

Steps

ECMap Newsletter

Early Child Development Mapping Project

Spring 2013

Survey shows strong support for provincial-regional coalition network

After the 2012 ECMap Provincial Fall Gathering, a survey was e-mailed out to participants to find out what they thought.

The gathering, held November 7-8th at the University of Alberta Conference Centre in Edmonton, was the first provincial meeting of coalitions in Alberta. Eighty-three coalitions sent 130 representatives. (Government of Alberta and ECMap project staff brought the total number to 153.)

Participants were then surveyed on how useful they found the gathering, what they found most valuable and their ideas on next steps.

More than two-thirds responded. Here's what they had to say:

- > 92 per cent rated the fall gathering very positively.
- > 89 per cent would like to see another similar event in the near future.
- > 79 per cent supported the idea of a combined provincial-regional coalition network.
- > Sustainability of coalitions and making connections were the most important themes of the gathering.
- > Receiving updated Early Development Instrument (EDI) data and assistance with community development are most important for the sustainability of coalition work.

"Coalitions have evolved very differently across the province," notes ECMap Director Sue Lynch. "This became very evident at the fall gathering. Local coalition building has

varied tremendously from community to community. The strengths and challenges identified by coalitions are different."

The differences reflect Alberta's diversity, says Dr. Lynch. They also indicate that a one-size-fits-all model for building sustainability will not meet coalitions' varying requirements.

"The message that we got from the fall gathering is that coalitions want to stay connected. They endorse the creation of some sort of provincial network, but they also wish to retain their local autonomy. In order to move forward, they will need additional opportunities to meet and provide their input into the next steps. ECMap will try to find ways to make that happen."

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A mom reads to her child at the Norwood Child and Family Resource Centre in Edmonton. See story on early literacy and language development on page 2.

Ed Kaiser

Early childhood development

The ABCs of early literacy: What every parent, caregiver and educator needs to know

Consider this statistic.

Nine million – or 42 per cent of – working age Canadians do not have the literacy skills they need to function properly in today's society.

This represents an enormous loss to individual Canadians and our country as a whole. Literacy is linked to everything from success in school, work and social relationships to civic engagement, health and life expectancy.

Until recently it was thought that literacy began in school, but new research has shown that it starts to develop much earlier, during a child's first years in fact. We now know that language development in the early years lays the foundation for literacy skills and adult achievement.

"This is not about getting toddlers to read," explains Dr. Linda Laidlaw, associate professor in early literacy at the University of Alberta. "There's pressure to teach children the alphabet before they start kindergarten, but there are no studies to show that if you learn to read in the early years, you're going to be at an advantage in school. This is about building the scaffolding for the language, thinking and social skills that are essential to learning to read and write."

What do parents, educators and caregivers need to know about early literacy? And what can they do to support its development?

Here, in brief, is what the experts and current research say:

A Language development precedes and lays the basis for literacy. A child's language ability at age three to four strongly predicts his or her literacy skills and learning success throughout school.

B Language and literacy involve a number of complex, interrelated areas of development, including thinking, physical, social and behavioural development.

C Early environments and experiences have a significant impact on language and literacy development.

D Language learning begins at birth. Infants naturally respond to the sounds of speech and begin vocalizing. Responsive parents and caregivers who speak to them often and encourage their attempts to communicate positively support their language development. Children raised in nurturing, language-rich environments acquire larger vocabularies and better language skills.

E The home environment plays an important role in language learning. Early learning and child care environments are important, too. High quality preschool programs improve children's language and literacy skills, and can improve outcomes for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

F Individual development in language and literacy varies a great deal and is influenced by the interaction of many factors (including socio-economics, language experience and gender).

G Reading books with children supports the growth of language and literacy. Many other activities promote language and reading as well, including singing songs, playing word games, reciting poetry and rhymes, telling stories and encouraging children to articulate their thoughts and feelings. Parents who struggle with literacy can support their children's development through these kinds of activities and by participating in family



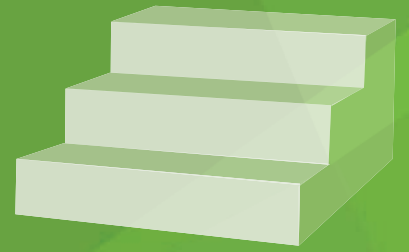
Language development in the early years lays the foundation for literacy skills, says Dr. Linda Laidlaw, associate professor in early literacy at the University of Alberta.

literacy programs offered by libraries and family support centres.

Dr. Laidlaw offers this parting advice: "Respond to your children's interests. Children are motivated to learn when their interests are supported. Use electronic media in ways that promote language, social interaction and print awareness. Technology is not necessarily evil."

For more information about early language and literacy development, please go to <http://www.cllrnet.ca/>

Community coalitions



Libraries and coalitions are on the same page

Parents with preschoolers don't have to worry about childcare when they attend Brooks – Newell County coalition meetings.

The meetings are held at the Brooks Public Library and are scheduled at the same time as Tales for Tots or one of the other programs the library runs for young children. If the meeting runs longer than the program, the children get to play and do arts and crafts under the watchful eyes of library staff. "We try to make the meetings as accessible as possible," says Sarah McCormack, head librarian and co-chair of the rural southern Alberta coalition.

The coalition also makes good use of the library's video-conferencing capability, which allows members from small, outlying communities, such as Bassano, a one-hour drive away, to participate in meetings more easily.

Public libraries are providing invaluable support for early childhood development (ECD) coalitions across Alberta. Their contributions include well-established community connections, organizational leadership and free meeting space.

About five years ago, libraries underwent a major shift towards a more community-driven and early literacy focus. When the Early Child Development Mapping Initiative was launched and coalitions began organizing, coalitions discovered they had much in common with libraries. In many communities, strong partnerships have been forged between the two.

As McCormack points out, both the library and coalition aim to serve the community. In the case of Brooks and surrounding Newell County, this means a widely diverse population with a high percentage of immigrants, who speak 100 languages and are mostly employed by the meat packing industry. She feels that the community is better served through the close collaboration that has emerged among different groups and agencies through



Elaine Jones, manager of youth services at the Edmonton Public Library, says working with coalitions fits in with the EPL's community role.

the coalition. And, she says, the EDI (Early Development Instrument) – the tool used to collect information on how well young children are doing – has provided a useful gauge in how well libraries and other service organizations are supporting early development.

Libraries and coalitions in Alberta's major urban centres have also found themselves on the same page when it comes to early development.

"I would say that all 18 of our libraries in Calgary are involved with the ECD Mapping Initiative in one way or another," says Diana Villeneuve, early literacy advocate, for the Calgary Public Library system.

Libraries in Calgary, one of the fastest growing cities in Canada, cannot keep up with the demand for early years programming, she says. Programs are filled on the morning registrations open.

Libraries bring a rich network of community contacts and credibility to coalitions,

she notes. These have been particularly useful as a starting point for new coalitions.

Villeneuve sits on two coalitions: the Calgary Downtown Core and the citywide The First 2000 Days network. "It's really exciting to see the city coming together in a broad network and the momentum growing to accomplish positive change in early development outcomes."

The Edmonton Public Library has been looking at EDI results for the city's seven ECD communities to see if any patterns are emerging and whether any changes should be made to early literacy and other children's programming to better support early development, says Elaine Jones, manager of youth services.

"We see our work with coalitions as a natural extension of our role in the community," says Jones. "We recognize the importance of early literacy and of early development, and we bring that knowledge to coalition tables."

Profiles

Beginning conversations that matter

Janice Kraemer has the early years much on her mind these days and she'll talk to anyone about them who cares to listen.

Like the young man sitting next to her on the bus. She strikes up a conversation with him and discovers he's doing his master's degree in sociology at the U of A. That gets her talking about early environments and how they impact young children's development.

Or the neighbourhood mom she finds herself walking to school with to pick up kids one afternoon. It turns out the woman has a daughter in kindergarten. That gets Kraemer talking about the EDI (Early Development Instrument) and how important it is for parents to sign the consent form to allow their children to participate.

"You never know where these conversations will go," says Kraemer. "They spread like a web, and it's fascinating to watch how the web develops."

Kraemer is an executive member of the Edmonton Southeast coalition. She is also the early learning facilitator of the preschool morning program at St. James Elementary School. She began her career as an elementary school teacher but her interests shifted to the preschool years about ten years ago. At that time, she was living in St. Louis, Missouri, where her pastor husband was working on his PhD. Kraemer was battling post-partum



Janice Kraemer, Edmonton Southeast coalition, kraemers5@shaw.ca

depression after the birth of the youngest of her three children, far from the support of extended family and friends. A referral to a local family centre, and the high-quality programming for parents and young children offered there, proved to be a life saver.

When Kraemer moved back to Edmonton with her family and began working outside the home again, she decided she wanted to be involved with preschoolers. As her understanding of early development grew, Kraemer saw that providing young children with positive, supportive environments involves community in

addition to the immediate family and the home.

"I learned that it takes the whole community," she says. "It's a bigger issue and needs a bigger awareness."

Gregarious and down-to-earth, she naturally connects with other people and engages them in conversation. Talking in front of groups and to policy- and decision-makers is new to her.

"I want to better articulate how supporting early development should be reflected in public policy," says Kraemer.

Her Edmonton Southeast coalition received its results last June, which showed that 28 per cent of kindergarten-aged children in the community were experiencing great difficulty in one or more areas of development.

Kraemer wants to see those results improve. She has created a 'bubble map,' listing the people and groups that can make a difference. The list includes the local councilor and MLA, parent school councils, community leagues and the city parks and rec department. Her coalition would also like to meet with businesses involved in a local mall redevelopment and ask them whether they have any plans to make the revamped mall family friendly.

"I don't mind taking the risk of getting up and speaking to people," she says. "It keeps getting easier."

FYI

In Memoriam: Clyde Hertzman

Dr. Clyde Hertzman, one of Canada's leading early childhood development experts, died suddenly on February 8th. Dr. Hertzman was the director of the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) at the University of British Columbia. He had recently won the Order of Canada for his trailblazing research that is known internationally. His work in B.C. inspired Alberta to study and map early development in this province. Dr. Hertzman was 59.



Contact us

The Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap) is part of the Early Child Development Mapping Initiative, which is funded by Alberta Education. ECMap is led by the Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth and Families (CUP), Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta.

For further information, please go to www.ecmap.ca

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Mapping a bright future for Alberta's young children