Discussion Tool**

**Foundation: Engagement**

Goals & Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectation	Exceeds Expectations
	1	2	3
Providing a wide variety of interesting objects and open-ended materials for children to explore with their senses, manipulate, and investigate	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials, equipment and toys in the program have limited uses <input type="checkbox"/> There are no multi-sensory materials, equipment or toys	<input type="checkbox"/> A portion of the materials, equipment and toys are open ended <input type="checkbox"/> A portion of the materials and toys are multi-sensory (eg. Drums, clay, dolls)	<input type="checkbox"/> Most materials, equipment and toys are varied and open-ended for high play value (eg. blocks, sand, water, dolls, toy vehicles) <input type="checkbox"/> Materials, equipment and toys, both natural and manufactured, are multi-sensory, and are authentic and representative of real-life
Planning daily routines with limited interruptions providing ample opportunities through large blocks of time for older children to engage in sustained, complex play and inquiry	<input type="checkbox"/> A current program plan is not posted <input type="checkbox"/> Program Plan does not cover the entire time children are in attendance <input type="checkbox"/> Each room does not have its own Program Plan.	<input type="checkbox"/> Current Program Plan includes descriptions of the learning opportunities <input type="checkbox"/> Evidence that individual goals of children are incorporated into the Program Plan	<input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of formal programming time given to staff <input type="checkbox"/> Supervisor reviews Program Plans and signs them weekly <input type="checkbox"/> Information is accessible to parents on curriculum model.
Providing inclusive learning environments and experiences that encourage exploration, play, and inquiry	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff do not demonstrate inclusive practice	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff demonstrate encouragement <input type="checkbox"/> Staff role-model how to accomplish tasks <input type="checkbox"/> Staff address children by their real name. <input type="checkbox"/> Displays are arranged in an inclusive manner	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff encourage children to identify the emotions of others <input type="checkbox"/> Displays promote inclusion in daily living

How Does Learning Happen? Assessment Discussion Tool					
Foundation: Expression					
Goals & Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations		Meets Expectation	Exceeds Expectations	
	1	2	3	4	5
Being attuned and responding to children's varied cues and communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff repeatedly solve the children's problems immediately <input type="checkbox"/> Staff repeatedly miss opportunities to build children's knowledge <input type="checkbox"/> Staff repeatedly do not support children to follow through with strategies.	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff support the children's ability to solve problems <input type="checkbox"/> Staff extend verbal/non-verbal interactions with materials <input type="checkbox"/> Staff are observed participating in play with children.	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff recall past experiences to extend current learning opportunities <input type="checkbox"/> Staff extend children's vocabulary.		
Engaging in authentic, reciprocal communication with children, where children participate as both initiators and equal partners	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff are rarely at the children's level <input type="checkbox"/> Staff use language that is too advanced or simple	<input type="checkbox"/> Staff are at the children's level for face to face interactions <input type="checkbox"/> Staff use language appropriate to children's development <input type="checkbox"/> Staff are genuine when acknowledging children's accomplishments	<input type="checkbox"/> Child views staff as a play partner <input type="checkbox"/> Staff know when to intentionally remove themselves from play and interaction		
Providing time, space, and materials to encourage expression through creative materials that reflect children's social and cultural background;	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials do not reflect the home, community and culture of the families that attend the program. <input type="checkbox"/> The learning materials are not culturally diverse.	<input type="checkbox"/> The materials and furnishings reflect the home, community and culture of some of the families that attend the program. <input type="checkbox"/> Some learning materials are culturally relevant and diverse.	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials and furnishings reflect the home, community and culture of all the families that attend the program. <input type="checkbox"/> There are numerous learning materials that help to develop an understanding of Aboriginal culture and other cultures and facilitators incorporate cultural materials in the program.		
Engaging and cultivating children's connections with stories and books in a variety of contexts, and for a variety of purposes	<input type="checkbox"/> There are no opportunities for sharing books within the program. <input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator does not model ways adults and children can explore and enjoy books together.	<input type="checkbox"/> Space is set aside in the program for sharing books. <input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator models ways adults and children can explore and enjoy books together, e.g. schedule shared book time prior to circle time.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are many opportunities available in the program for shared reading (books available in many areas of the program, shared reading part of the regular schedule). <input type="checkbox"/> The facilitator regularly and intentionally models and supports different ways adults and children can explore literacy resources and enjoy books together.		