Early Childhood and the Importance of Quality Early Education

*Dr. Emis Akbari, Ph.D.

Professor, School of Early Childhood, George Brown College, Toronto, Ontario
Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto
Presentation Outline

01 Negative effects of adverse childhood experiences

02 Benefits of Quality Early Education

03 The Status of Early Childhood Education in Canada
Why Care About Early Childhood?

- **Newborn**: 25% of adult brain weight
- **6 months**: 50% of adult brain weight
- **1 year**: 60% of adult brain weight
- **2 years**: 75% of adult brain weight
- **4-6 years**: 90% of adult brain weight

Why Care About Early Childhood?

High stable trajectories found for all aspects of mental health and learning

Follow up at 23 years old

29% HS graduation

89% HS graduation

ADHD Symptom Trajectories From Ages 6 to 12

Pingault et al., 2011, Amer. J of Psychiatry
Half of all mental health problems at age 26 have been diagnosed in childhood and adolescence.

Why Care About Early Childhood?

Kim-Cohen, Caspi, Moffitt, Harrington, Milne, & Poulton, 2003, JAMA
Health Outcomes as a Function of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Ischemic heart disease
Stroke
Chronic bronchitis & emphysema

Felitti, et al., 1998 Dong et al., 2004
Risky Health Behaviors as a Function of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
Ecological Model of Child Development

Socioeconomic influences

Culture

Parent-child

Marital

Sibling

Neighbourhood influences

Multilevel ecology. Lerner 2006
Ecological Model of Child Development


- Genes
- Epigenetics
- Experience
- Environment
- Maternal health
- Learning
- Behavior
- Health
Empowering the Future: Best Evidence for Investing in Early Childhood Education

Positive benefits of high-quality preschool are seen in children from both low- and middle-socioeconomic environments, with stronger effects for children in low socio-economic circumstances, dual-language children, and children from immigrant families.

Preschool programs with a focus on social development result in important long-term benefits including reduced substance abuse, lower rates of school dropout, juvenile delinquency and adult criminality, and higher levels of employment and income.

Positive child development impacts are more likely to endure when programs incorporate effective elements being positive and stimulating interactions in their practice.

Benefits of preschool outweigh the costs, through decreases in expenditures on programs such as social assistance, special education, family transfers; and a rise in economic production from increased adult earnings and tax transfers; indicating a prudent economic investment.

Early education programs with the best long-term effects on reading, math, and social behaviour also include a parenting component focused on optimizing parent-child interaction.

High quality ECE enhances a child’s early language, literacy, and math skills with socio-economically disadvantaged children being likely to benefit most, reducing socio-economic related disparities in school achievement.
Early Childhood Education Report
The Status of Early Childhood Education in Canada
Established in 2011, the Early Childhood Education Report is released every three years to evaluate the quality of provincial/territorial early years services in Canada against a 15-point-scale. Results are populated from detailed profiles of each jurisdiction. The report is organized around 5 categories with 19 benchmarks forming a common set of minimum criteria contributing to the delivery of quality programming.
The OECD released its report *Starting Strong II.* Canada exposed as a policy laggard in ECEC.

The Early Years 3 study laid the groundwork for Canadian children and recommendations to improve the quality of ECEC services.

*The Early Childhood Education Report 2014* reported on cross-jurisdictional improvements in ECEC.

The third status report takes a snap shot of ECEC across Canada and sees improvements in all jurisdictions.
Benchmarks of Quality

**1. Integrated Governance**
- ECE under common department/ministry: 0.5
- Common ECE supervisory unit: 0.5
- Common ECE policy framework: 1
- Common local authority for ECE administration and delivery: 1

**2. Funding**
- At least 1/3 of child care funding goes to program operations: 1
- Mandated salary and fee scale in licensed child care: 1
- At least 3% of overall budget devoted to ECE: 1

**3. Access**
- Full day kindergarten offered: 1
- 50% of 2 to 4 year olds regularly attend an ECE program: 1
- Funding conditional on including children with special needs in licensed child care: 1

**4. Learning Environment**
- ECE curriculum framework: 0.5
- Alignment of ECE programs with kindergarten: 0.5
- At least 1/3 of staff in programs for 2 to 4 years olds are qualified: 0.5
- Kindergarten educators require ECE qualifications: 0.5
- Salaries of ECEs are at least 1/3 of teachers: 0.5
- ECE professional certification/professional development required: 0.5

**5. Accountability**
- Annual progress reports (2014 or later): 1
- Standards for ECE programs include kindergarten: 1
- Population measures for preschool collected and reported: 1

Total: 15 points
In recent years, we have seen a steady investment in ECEC services across the country.
Funding overall funding
Only **three** jurisdictions have funding that is conditional on including children with special needs.
Integrated Governance

Ministry of Education
Early Childhood Educator Salaries as a Percentage of Teacher Salaries by Province/Territory

- NL
- PE
- NS
- NB
- QC
- ON
- MB
- SK
- AB
- BC
- NU
- NT
- YK
All provinces now have an early learning curriculum
Canada has come a long way since the OECDs report in 2006. Our results showcase the improvements made across the country, with some jurisdictions making leaps forward in their investments in ECE.
For more information and detailed provincial and territorial profiles log on at ECEReport.ca
The Abecedarian Approach in Manitoba’s Early Childhood Community

**Intervention in Early Childhood**

- **Abecedarian** is an intervention that focuses on children with multiple risk factors in their lives, recognizing that these risk factors can be barriers to learning.

- **Language Focus** – Abecedarian sees language as the core of early learning; strong language skills allow for greater cognitive and social/emotional development.

- Language grows best in respectful, responsive, reciprocal relationships.
The Abecedarian Approach in Manitoba’s Early Childhood Community

- High quality, individualized, relationship based care
- Playful interactions between adult and child
- Language focus
- Specific attention to individual children’s development
- Strength based approach to families
The Abecedarian Approach in Manitoba’s Early Childhood Community
Ontario’s Vision for Early Learning and Care (FDK)

Full-Day Kindergarten in Ontario

• In 2010 in Ontario: full-day kindergarten (FDK) became a universally available program for all 4- and 5-year-olds, moving early childhood education firmly into the realm of public education.

• Rollout over five years, with 260,000 children enrolled by September 2014. Created 10,000 new public sector jobs for ECEs.

• Unique to the Ontario model was the “seamless day,” an extension of the school day to accommodate child care needs, and the educator team, where teachers and early childhood educators share responsibility for the planning and delivery of the program.

• Original model was school board operated before and after school early learning. Currently one district follows this model with another with a modified model.

Pascal, 2009
Ontario’s Vision for Early Learning and Care (FDK)

Effects on Children

FDK has lasting benefits for children’s behaviour as well as their learning. Children in this program scored higher on reading, writing and number knowledge than those in a half-day program and remained ahead until the end of Grade 2.

Children also scored higher on self-regulation, which is the capacity to respond to life’s stresses and return to a calm and alert state. Self-regulation in early childhood is especially important. Existing research shows that self-control, an aspect of self-regulation, predicts long-term health, wealth and even a reduction in crime.

Pelletier, 2017
Janmohamed, McCuaig, Akbari, & Gananathan, 2014
Thank you!

Emis Akbari, Ph.D.
emis.akbari@georgebrown.ca