

Methodology

Overview

This project is a partnership between the School of Early Childhood at George Brown College, one of Canada's largest training institutions for early childhood education, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Together they make up the Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development located at the University of Toronto. Participation from Dr. André Plamondon from Laval University in Québec expanded French language sources. Materials are presented in their language of origin.

The Atkinson Centre is sharing innovative approaches to early learning and child care in Canada that are showing promise and could be scaled to spread their impact. By reporting findings from early learning program evaluations and reporting on the quality of such evidence, we can begin this process. Within Canada, there are frequently not enough studies to provide a synthesis of evidence of program effectiveness. Generating this kind of data for early learning is an important goal allowing for the sharing of best practices across various levels of government and with practitioners.

This project has the following objectives:

1. Supporting the Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) sector to learn about promising innovations in Canada that could be scaled to spread their impact;
2. Supporting equitable access to culturally appropriate, high quality, and innovative ELCC systems management and program delivery approaches through tools, programs and methodologies;
3. Promoting best practices in ELCC program delivery and systems management; and
4. Sustaining and enhancing the transfer of knowledge regarding innovation in the ELCC sector beyond the project end date.

ELCC delivery is supported by a number of factors. While each factor plays its own distinctive role, each influences the effectiveness of the other. Progress made in one area encourages progress in others. Evidence also suggests that while pilot projects and other innovative processes provide ideas and strategies they should not necessarily be viewed as models.

This project identifies innovations in the following areas: ELCC governance; funding; inclusion and equitable access; the learning environment including curriculum, program supports, transitions to kindergarten, and parent engagement; the workforce including educator training, professional development, compensation and recognition; monitoring and accountability; and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (including Aboriginal Head Start). Examples of innovations in the above areas can be found at the national, provincial/territorial, regional, local, program, and individual level. They may be targeted to different communities (e.g. New Canadians, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, families at risk etc.) or have universal application (e.g. full day kindergarten).

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Evaluations demonstrate that various innovations produce different outcomes (including those that are either unintended or not the primary objective of the innovation), and effects may either be short-term or long-lasting. Innovations may directly improve child outcomes, or influence educator practice and improve the quality of programming. The evaluations themselves differ in their rigour. Qualitative and quantitative evaluations are included in this review. Randomized control trials (RCTs) although more rare, are also represented here, as are discontinuity regression analyses when evaluations are conducted on large population measures.

This data is organized into an "*ELCC Innovation ToolKit*", an accessible, web-based format identifying the type of innovation (i.e. governance, funding, access, learning environment, accountability, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis); where the evaluation(s) were conducted; and the policy and child outcomes.

Defining Innovation

For the purpose of this ToolKit, innovation is defined as a program that falls outside relative practice across Canada, and has been evaluated. Innovative practices must also have the potential to be scalable. Scalability requires innovation that can flexibly adapt to effective use in a wide variety of contexts, across a spectrum of learners and educators. It must also be robust in order to retain effectiveness in settings that lack ideal conditions for success.

Innovative practices in ELCC included in this review have been evaluated either by academic institutions, government bodies, or by commercial and non-profit sponsors. Only innovations that have occurred after 1997 are included here. In 1997, when Quebec implemented its landmark initiative, making childcare accessible to the wider population at \$5/day. This marked a turning point for child care in Canada and brought national attention to its benefits.

Exclusion Criteria

Following the database search, 242 evaluations were identified and reviewed by 5 coders. Evaluations were excluded if they were conducted prior to 1997, full text was not found, the evaluation was published in a language other than French or English, the evaluation had less than 10 participants, there was no effect measure, the outcome measure was unrelated to the scope of the current work, the study did not target children from 0-8 years of age, the objective was not targeted to early education services, the evaluation was of policy implementation only, the innovation included only direct payment transfers to parents, the innovation was not within early education programs, the evaluation did not include a Canadian sample, and the publication was an expert opinion only. Based on the above criteria, the 240 evaluations were reviewed and 125 were included. A [coding manual](#) was used to ensure inter-rater consistency. Inter-rater reliability was conducted at the onset of the review to ensure high rates of reliability.

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Authors' Notes

Some evaluations on ELCC programs and services conducted by governments are not included in this review because reports have been removed from public access. Although many of the innovations presented here have a myriad of international vigorous scientific evaluations, only Canadian studies have been included for the purpose of this review. The challenges of such a review is the vast variability of methodologies that exist in the literature. As both qualitative and quantitative evaluations are included here, a distinction is made in the ToolKit between methodologies, allowing the user to decipher the type of evidence that supports the innovations. Quantitative evaluations can help remove human biases from evaluations and analyses, and are systematic in their assessment, making the results more replicable. On the most stringent of quantitative designs lies randomized control trials (RCT) that allow for causal relationships and predictability of outcome. Also included are discontinuity regression analyses, a method more commonly used when assessing changes in policy. Qualitative evaluations on the other hand are not stringent in their methodology, are more exploratory, and much more subject to biases. Still, qualitative evaluations are invaluable specifically for the reason that it explicates human interaction and allows interpretation. Many fields, including early education, decide how to move forward in research or assess the value of data through this methodological design. Taken together, this review has made one issue very clear, Canada needs to invest more on high-quality research in the area of ELCC in order to better understand the causes of changes in outcomes and the effects of changes in programs and policies, in order to better support children and families.

This ToolKit does not stand as a final product, but a working collection of Canadian evaluations in ELCC. If you are a Canadian researcher in ELCC and feel your work may contribute to this document, please [contact our team](#).

Search Criteria and Methods

Evaluations of innovative practices were searched using the following databases.

Library Databases:

Academic OneFile
Academic Search Complete
Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA)
Business Source Complete
Canadian Business & Current Affairs Database (CBCA Complete)
Canadian Research Index (CRI)
CINAHL
Education Source
EMBASE
ERIC
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences*

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Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts
MEDLINE
Periodicals Archive Online*
Periodicals Index Online*
Policy File Index*
ProQuest Dissertations & Theses
PsycARTICLES
PsycINFO
PsycTESTS*
Sociological Abstracts
Social Science Abstracts*
Social Sciences Citation Index*

Other Databases:

GALLOP Portal
Government of Canada Publications

Search Strategy:

Each search consisted of five sets of keywords, related to age group, innovation, evaluation, targeted change, and geography. "Evaluation" category was divided into two sets: one for innovation, another for evaluation. This avoided false positives related to (established, non-innovative) evaluation practices.

Relevant databases were identified and selected through the database lists on the George Brown College LLC and UTL websites. Some databases were searched individually, others simultaneously through EBSCO and ProQuest federated searches. Databases identified with an asterisk (*) in the list above turned up no results.

Each library database (or set of databases in a federated search) was searched five times, once for each targeted change. The other sets of keywords remained the same for each search. Searches were limited by date (1997-present) and by source type (excluding newspapers, magazines and wire feeds). Results were imported into EndNote, where duplicates were identified and removed, and remaining results assessed for relevance. Irrelevant results were removed from the list.

Non-library databases have more limited search functionality and/or character limits for keyword searches. Searches here used simpler keywords and multiple search attempts, and by browsing when necessary. Documents found outside the George Brown College or University of Toronto libraries were entered manually into EndNote. Additionally, sources were identified by scanning the bibliographies of meta-analyses and literature reviews; sources that had not appeared in the previous searches were located through title searches in library databases (for academic and professional publications) or Google (for government documents).

Researchers attended conferences, workshops and meetings to present the project and solicit studies. Researchers also used their own knowledge to add to the works reviewed in the Toolkit.

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Email Contact of Department Heads for Evaluations Currently in Progress

Relevant departments to ELCC (e.g. psychology, education, public policy, child and youth, economics, infant studies) at all universities and colleges in Canada were contacted (N=326) via email.

Department heads/chairs were asked to disseminate a short survey to their faculty about current evaluations of innovative practices. Survey data was reviewed, and any opportunities to include evaluations not yet published were incorporated.

Email

Hello,

We are developing an online data bank of innovative early childhood education (ECE) practices in Canada that have been evaluated for their effectiveness. To that end, we are conducting a systematic jurisdictional scan of innovative Canadian ECE practices in governance, funding, access, early learning environments, and monitoring and accountability. The focus is to identify practices that are scalable. The data bank will include both published articles and non-peer reviewed reports.

We are asking researchers across Canada to fill in a short online survey inquiring whether you have conducted work in these areas, or have projects in progress, and if you are willing to share your findings. We also ask that you share this message with your colleagues.

You may access the survey here: <http://www.innovation.fse.ulaval.ca>