

INSPIRED TO EXCEL: HOW A PRE-KINDERGARTEN SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM BENEFITTED THE YOUNGEST LEARNERS IN THE TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The early years is a critical, formative period during which experiences and environments facilitate childhood development. As such, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has offered *Inspired to Excel*, a free 4-week Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program for three consecutive years. This unique program focused on supporting young children's transition into formal schooling within a responsive and culturally sensitive pedagogical framework. This was accomplished through arts-based learning experiences, meaningful play, and inquiry-based activities which sought the purposeful engagement of parents/caregivers and community partners. To investigate the short- and long-term impacts of this summer learning program on stakeholders, mixed research methods were utilized.

In 2016, this pre-Kindergarten summer program was offered at six summer school sites across the city, with four sites employing the African-centred learning framework and two sites centering culturally relevant and responsive practices. A thematic analysis of the 131 participating children's Learning Stories and Progress Reports revealed that these young children expressed a sense of belonging and shared their feelings, thoughts, and experiences with their educators, peers, and families. Evidence also supported children's significantly increased school readiness demonstrated by their regulation of emotions and needs, co-operative behaviours, independence, responsibility, and enthusiasm to learn. Owing to the program, these children also improved their literacy and mathematics foundations as well as their problem solving, creative, and analytical thinking skills.

Quantitative and qualitative data afforded by parent/caregiver surveys and focus groups established that they were highly satisfied with their child's overall experience with the program. The vast majority of parents/caregivers strongly agreed or agreed that the program established high expectations for their child, encouraged their child to excel in the program, and enabled their child to develop a positive student identity. They felt that the program enhanced their child's overall personal and academic well-being, and had a positive impact on their child's academic skills in literacy and mathematics. They observed considerable improvement in academic, social, and psychological domains and enhanced school readiness among their child. Parents/caregivers themselves also had a positive experience and sufficient opportunities for involvement throughout the summer learning program: they unanimously felt comfortable participating in the program, felt that they were regularly informed about their child's learning and well-being, were satisfied with the communication received from the program, were provided sufficient opportunities to discuss their child's learning and well-being, and were given sufficient opportunities to provide suggestions.

Focus groups with educators afforded insight to their perceptions, experiences, and impacts linked with the program. They commented that collaboration, professional learning, culturally relevant teaching and learning, adequate program resources and support, and parent/caregiver engagement were integral components behind the program's success. In addition to their own professional learning, teachers and Early Childhood Educators corroborated feedback from parents/caregivers in that the program had a positive impact on participating children's school readiness and their foundational literacy and numeracy skills. They also noted that while children were the primary beneficiaries of the program, there were positive, rippling effects on parents/caregivers. From participating in this program, parents/caregivers benefitted from greater comfort in the school setting, enhanced educator-parent/caregiver relationships, and community building with other parents/caregivers.

A case study was conducted at the Parkdale site, which offered a unique partnership opportunity involving the Toronto District School Board, George Brown College, and the City of Toronto. Although positive findings were consistent with other sites, it is difficult to conclusively determine added benefits associated with this partnership, in comparison to other sites. We recommend that, in order to truly evaluate the impact of the partnership-based iteration of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program in comparison to the original approach, it is critical to have more sites offering the former and a control group. Implementing such pre-defined research methodologies would enhance our confidence in the research findings.

In light of the beneficial impacts of the program on participating children, their parents/caregivers, and educators, several key recommendations were proposed. Recommendations to enhance the efficacy of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program include the need for sustainable financial support, increased awareness and reach across the TDSB school communities, improved program logistics, additional support for children with special education needs, additional opportunities to empower parents/caregivers, a mentorship component for educators, and improved robustness of the program evaluation.

BACKGROUND

The early years is a decisively formative period during which dynamic and complex interactions between biological and environmental factors orchestrate children's development. While genetic variability establishes the biological parameters for learning, interactions with others, culture and quality of experiences (e.g., high quality programs and resources) prime children for optimal development. In Canada, 25% of children experience learning, health, and/or behavioural concerns when they reach Grade 1 (Janus, 2006; Kershaw et al., 2006; Willms, 2002). Additional vulnerabilities, such as poverty, transient living conditions, and ethno-cultural inequities, are even more rampant and may alter children's developmental trajectories.

Considering that early development is shaped by everyday experiences and environments, it is not surprising that early education is another important mediator. In fact, it is unequivocally understood that returns on investment in pre-school education are plentiful and long-lasting for individuals and society (Heckman, 2011). Namely, studies have found a seven-to-one return on public investment in early childhood education (Alexander & Ignjatovic, 2012; Heckman, 2008). Quality pre-school education, substantial evidence now tells us, is associated with improvements in school readiness, self-regulation, overall health and well-being, as well as social, physical, literacy, and numeracy skills (Caputo, 2003; Ministry of Education, 2007; Schweinhart, 2001).

The benefits of early learning environments are particularly important for vulnerable children, who may not have access to rich learning resources, supports, or spaces prior to formal schooling (Missall et al., 2007; Roberts, Jurgens, & Burchinal, 2005). Learning experiences that are out of reach during the early years have been linked to academic difficulties from primary education and into adulthood (Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008; Sroufe et al., 1983). Accessible (i.e., free), high quality early childhood educational opportunities can close gaps that potentially exist between the haves and have-nots.

What can be clearly seen in the literature are three fundamental components of effective programming in early childhood settings. First, play should be central to early learning opportunities as it draws on children's innate curiosity and excitement. Play allows children to better understand the world around them in interesting and challenging ways. Second, partnerships with parents/caregivers and communities enhance the ability of educators to meet the needs of young learners. Intentional and meaningful parent/caregiver engagement greatly benefits children (Mustard, 2006; Weiss et al., 2006). Third, respect for diversity and equity are prerequisites for education across the early years. Children and their families benefit most from such opportunities when they feel included and have a strong sense of self (Ministry of Education, 2007). By honouring and integrating differences, abilities, and challenges, early childhood learning spaces promote resiliency and enable children to thrive (Ministry of Education, 2007, 2016).

Support for accessible, high quality, preschool education that fosters development and well-being has been consistently echoed across international educational jurisdictions. For over three decades, France has offered free, universal pre-school to all children from three years of age. While Finnish children do not start school until their seventh birthday, they are afforded free, full-day programming from the age of eight months. Not long ago, Ireland expanded their early childhood care and education scheme to provide free, universal pre-school for children

over three years of age. Other jurisdictions that offer similar programming prior to formal education include Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, among others.

A recent evaluation of Ireland's Free Pre-School Year yielded a few important findings (McKeown et al., 2015). The authors demonstrated that more competent children (i.e., more or better skills) before starting the program tended to be more competent at the end of the program, and vice versa. This skill gap did not change or widen during the year. Individual and family characteristics appeared to be the most significant predictors of child outcomes, as they are present from birth. Based on this evidence, it can be seen that earlier identification and intervention, especially for vulnerable children, is warranted to foster healthy development.

However, there is currently a chasm in the literature on Canadian pre-school programming. This is partly because universal, extensive, and accessible educational opportunities do not exist in Canada. Some work in the past has shown the positive impact of a pre-Kindergarten summer orientation for First Nations children living on reserves in British Columbia (Mickelson & Galloway, 1972). Five years ago, Graham and colleagues (2011) attributed increased literacy skills among disadvantaged four year old Ontario students to a 5-week summer literacy program which included a parent/caregiver engagement component.

Against this background, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has endeavoured to fill this void in the educational research community. The TDSB is the largest school board in Canada and one of the most "multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual school boards in the world." It serves more than 72,000 students in Junior Kindergarten (JK) to Grade 2 in over 400 elementary schools each year. The majority (85%) of these students were born in Canada but fewer than half (46%) spoke English as their primary language at home. About two thirds (70%) and half (49%) of TDSB's younger learners belong to a visible minority group and were from low-income families (i.e., combined family income of less than \$50,000 Canadian Dollars annually), respectively. In addition, about 6% of the students were identified as having special education needs, with autism, learning disability, and development disability being the top three exceptionalities.

By triangulating the TDSB's unique 2012 Parent Census (parents of students in JK to Grade 6) data, a new socio-economic status (SES) variable was computed from parental presence at home, parent education, and family income, since all these three socio-economic variables are highly correlated (Zheng, 2015a). Zheng found that young (4-7 years old) self-identified Black, Latin American, and Middle Eastern students had the largest proportion associating with low socio-economic status (i.e., more students were living with a single parent, having parents with lower level of education, and/or from low income families), while young White and Mixed students had the largest proportion of students associating with high SES. Moreover, students associated from lower SES were less likely to participate in activities outside-of-school, attend school, and meet provincial standards in reading, writing, mathematics, and learning skills, than students with average or high SES. The proportion of students with low scores on the Early Development Instrument (EDI, a measure of young children's school readiness in Kindergarten) in the low SES group was about two to four times as much as in the high SES student group.

Furthermore, parents of students from low-SES backgrounds were less likely to communicate with their child's teachers, participate in parent-teacher interviews, attend school meetings or events, or volunteer at their child's school, than parents of students associated with average or high SES. Thus, the TDSB is committed to the principles of equity to enable all students to learn and grow to their full potential, in environments that welcome differences and are free from discrimination.

As such, an unique pre-Kindergarten summer program designed from an Africentric perspective was piloted in July 2014 by the TDSB to investigate the short- and long-term impact of early interventions on pre-Kindergarten children, especially those from lower socio-economic background and/or of African descent. This 4-week program involved students in arts-based learning experiences, meaningful play, and inquiry-based activities. It also embraced parents/caregivers and community partners through authentic engagement in the school setting. Using mixed research methods, an evaluation of this program found that participating children gained considerable school readiness towards personal well-being, sense of belonging, engagement in play and inquiry experiences, and expression and communication (Zheng, 2015b). Parents/caregivers and educators also benefitted from their involvement with the program (Zheng, 2015b).

Since its inception, this pre-Kindergarten summer program has expanded and evolved in the following years. This year (2016), it was offered at six school sites across the city and admitted 62% more children. In addition to the African-centred framework, some sites accentuated culturally relevant and responsive practices and one site partnered with a local college to deliver the program. To evaluate the impact of this year's program on stakeholders (i.e., children, parents/caregivers, and educators), quantitative and qualitative data were collected using surveys and focus groups, as well as from the Board's student registration data.

OVERVIEW OF THE 2016 PRE-KINDERGARTEN SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM

For the third consecutive year, the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) Early Years Learning and Care Department, with the support of the Board's Continuing and International Education Department and the Model Schools for Inner Cities Program, offered *Inspired to Excel*, a free 4-week Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. The purpose of the program was to facilitate young children's transition into formal schooling within a responsive and culturally sensitive pedagogical framework.

Program Sites and Participants

The 2016 Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program was offered at six TDSB summer school sites across the city (two sites in the west, three sites in the east and one site in the south regions of the city). These sites were selected based on TDSB's most recent 2011-12 Kindergarten-Grade 6 Parent Census, which gives the Board critical information on young students' demographics and school experience. Four of the six sites had Africentric programming, whereas two sites had culturally relevant programming.

This program was promoted through informational flyers and leaflets available at the six school sites and through word of mouth at the Parenting and Family Literacy Centres and in the broader community (e.g., Ontario Early Years Centre, More than Child's Play, etc.). Parents/caregivers registered their child in the program at the school office. The program took place every morning (i.e., 8:30am-11:30am or 9:00am-12:00pm) between July 4 and 29, 2016.

A total of 131 children participated in this Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. Most of the children were 4 years old, with a small number of 3, 5, and 6 year olds.

Program Design

The objectives of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program were to afford children with a meaningful learning opportunity to develop their literacy, numeracy, science, and technology competencies through an intentional and culturally sensitive approach. While Africentric sites were punctuated by the African-centred education framework established by Dei and Kempf (2013)¹, culturally relevant sites were infused with culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy conceived by Ladson-Billings (1994)² to shape classroom programming. As such, children participated in a dynamic and intentional learning space that nurtured the development of their communication, sense of belonging, self-regulation, and problem-solving abilities. The program also emphasized the engagement of parents/caregivers, as well as community partners and agencies.

¹ Dei and Kempf (2013) recognized seven themes (i.e., representation, language, family/community, co-operative education, equity and values, indigenous/community knowledge, and spirituality) that are central for effective practices and strategies in order for students of African descent to academically and socially thrive.

² Ladson-Billings' (1994) culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy focuses on high expectations, cultural competence, and critical consciousness.

Parent/Caregiver Engagement

Parent/caregiver engagement was an important element of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. Upon registering their child, parents/caregivers were informed that they would be invited to participate in the program. They were involved in the morning “Nia Circle” (described in the Program Delivery section) and shared cultural songs and knowledge (e.g., literacy and numeracy in their language). They also supported the educator team by co-ordinating Learning Centres and snack time. Newsletters were prepared by educators and sent home informing family members of the day-to-day program activities and strategies to support their child’s learning and well-being at home (e.g., recipe to make slime, number and letter games, etc.). Thus, educators and parents/caregivers were co-responsible for educating their young children.

Program Educators

A team of 16 educators were involved in the implementation of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. The educator team consisted of six TDSB Ontario Certified Teachers, six TDSB Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), one George Brown College (GBC) ECE, two GBC ECE interns, and one volunteer. With the exception of Parkdale site (which had one teacher, two ECEs, and 2 ECE interns) there was one teacher and one ECE assigned to each site. An administrative team from the TDSB, consisting of a Central Coordinating Principal, Capacity Building Coordinator, and Program Coach, supported educators with implementing the program on a day-to-day basis.

Prior to the start of the program, educators participated in a full-day professional learning session. This session focused on the rationale behind the program, theoretical underpinnings of African centered education and culturally relevant and responsive practices, asset-based lens when working with children and the community, operationalization of the Nguzo Saba³, and collaborative planning. With this background, educators had the foundation to create an inviting space for learning and inquiry through the use of technology and other mediums. This professional learning opportunity was sustained by four weekly half-day sessions at different program sites. The purpose of these subsequent sessions was to continue capacity building, make program adjustments, and plan.

Program Delivery

Educators relied on various tools and methods to provide learning experiences to participating children. The primary methods of delivering the program were the “Nia Circle” and the Learning Centres.

Nia is one of the seven principles of Nguzo Saba and represents “purpose”. The “Nia Circle” served as a vehicle for whole group learning and morning routine. Activities that took place during the “Nia Circle” included independent and partner reading, name puzzles, and attendance activities, among others. Parents/caregivers were invited to participate and contribute to these activities. The objective of this culturally rooted practice was to enhance classroom programming by creating a shared learning environment whereby children felt comfortable and confident in expressing themselves.

³ Nguzo Saba refers to the seven principles of Kwanzaa and African heritage which punctuated the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program (Dei & Kempf, 2013).

Learning Centres are intentional learning experiences that enable play-based learning in a culture of inquiry (Ministry of Education, 2016) since children “learn through play, independent problem-solving, and inquiry” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 36). In accordance with the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program document (2001) and the current The Kindergarten Program (2016), Learning Centres were at the focal point of the summer learning program. The Four Frames of The Kindergarten Program (i.e., Belonging and Contributing, Self-Regulation and Well-Being, Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours, and Problem Solving and Innovating) shaped the Learning Centres. Educators optimized the thoughtfully selected, inclusive, and rich open-ended learning resources and the children’s interests to promote inquiry and exploration at each Learning Centre. For instance, positive self-image and cultural identities were fostered through African-centered or culturally relevant literature and diverse skin colour paints, crayons, and paper. Other Learning Centres afforded opportunities for children to engage in science, mathematics, dramatic play, language, visual arts, and music. Ultimately, the developmentally appropriate practices, intentional provocations, cultural relevant resources and experiences provided children with a comprehensive program that not only enhanced their academic proficiency but socio-emotional well-being as well.

METHODS OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

The focus of this report is to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, a program to support young children's transition from pre-school to Kindergarten. In order to do so, a mixed research methods (i.e., qualitative and quantitative data) approach was used to inform the findings. Data were collected to assess stakeholders' (e.g., children, parents/caregivers, educators) perceptions, experiences, and impacts associated with the program.

Assessments of Participating Children

Learning Stories

Evidence of children's thinking and learning were gleaned from observations, listening, and probing, which educators recorded through various media. For instance, teachers and ECEs used cameras and video recorders to capture learning and to serve as artefacts. Tools used for documenting (e.g., digital cameras, video recorders, notepads, etc.) were readily available at all times. Educators also used a variant of a documentation wall (see Figure 1). This observation wall was located inside the classroom. At some sites, a photo of each child was arranged in a row, under which educators would post notes and quotes documenting the individual learning and development. At other sites, educators used a chart system on the wall whereby there was a column labelled with each child's name and there was a row designated for each of the four early years learning frames (i.e., Belonging and Contributing, Self-Regulation and Well-Being, Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours, and Problem Solving and Innovating) as defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2016). In this case, educators would record their observations for each child according to each of the four areas of learning. This process of collecting data allowed all of the educators to be part of documentation and assessment and served as a visual reminder as to which children and/or in which of the four frames the child needed to improve.

Figure 1: An Example of an Observation Wall used in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program



Using this approach, educators captured the holistic nature of learning in authentic settings in the early years. Namely, teachers and ECEs commented on children’s dispositions, capabilities, interests, knowledge, and interactions with individuals and materials that transpired in the classroom, playground, or community-based activities. Educators considered these observations in terms of their significance to the children’s learning, relation to learning goals, and how educators supported and fostered learning.

Progress Reports

Towards the end of the program, educators developed individual Progress Reports in accordance with a template they were provided with by the program administrative team. The template (see Appendix A) encouraged educators to reflect on each child’s learning journey as it pertains to the four frames of learning. Educators provided an open-ended reflection drawing from the Learning Stories and other in-class assessments and observations. Progress Reports were given to parents/caregivers on the final day of the program.

These qualitative data were analyzed for themes and grouped in accordance with the four frames. It should be noted that the four frames do not operate exclusively; there are aspects fundamental to learning that are interrelated. Thus, there was overlap in the coding structure. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participating children, “Child A” is used in place of the actual child’s name where originally used.

Assessments of Parents/Caregivers’ Perceptions

Parent/Caregiver Survey

To better understand parents/caregivers’ opinions about the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, a survey was developed (see Appendix B). The survey consisted of items regarding their child’s demographics, as well as their and their child’s experiences, engagement, impact, and satisfaction regarding the program. The aforementioned areas were assessed using a combination of four-, five-, and six-point scales. Parents/caregivers were also provided with two open-ended questions to further describe changes they observed in their child as a result of the program and additional suggestions for the program.

The Parent/caregiver surveys were administered during the last week of the program. Parents/caregivers were informed that their survey responses would strictly be kept confidential and anonymous. Completed surveys were received from 73% of parents/caregivers. Surveys were returned to Research and Information Services, scanned, and processed in July 2016.

Frequencies for each survey question are provided in Appendix C. For ease of reporting, Factor Analysis was used to identify clusters of related survey items and these related items were then combined to form representative variables, simplifying the reporting of the results. Principal Components Analysis was selected as the extraction method due to the exploratory nature of the analyses.

Descriptive statistics and one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine differences in thematic parental/caregiver perceptions of the program across demographic variables. Statistical significance was assumed at $p = 0.05$. Statistical analyses were computed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 19. Regarding qualitative data, responses to the open-ended questions were thematically organized and are summarized in this report.

Parent/Caregiver Focus Groups

Focus groups were used to obtain a deeper understanding of parents/caregivers' perceptions and opinions. They were conducted at three of the six sites located at the west, east, and south parts of the city towards the end of the program in July 2016. These sites were selected as they represent the geographic and demographic diversity in the program. A culturally varied group of 25 parents/caregivers (23 mothers and 2 fathers) of South Asian, Tibetan, Caucasian, or Black descent participated. A translator was provided at one site since the majority of participants there spoke English as their second language.

Staff from Research and Information Services conducted the focus groups using a standardized interview guide (see Appendix D). Prior to starting the focus group, parents/caregivers were informed that the conversations would remain confidential and consented to the audio recording of the interview for transcription purposes. Table 1 presents the number of participants and the duration of each focus group. Interview transcripts from the focus groups were analyzed for prevalent themes.

Table 1: Participant Count and Duration of Parent/Caregiver Focus Groups

Program Site	Focus Group Participants		Duration (Minutes)
	Males	Females	
North Kipling Junior Middle School	0	8	80
Parkdale Junior and Senior Public School	1	7	62
Tom Longboat Junior Public School	1	8	90

Assessment of Educators' Perceptions

The final component of the evaluation plan was to engage educators in a discussion surrounding the program impacts, successes and challenges they encountered, topics specific to the program curriculum (e.g., focus on Africentric and culturally relevant principles, professional learning), and recommendations for future offerings of the program (see Appendix E for Interview Guide).

The educator focus group comprised of six teachers⁴, seven Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), two George Brown College ECE interns, one volunteer, and one supervisor affiliated with George Brown College. The program administrative team members were present during the focus group.

Focus group participants were informed that the discussion would be audio recorded to facilitate later transcription and that their responses would remain confidential. The focus group was facilitated by two members from Research and Information Services, and was 95 minutes in duration.

Afterwards, a subsequent focus group took place with only the educators involved with the Parkdale site. The aim of this focus group was to evaluate the partnership between the Toronto District School Board, the City of Toronto, and George Brown College in delivering the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program (see Appendix F for Interview Guide). There were six participants in the focus group and it took 26 minutes. These results are presented in the Parkdale Case Study (see page 49).

Both educator focus group transcripts were analyzed for prevalent themes.

⁴ One teacher was unable to attend, and so, participated by providing electronic responses to the interview guide.

PROGRAM IMPACT ON PARTICIPATING CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Learning Stories

Through assessments, educators garner a comprehensive understanding of their students' strengths and interests which fosters pedagogical decision making. Carr (2001) pioneered a qualitative and holistic assessment and reporting tool rooted in narrative inquiry. Learning Stories are "structured observations in everyday or 'authentic' settings, designed to provide a cumulative series of snapshots" (Carr & Claxton, 2002, p. 22). This documentation approach employs a strength or asset-based, rather than a deficit-based, lens whereby children are credited for their abilities, interests, former learning, and experiences. The socio-cultural contexts that shape learning are also acknowledged (Carr & Claxton, 2002; Claxton, 2002).

Learning Stories are generated by educators and shared with the child and his or her family. Learning Stories tend to focus on dispositions, which are manners in which an individual conducts him or herself. Carr and Claxton consider dispositions as "a very different type of learning from skills and knowledge. They can be thought of as habits of mind, tendencies to respond to situations in certain ways" (2002 p. 30). The five dispositions that are emphasized in Learning Stories are courage and curiosity, trust and playfulness, perseverance, confidence, and responsibility (Carr, 1998). However, educators may provide commentary on other aspects of the child as a learner, including opportunities and possibilities for extending learning.

This form of documentation focuses on making "thinking/learning visible and giving voice to children" (Kashin, 2016, March 19). In doing so, children feel valued and families are engaged. Educators also benefit from the Learning Story approach as it prompts intentionality and reflection behind documentation, responsive pedagogy, and accountability.

Notwithstanding the benefits associated with these documentation and assessment methods, various challenges and limitations have been acknowledged in the literature. Scholars have questioned the reliability, validity, and objectivity of Learning Stories (Blaklock, 2008). Individuals involved in a child's learning are encouraged to contribute to the Learning Stories from their unique perspective. While this may affect the reliability of the data, this aspect strengthens the richness of this narrative approach. One particular Learning Story might be based on several minutes of observation which represents a small segment of a child's learning experience and may not be entirely transparent or reflective of the child's learning and development, and from which assessments are devised. Carr suggested that users abandon conventional conditions for reliability and validity and instead appraise Learning Stories in terms of accountability (2001). To mitigate potential compromises to accountability, she proposed that transparency of data is maintained, a range of voices are involved in the interpretation of a Learning Story, refining evidence as it emerges, and elucidating the connection between the student and their learning environment (Carr, 2001).

Owing to the use of Learning Stories, educators with the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program garnered a greater understanding of their children's strengths, interests, and dispositions. Teachers and ECEs used this knowledge to plan for and provide enriching, personalized learning experiences to scaffold children's next steps in learning and development. The use of Learning Stories in this program aligns with Mary Jane Drummond's, a renowned educator, researcher and author, definition of assessment: "The ways in which, in our everyday

practice, we observe children’s learning, strive to understand it and then put our understanding to good use” (1993, p.13).

Progress Reports

Aside from Learning Stories providing direction for children’s learning and development, educators used this evidence, together with other formative assessments and observations, to form the basis of the Progress Reports they generated for participating children at the end of the program. Not surprising, the educator teams embedded the holistic and multifaceted nature of Learning Stories into their Progress Reports. This process enhanced the efficiency of summative assessments as the learning journey documented through the Learning Stories served as the foundation for the Progress Reports.

On the standard Progress Reports (see Appendix A), educator reflection around the four frames of the Kindergarten program, as referenced in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s *The Kindergarten Program* (2016), was encouraged. The four frames – *Belonging and Contributing*, *Self-Regulation and Well-Being*, *Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours*, and *Problem Solving and Innovating* – refer to broad areas that reflect the innate yet integrated manner in which learning occurs and aspects of learning that are integral to development during the early years (see Figure 2). According to the aforementioned Ministry document, *Belonging and Contributing* refers to children’s sense of connectedness to and relationships with others, as well as contributions and understanding of the world around them. *Self-Regulation and Well-Being* encompasses children’s cognitions and feelings and acknowledgement and respect of others’ cognitions and feelings, regulation of emotions, distraction management, appraisal of consequences of one’s actions, and physical and mental health and wellness. The *Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours* frame includes communicating thoughts, feelings, literacy behaviours and mathematics behaviours in various ways as well as active engagement in learning. Finally, *Problem Solving and Innovating* is reflective of children’s inherent curiosity to exploring the world using multiple senses, and through creative and analytical thinking.

Figure 2: Ontario Ministry of Education’s Four Frames of the Kindergarten Program
 (© Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2016)



Belonging and Contributing

Carol Goodenow defined belonging as the “psychological membership in the school or classroom, that is, the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment” (1993, p. 80). One of the most predominant themes in this frame was exactly this – a sense of belonging – which was explicitly stated or was referred to. For the children participating in this unique program, more than half (60%) demonstrated respect and consideration for individual differences and alternative points of view. Some children (38%) were observed sharing aspects of their identity, such as their skin colour, culture, preferences, and interests with their peers, engaged parents/caregivers, and educators.

“She also loved going to the Dramatic Play centre where she would dress in dresses that were perhaps similar to the traditional dresses from her parent’s country of Sri Lanka. She would role play that she was cooking for her family. She would often say, “I look like Mommy”. This would bring a huge smile to her face.” (Progress Report of a Child from Parkdale Site)

Educators also noted the development of interpersonal skills, such as listening and responding to others, forming relationships, and talking about and retelling events, among 89% of children.

“For example, Child A comforted a classmate as he struggled with drop off, he said, ‘Don’t worry, Mommy will be back.’” (Progress Report of a Child from Ellesmere-Statton Site)

Educators also commented on a sense of accomplishment, such as taking pride in their work, completing tasks in Learning Centres, and recognizing personal strengths in about one-third (32%) of children's Progress Reports. Other examples of *Belonging and Contributing* (e.g., understanding and awareness of their surroundings, speaking confidently, making choices, expression, etc.) were noted for 74% of children.

"As Child A became more comfortable with his environment, he was able to engage in exploring the room and he would point out his creations to the adults ("Look!", pointing to his classroom ship made from Legos smiling)." (Progress Report of a Child from Parkdale Site)

Self-Regulation and Well-Being

Self-regulation has been described by experts in the field as critical to social and emotional learning and health development, as oxygen is to life (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a). Educators recorded various elements of self-regulation and well-being in Progress Reports. Nearly all children (99%) provided evidence of active and frequent participation in a variety of activities. Specifically, children asked questions in different contexts, were willing to try new things, adapted to new situations, and communicated their ideas.

"Child A actively participated in learning new songs such as: Shape Song, Kye Kye Kule call and response, Alphabet song, and empowering videos from Sesame Street." (Progress Report of a Child from North Kipling Site)

The second leading theme noted by educators was children's ability to play co-operatively with their peers. Cooperative behaviours such as turn taking, building relationships, asking for assistance to resolve conflict, using an appropriate tone of voice, and paying compliments were documented by educators for 72% of the participating children.

"At the small blocks he was seen playing cooperatively with two peers and he shared, 'A sail boat! Now we're playing a different game.' He is often seen playing cooperatively with his peers and if a problem arises, he uses his words to express his feelings. Sometimes he contacts an adult for assistance." (Progress Report of a Child from Ellesmere-Statton Site)

An eagerness to learn was referenced in more than half (53%) of children's Progress Reports through enthusiasm, eagerness, interest, and becoming an active learner. Similarly, half of children (50%) demonstrated an ability to follow instructions and routines and be a respectful and active listener.

"She is able to follow classroom routines with very few reminders from the educators." (Progress Report of a Child from St. Margaret's Site)

Responsibility for one's learning and actions was evident in more than one third of children (37%) in the program. Educators reckoned that self-reliance and accountability for oneself, belongings (personal or classroom), recognizing when to seek assistance, and self-control further substantiated this theme.

"Child A verbalized often that she wanted to be the classroom helper to collect books and assist with cleaning up our classroom at the end of the free play time frame. Even if she was not the helper of the day, Child A always took time to help

educators and her classmates to clean up to transition to the next activity.”
(Progress Report of a Child from Parkdale Site)

To a lesser extent, educators reported that a small proportion of children (18%) exuded confidence in their behaviours, communication, and engagement in an activity. These children were also self-motivated, took initiative, and persevered. For instance, one child confidently shared aspects of his cultural identity by teaching the class how to count to ten in Dari. Another element of this frame that was conveyed in the Progress Reports for a small proportion (14%) of children was the development of empathy. Namely, children expressed empathy for others, were able to respond to their peers' feelings, and understand their own and others' thoughts and feelings.

“Once when another student was crying in our class, [Child A] walked over and patted him on his back and said, ‘It’s okay.’ She then continued to gently take his hand and walk him over to the snack table. [Child A] is a kind friend who is always ready to comfort and aid her classmates.” (Progress Report of a Child from Ellesmere-Statton Site)

There was support for other self-regulating behaviours among 60% of children. Among these behaviours were going to the washroom independently, self-reliance, developing movement skills, and controlling both fine and large motor skills.

“[Child A] demonstrates her personal well-being as she monitors her desire for snack, water, and the washroom without support from her teachers. She expresses herself well and will politely ask for more snack and assistance when needed.”
(Progress Report of a Child from Tom Longboat Site)

Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours

Play is a critical agent for learning. A large body of evidence has converged to suggest a strong link between play and learning during the early years, particularly with respect to problem solving, language acquisition, literacy, and mathematics (Fullan, 2013; NAEYC, 2009; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b). Play-based learning was heavily emphasized in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, which established a foundation for literacy and mathematics skill development.

Literacy Behaviours

Educators shared observations of nearly all children (97%) using language in a variety of capacities. Children used both verbal and non-verbal language to communicate their thoughts, reflect, and solve problems. They also used language as a means to share and make connections between their previous and new experiences as well as ask questions. For example, one child shared what she did on the weekend and reflections from her culture with her educators and peers. Literacy skills, such as reading and writing, were also noted. The vast majority of children (89%) were observed clarifying familiar and unfamiliar text by using pictures, their knowledge of oral language, and sound-symbol relationships. Children also demonstrated an interest in reading and acknowledged different forms of written material.

“[Child A] demonstrates her literacy behaviours when she is enjoying reading simple books with the teacher. She will attempt to sound out words, but has begun to use pictures as cues when reading books.” (Progress Report of a Child from Tom Longboat Site)

On a related note, nearly three quarters of children (73%) demonstrated knowledge and recognition of most letters of the alphabet in different contexts (e.g., letters in their name, books, etc.). Writing was also alluded to in the Progress Reports, in that, 60% of children demonstrated an interest in writing and were able to write their name, words, and simple messages.

“She was very interested in trying to make sentences with alphabet magnets on trays in our classroom. She was able to spell her name and identify the letter used in making it. This demonstrated her literacy strengths in the classroom.” (Progress Report of a Child from Parkdale Site)

Mathematics Behaviours

As for mathematics behaviours, educators indicated that most children (79%) understood the counting concepts (i.e., stable order, order of irrelevance) and were able to count in sequence. Children were also observed applying these counting principles in relevant contexts and by participating in number songs, rhymes, and poems.

“[Child A] demonstrates an understanding of numbers and is continuing to identify numbers, count in sequence, and recognize quantities without counting (numbers from 1-10 and ten frame counting).” (Progress Report of a Child from Firgrove Site)

“[Child A] also understands and communicates numerical concepts. For example, he said, ‘I have four pockets, two on the side of me and two on the back’.” (Progress Report of a Child from Parkdale Site)

About one third of children (35%) were able to identify numbers and quantity using both non-standard units of measure and concrete materials. The development of other numeracy skills, such as one-to-one correspondence, estimation, and shapes (i.e., naming, forming, creating), were cited in the majority (70%) of Progress Reports.

“[Child A] shows his understanding of counting principles when he explores non-standard units (e.g., link cubes) to measure length and different sized containers at the sand and water table, where he also discovered capacity.” (Progress Report of a Child from Firgrove Site)

Relevant to both literacy and mathematics behaviours, was the identification, creation, comparison, and extension of patterns in the school and natural environment. Children did so using different shapes, colours, blocks, gears, letters, and numbers. Children also recognized patterns in their surroundings, such as their clothing.

“[Child A] excelled at creating a pattern using cubes and shape blocks. When creating his Kente mat, [Child A] was quick to identify when his pattern had gotten mixed up and fixed the mistake.” (Progress Report of a Child from Parkdale Site)

Problem Solving and Innovating

Through the intentional design and delivery of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, opportunities to foster the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, and innovation were provided to participating children to develop these 21st century skills.

The principal theme in this frame was the communication of results of inquiry. That is, 80% of children were able to communicate the findings from individual and group explorations, use specialized vocabulary to communicate, and retell experiences in proper sequences. Two thirds of children (66%) were described as using problem solving strategies (e.g., social situations) and their imagination to create drama, dance, music, and visual art forms.

"[Child A] is engaged in play and inquiry when she is creating a new ship or airplane at the art centre and through trial and error figured out whether they sink or float."
(Progress Report of a Child from Tom Longboat Site)

Educators also noticed that most children (59%) were capable of making predictions and observations during the activities they were engaged with, and 43% of children stated problems and posed questions under different circumstances. They used diverse materials to conduct their own explorations.

"[Child A] shares observations, predictions, and questions in a variety of contexts. At the gardening centre, she shared, 'I see a flower. I see interesting stuff and they're growing up.' She also posed a question saying, 'I wonder [if] they need water?'" (Progress Report of a Child from Ellesmere-Statton Site)

Detailing learning in a socio-culturally relevant and developmentally appropriate manner, as done in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program with the Learning Stories and Progress Reports, "honours the whole child, including the wealth of experience that stems from each child's home life" (Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program Educator). As such, documentation and assessment impact children, educators, and parents/caregivers in the following ways: "creates shared understanding, celebrates the rights of individual learners, recognizes children's ownership of their learning, actualizes shared accountability, and provides voice in learning for everyone" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012, p.8). Thus, stakeholders are likely to feel valued and respected as their contributions are at the crux of these tools. Children, in particular, feel validated as they are the protagonist in the document. Due to the alignment between these forms of pedagogical documentation and the Ministry of Education's overall expectations (i.e., four frames) for the Kindergarten program, educators gained a better appreciation for how they interrelate. They also gained a better understanding and ability to implement the program and curriculum and meet the individual needs of the children. Among educators, Learning Stories and Progress Reports are fundamental to collaborative inquiry and evidence-based and effective pedagogy. This authentic partnership also enhanced parent/caregiver engagement with the learning and development of their child in the school, home, and broader community environments. Information gleaned from Learning Stories and Progress Reports strengthened parents/caregivers' understanding of their child and how to better extend their learning and development outside of the classroom.

Conclusion

Learning Stories and Progress Reports were effective at capturing the essence of every young learner as they epitomize the intersection of children’s abilities, interests, dispositions, and socio-cultural milieu. Educators with the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program employed Learning Stories as a form of documentation and to support assessment (i.e., Progress Reports). This aligns with pedagogical documentation recommended by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Moreover, it had a positive impact on children, educators, and parents/caregivers. Educators at one site used a dinner feast analogy to describe the value and vibrancy of Learning Stories: “The feast is much better when each person contributes, rather than just one dish that everyone replicates or eats out of.”

PARENTS/CAREGIVERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROGRAM

Parent/Caregiver Survey

A total of 95 parents/caregivers completed the survey in 2016. The majority of survey respondents were mothers (N=75; 79%), followed by fathers (N=13; 14%) and relatives or caregivers (e.g., sibling, grandparents, etc.; N=7; 7%). The survey return rate was 73%.

Demographics of Participating Children

Demographic characteristics of children participating in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program were collected through the Parent/Caregiver Survey. The survey data indicate that there was a slightly higher proportion of male (N=50; 53%) compared to female children (N=44; 47%). The average age of participating children was 3.9 years, with most children being 4 years of age (N=53; 56%), followed by 3 years of age (N=24; 25%), and 5 years of age or older (N=17; 18%).

The vast majority of parents/caregivers reported that their child was born in Canada (N=85; 94%) while the remaining 6% (N=5) reported that their child was born outside of Canada. Half of parents/caregivers identified that their child spoke mostly English at home (N=49; 52%), followed by English and another language (N=26; 27%), and lastly, a language other than English (N=20; 21%). Three quarters (N=70; 75%) of the children had some prior exposure to external early learning programming (i.e., child care centre, preschool program, the TDSB's Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, play-based children's program, Ontario Early Years Centre, or Family Resource Centre program). Table 2 presents the distribution of the various early years programs children attended prior to their involvement in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. Some (N=20; 22%) indicated that their child had attended more than one type of early years program.

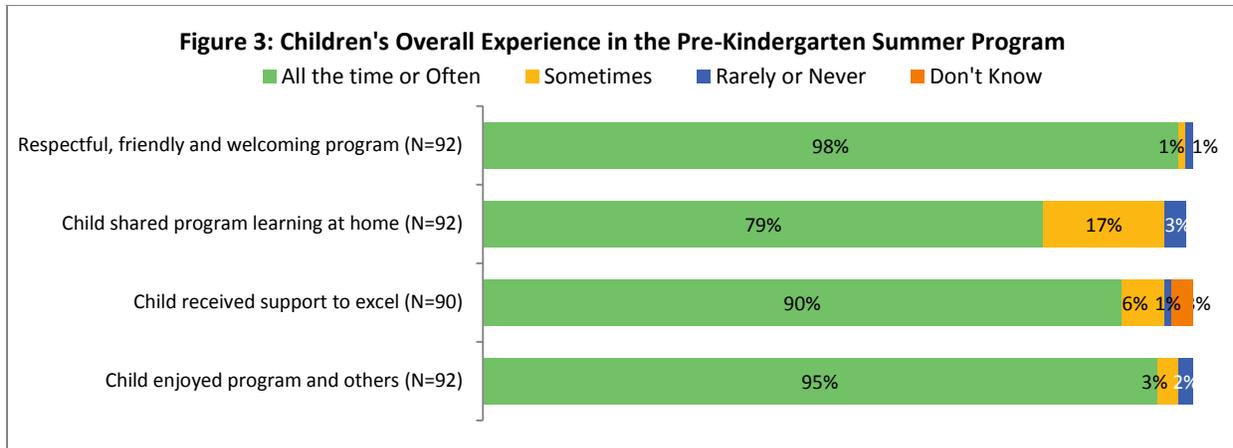
Table 2: Distribution of Early Years Programs Previously Attended

Program	Frequency	Percentage
Child care centre	12	13%
Pre-school program	34	37%
TDSB Parenting and Family Literacy Centre	13	14%
Play-based school program (e.g., drop in, Ontario Early Years Centre)	26	28%
None	23	25%

Children's Experience, Improvement, and School Readiness

Children's Overall Experience

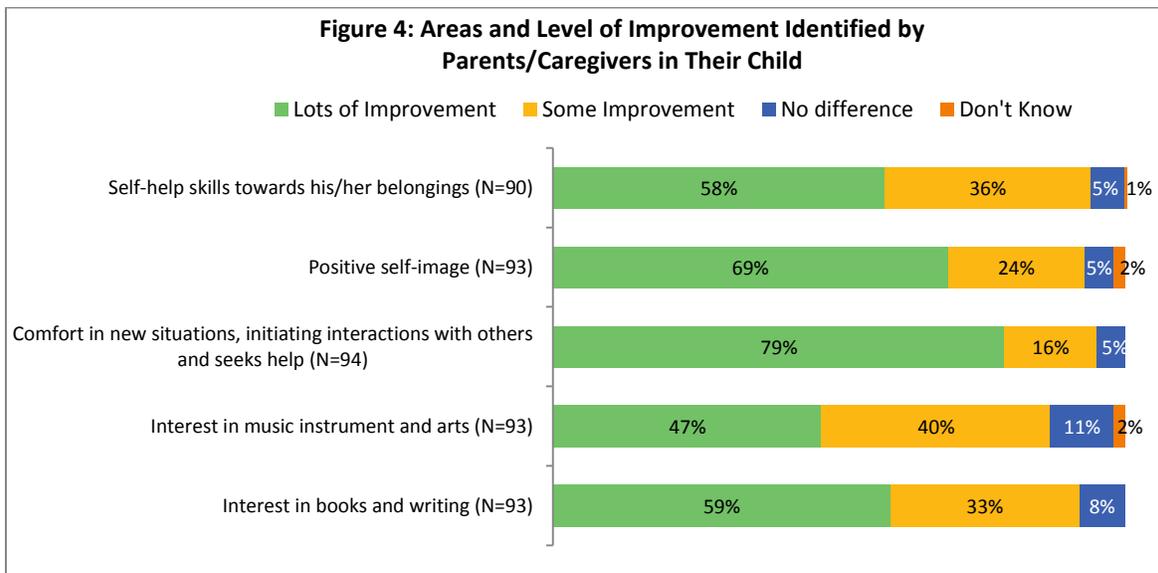
The vast majority (98%) of parents/caregivers reported that they had found the program to be respectful, friendly, and welcoming *all of the time or often* for their child. In addition, a large proportion (79%) reported that their child shared what he/she had learned during the program at home *all of the time or often*. Similarly, 90% and 95% of parent/caregivers reported that their child had received the support they needed to excel and had enjoyed the program and others, respectively, *all of the time or often* (see Figure 3).



Areas of Improvement among Children

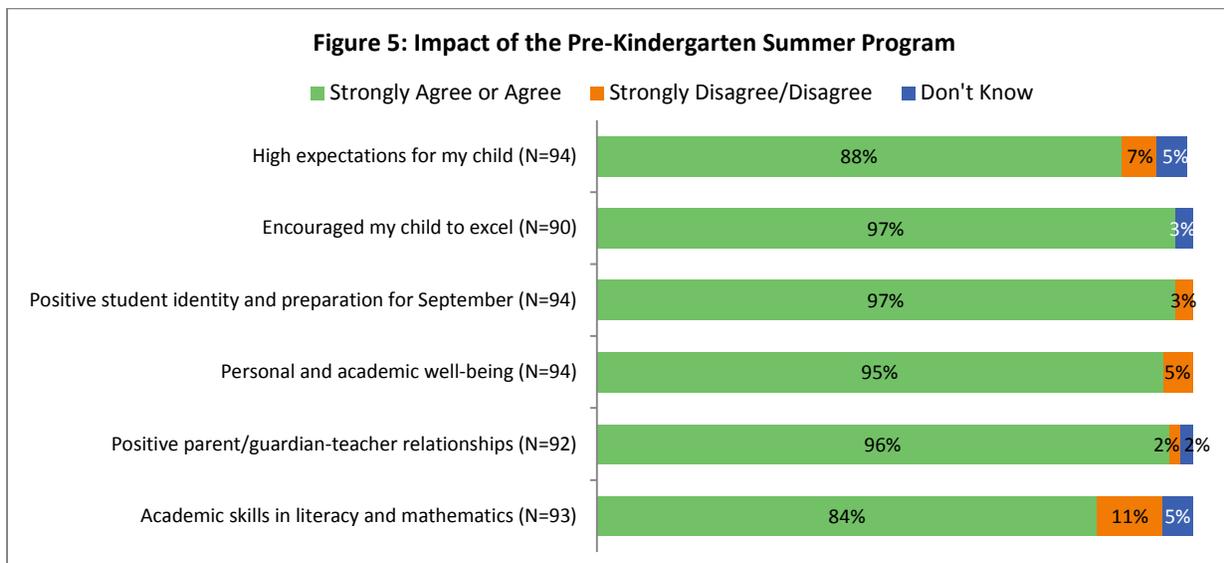
Parents/caregivers were asked to rate the level of improvement they identified in their child since attending the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program in various academic, social, and psychological domains (see Figure 4).

The majority of parents/caregivers either observed *lots of improvement* or *some improvement* in their child across these domains. More specifically, more than half of parents/caregivers reported noticing *lots of improvement* (58%) in their child's self-help skills towards his or her belongings. More than two thirds of parents/caregivers (69%) identified seeing *lots of improvement* in the development of their child's positive self-image, while a higher proportion (79%) indicated *lots of improvement* with their child's comfort in new situations, initiating interactions with others, and seeking help. Approximately half of parents/caregivers observed *lots of improvement* in their child's interest in music instruments and arts (47%) as well as in books and writing (59%).



Program Impact on Children's School Readiness

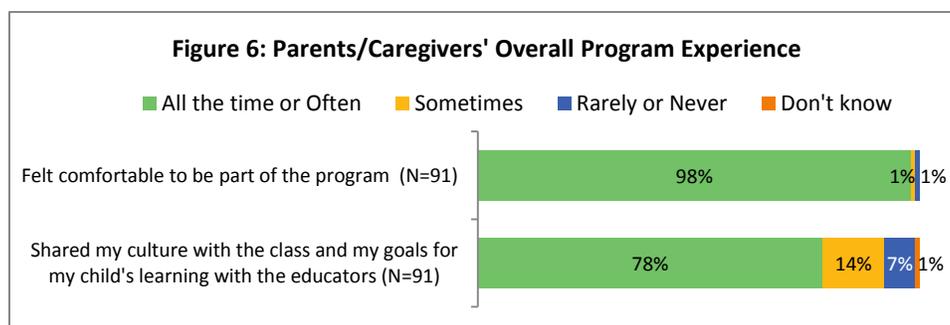
Parents/caregivers were also asked to rate their level of agreement on the program's impact on their child's school readiness. The vast majority of parents/caregivers *strongly agreed or agreed* that the program established high expectations for their child (88%), encouraged their child to excel in the program (97%), enabled their child to develop a positive student identity and be more prepared for Kindergarten in September (97%), enhanced their child's overall personal and academic well-being (95%), and had a positive impact on their child's academic skills in literacy and mathematics (84%). Most parents/caregivers also expressed that the program benefitted their relationship with their child's teacher (96%) (see Figure 5).



Parents/Caregivers' Experience, Involvement, and Satisfaction

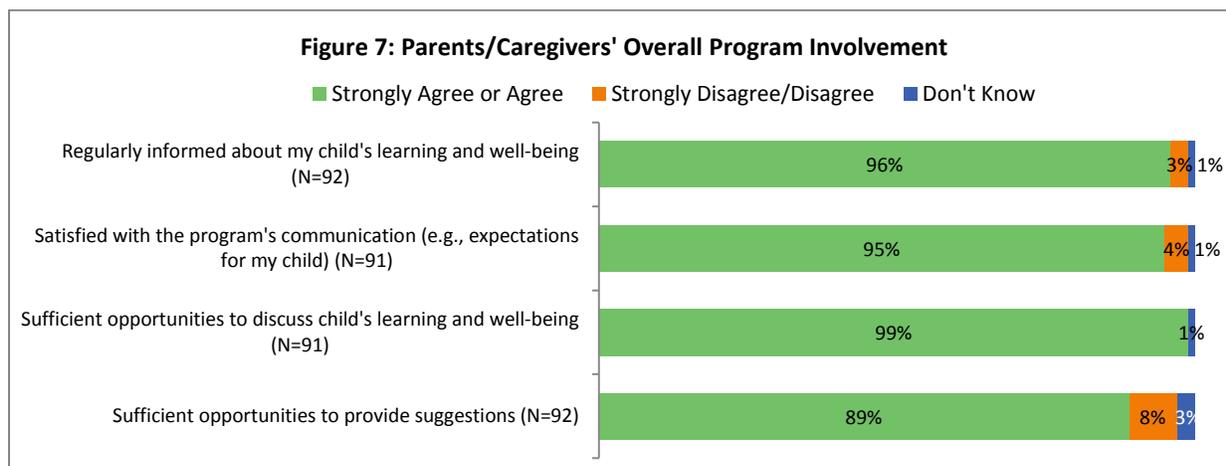
Parents/Caregivers' Overall Experience

Parents/caregivers' overall experience in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning program is depicted in Figure 6. The vast majority (98%) reported feeling comfortable to be part of the program *all the time or often*. More than three quarters (78%) of parents/caregivers reported sharing their culture with the class and/or their goals for their child's learning with educators.



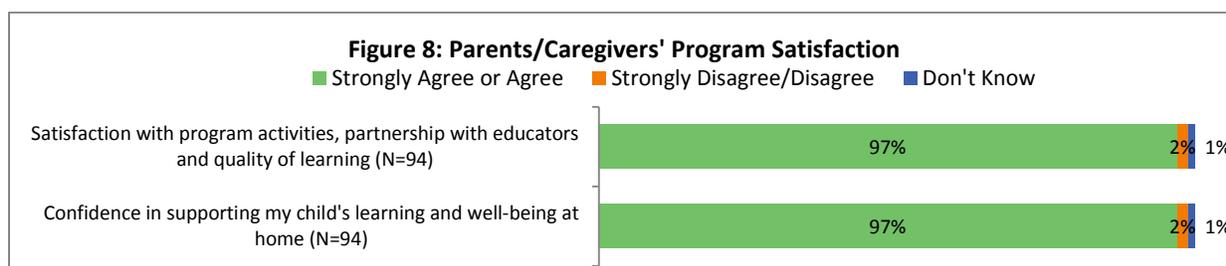
Parents/Caregivers' Involvement

Parents/caregivers unanimously felt comfortable participating in the program (see Figure 7). Most *strongly agreed or agreed* that they were regularly informed about their child's learning and well-being (96%), satisfied with the communication received from the program (i.e., child's progress, expectations; 95%), were provided sufficient opportunities to discuss their child's learning and well-being (99%), and were given sufficient opportunities to provide suggestions (89%).



Parents/Caregivers' Satisfaction with the Program

In addition, parents/caregivers were asked to report their satisfaction with the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. An equally high proportion of respondents *strongly agreed or agreed* that they were satisfied with the program's activities, their partnership with educators, and quality of learning (97%) as well as their confidence in supporting their child's learning and well-being at home (97%). This demonstrates that parents/caregivers and educators worked well in partnership with one another to support children's learning and well-being throughout the program (see Figure 8).



Secondary Analyses

Secondary analyses were conducted to examine potential differences in program outcomes when factoring demographic variables, such as children's sex, birth place, language spoken at home, age, survey respondent's relationship to the child, and prior exposure to an external early years learning programming.

Following the results of a Factor Analysis, highly correlated items were combined to compute mean scores to represent the following six overarching variables: 1) children's *overall program*

experience included items such as program enjoyment, welcoming environment, and level of comfort; 2) *level of improvement* in children from participating in the program comprised of items concerning social skills, self-help, and interest in books; 3) *program impact* on school readiness was determined from items such as children’s comfort in the school environment, positive student identity, and academic skills; 4) *parent/caregiver experience* was calculated from items representing their comfort in participating in the program and sharing their culture; 5) *parent/caregiver involvement* comprised of items such as sufficient opportunities to provide suggestions and being regularly informed about their child’s progress; and 6) *parent/caregiver satisfaction* was calculated from items concerning program variety and quality of learning.

Mean scores were computed such that lower scores (i.e., closer to 1) reflected greater frequencies of positive ratings in program experience, improvement or agreement. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine any significant differences (i.e., $p = 0.05$) among the mean scores of the six overarching variables across each of the demographic variables mentioned above (see Appendix C).

Statistical tests revealed that significant differences existed only for parent/caregiver involvement and satisfaction as a function of children’s sex, birth place, and age (see Table 3). Namely, parents/caregivers of male children reported more positive involvement in the program than parents/caregivers of female children. Secondly, parents/caregivers whose children were born in Canada reported noticeably more positive involvement and satisfaction with the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program compared to parents/caregivers whose children were born outside of Canada. Lastly, the program most positively impacted the involvement and satisfaction of parents/caregivers whose children were four years old, compared to parents/caregivers of younger and older children.

Table 3: Parents/Caregivers’ Involvement and Satisfaction by Child Demographic Variable

Demographic Variable	Parent/Caregiver Involvement		Parent/Caregiver Satisfaction	
	Mean (Standard Deviation)	p	Mean (Standard Deviation)	p
Child’s Sex				
Male	1.39 (0.47)	0.03	N/A	N/A
Female	1.68 (0.78)			
Child’s Birth Place				
In Canada	1.70 (0.83)	0.02	1.47 (0.51)	0.01
Outside Canada	2.53 (1.19)		2.30 (1.62)	
Child’s Age				
3 Years	1.53 (0.59)	0.03	1.41 (0.71)	0.04
4 Years	1.41 (0.47)		1.26 (0.48)	
≥5 Years	1.89 (0.99)		1.74 (0.98)	

Note: Mean (Standard Deviation)

Program effects on children’s overall program experience, level of improvement, program impact on school readiness, and parent/caregiver experience and satisfaction did not vary by children’s gender. Program effects on children’s overall program experience, level of improvement, program impact on school readiness, and parent/caregiver experience did not vary by child’s birth place or language spoken at home.

Non-significant differences were revealed between other demographic variables (i.e., language spoken at home, relationship to child, and prior exposure to external early years learning programming) and children's overall program experience, level of improvement, program impact on school readiness, and parent/caregiver experience, involvement, and satisfaction.

These non-significant differences demonstrate that the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program was well received by nearly all participating children and their parents/caregivers. Findings previously outlined should be considered carefully as statistically significant differences may not imply educational or pedagogical meaningfulness. In other words, the magnitude of difference in the domains examined through these secondary analyses should be interpreted with both statistical and pragmatic reasoning.

Descriptive and statistical statistics for these comparisons are reported in Appendix C.

Qualitative Data

To close the survey, parents/caregivers were given two open-ended questions to describe additional program outcomes for their child and provide further feedback. A qualitative analysis was conducted on these comments from parents/caregivers.

Additional Changes Observed in Children

Parents/caregivers were first asked if they had noticed any additional changes in their child as a result of participating in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. A total of 65 parents/caregivers responded to this question. Parents/caregivers mainly elaborated on topics already captured by closed-ended survey items. The majority commented that their child had greatly enjoyed the program and had been excited to attend school.

"My daughter is able to interact with kids her own age. She likes to go to school and is happy and excited about going to school which is very important for me." (Mother)

Some parents/caregivers also remarked on their child becoming more independent, self-confident, and ready to begin Kindergarten in September.

"Participating in the program has helped develop his self-confidence which I believe will assist him in having a smoother transition to JK this September." (Mother)

A few respondents attributed their child's strengthened self-identity to receiving culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy through the program.

"[The teacher]'s program also helped introduce culturally relevant learning for my son who is of mixed race. She goes above and beyond to ensure each child sees himself/herself as a valued member of the classroom and community, through rich Learning Centres and guided learning opportunities." (Mother)

In addition, parents/caregivers explained that their child demonstrated an improved ability to communicate their thoughts and emotions.

"My son is more independent, more open to making new friends and [has] better social skills. He can describe his feelings better." (Mother)

"[My child is] more outgoing, polite and engaging/conversant". (Father)

Furthermore, a few parents/caregivers believed this program had nurtured their child's interest in reading and writing.

"I noticed lots of changes in my child. He showed greater interest in this programme [and] his interest in reading books." (Mother)

"Yes, she has more interest in books and writing." (Mother)

Areas to Improve the Program

Despite the immense praise for the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, parents/caregivers provided several suggestions for improving future offerings. Some parents/caregivers mentioned that participating children would further benefit if the program was longer in duration.

"This program is only 4 weeks...if this [was] 6 weeks or 8 weeks it will be more benefi[cial]." (Mother)

Some respondents also mentioned that the literacy and mathematics curriculum, along with the development of physical skills, should be strengthened.

"I think we should have more math activities, reading books more than that and most of all, practicing the writing skills." (Mother)

"You could focus [on] fine motor skills, cutting, writing and other activities." (Father)

Many respondents suggested expanding the program to other schools and age groups in future years.

"I would like to [say] please continue and develop this program every summer. Many children didn't [get into] this program so [it is] very sad [and] that's why I'm saying [to] develop this program [in] some more schools." (Mother)

Parent/Caregiver Focus Groups

Focus groups provided parents/caregivers an opportunity to elaborate further on both their child's and their experiences with the program, particularly regarding their child's school readiness and learning skills along with how participating in the program benefitted them as parents/caregivers.

Introduction to the Summer Learning Program

The focus group began by parents/caregivers sharing how they were introduced to the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. They became aware of the program through the promotional efforts of school staff (e.g., principal, teacher, social worker) and other parents/caregivers associated with program sites.

"I learned about the program through my friend [...] here. She introduced me to it. And I said, 'Why don't I give it a try?'" (Mother)

A few parents/caregivers also mentioned that informational flyers and leaflets advertising the program had been distributed by their child's school. Other family members heard about the program at the Ontario Early Years Centres, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, More than Child's Play, and in the community.

Expectations of the Summer Learning Program

Next, parents/caregivers were asked to express their motivations for enrolling their child in the program. The leading reason was to foster Kindergarten readiness. In other words, parents/caregivers were seeking opportunities to familiarize their child to the school routine, environment, and individuals. The aspects of school readiness that were most important to family members included self-regulation, independence, maturation, social interactions and behaviours (e.g., sharing), and enthusiasm to learn.

"[The program] is going to help him [...] when he starts Junior Kindergarten. [...] I want him to be [on] his own, when the time comes in September without me."
(Mother)

"You know, [it's] nice to start early because, like I say, four years old and to get ready for September and to [get] used to [...] play with kids, to share things with the others. [...] It's a good reason to start this way." (Father)

Similarly, parents/caregivers wanted to expose their child to a social environment that would afford them opportunities to interact with peers of a similar age.

"I want her to come, so she can extend her skills and to interact more with kids, and try to communicate and be calm in the class. That's basically why I [chose] to come to this [program]." (Mother)

"So her expectation from this program is for her daughter to learn how to share and [...] know how to socialize because she's the only child in the home, so she doesn't know [how] to share or you know, how to socialize with her own age group. So this summer reading program has helped her daughter a lot." (Translator, on behalf of a mother)

Other parents/caregivers described wanting to provide a learning experience in order to occupy their child for the summer as their reason for enrolling their child in this program.

"My daughter has been going to pre-school. I just want some activities for the summer. Since summer camp, she want[s] to go somewhere." (Mother)

By extension, some parents/caregivers enrolled their child to accelerate the development of basic academic skills, such as reading, writing, and numeracy. This was especially true for families who were newcomers to Canada and not fluent in English.

"I came to Canada. I want to improve my child's language and [learn] how to speak with the child." (Mother)

Parents/caregivers were then asked to elaborate on their initial expectations of the program and if the program had successfully met those expectations. These expectations mirrored their reasons for enrolling their child as previously mentioned. Namely, parents/caregivers expected

that the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program would promote school readiness, healthy social interactions, and academic skills. The majority of parents/caregivers confirmed that the program had met and exceeded their expectations.

Program Impact on Children's Learning and Development

A fundamental motive for evaluating programs such as this one is to better understand its impact on stakeholders. Parents/caregivers shared changes they had noticed in their child as a result of their participation in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program.

Academic and Learning Skills

First, parents/caregivers observed a variety of improvements in their child's academic and learning skills. That is to say, the curriculum and Learning Centres helped their child learn to count, know the letters of the alphabet, read, and write. Children also learned to identify shapes and colours.

"My daughter [...] can write 1 to 15 now and she can write A to I think G or so. She can do that, and she can read and wants to learn shapes [and] colours at home."
(Mother)

"Her daughter never liked books. So now she's looking at books, looking at the pictures, and you know, having fun." (Translator, on behalf of mother)

Likewise, parents/caregivers noted that the program developed an intrinsic interest in reading and in books, in general, in their child. For example, one mother described that her son now requested that she read a story to him every night before bed.

School Readiness

Improved school readiness among participating children over the course of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program was reported by parents/caregivers. They were grateful that their child became more autonomous and were comfortable at school in their parents/caregivers' absence.

"He's using the washroom independently. It's a big thing because at home [...] I have to help him. [Now] he's using [the] washroom [by] himself. It's very nice. [...] He's [a] little bit [more] independent after [participating in the program]. [...] Now, he's trying to think for himself [and] asking [for] help." (Mother)

Another feature of school readiness is the ability to follow a routine and instructions. While there was initially a learning curve for participating children, they quickly adapted and became more disciplined.

"Through this program, she has seen changes in her daughter. [...] Like, day to day tasks, and you know waking up early in the morning, getting prepared." (Translator, on behalf of mother)

"I like the routine; there's like circle time, story time, and the rules. [...] The teacher says, 'Hands on head' [and] this means stop. [...] It is building like discipline in children." (Mother)

Furthermore, children demonstrated a greater ability to self-regulate, concentrate, and disregard distractions as a result of their participation in the program.

“So he listen[s] and focus[es] on the [librarian] when she [is] talking. [...] I’m shocked for that one too. He [...] never listens [to] anything. [Now], he can listen, sit down and listen and he can focus.” (Mother)

Social and Communication Skills

In addition to school readiness, parents/caregivers noticed an improvement in their child’s social and communication skills. In specific, they explained that their child developed healthy interpersonal skills which allowed them to form friendships with their peers.

“She enjoys the atmosphere. She enjoys playing with the other kids and [...] she’s very appreciative of everybody in her class.” (Mother)

“Especially with my son, he learned to be social, which is very, very important for them. They have to be in class. They have to talk to each other and learn new things.” (Mother)

Moreover, children learned to interact with others in a respectful way, as explained by one parent.

“[I tell my son,] ‘Ask permission when you take something from other people or from the teacher, anything you need, you have to ask the teachers.’ And now he’s try[ing] to ask, ‘Can I have please?’ Before he [would] say ‘Give me!’” (Father)

Similarly, parents/caregivers observed that their child became more communicative both in the school and home environments. For instance, children’s curiosity about their surroundings prompted them to ask more questions. They also shared their experiences with their family members.

“He’s totally different. He ask[s] lots of questions at home. He tells lots of stories about his class and he says he met new friends.” (Father)

Enhanced Cultural Pride

Finally, this program was punctuated by Africentric and culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical frameworks. Not surprising, parents/caregivers revealed that their child had been motivated to learn more about their own and their peers’ cultural backgrounds (e.g., first languages, songs, stories, etc.).

“They’re learning to count in different languages, like Swahili [...]. They’re catching on very well.” (Mother)

Owing to this intentional and culturally sensitive approach, children also enhanced their cultural identity, sense of belonging, and confidence levels.

“My son told me, ‘Mommy, what you have [on] the inside and [what] I have inside is [the] same.’” (Mother)

“This program gave [my daughter] more of an insight [that] there [are] different backgrounds and it doesn’t matter what background anybody is; everybody’s your

friend. Anybody could be your friend no matter what their gender is or what colour their skin is. It's a matter of how they interact with you as a person.” (Mother)

None of the aforementioned outcomes associated with the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program were unexpected. However, some parents/caregivers were surprised that their child did not find the program to be an overwhelming experience. They also did not anticipate their child to divulge information about their day or exhibit confidence and self-pride in their abilities.

“Sometimes they make something [...and my son] bring[s] it home and he was so [...] happy, excited. [...] When] daddy came home [in] the evening time from office, [he said], ‘Look daddy what I make in my classroom. Look I can make it.’” (Mother)

Parents/Caregivers’ Overall Experiences

Parents/caregivers were actively involved in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. During the focus groups, they were asked to share their observations and reactions to the program.

Parents/Caregivers’ Engagement

A key element of this program was parent/caregiver engagement. As previously described, parents/caregivers were always welcomed to participate in the learning space. Parents/caregivers explained that they often accompanied their child into the classroom until he/she felt settled. Others mentioned that they observed classroom activities, interacted with educators and other children at Learning Centres, and assisted with classroom routine (e.g., snack time, tidying up).

“I come in every morning and ask around. I help around. I volunteer; I just help out with arts and craft, whatever [and] whenever [is] necessary.” (Mother)

From their time spent in the classroom, parents/caregivers made numerous observations on the program components, educators, and their child’s integration. They were fond of the diverse activities, routine, healthy snack options, and educators’ genuine inclusion of family members.

“Even though, I stay every day, [the educators] still welcome me; they’re happy to meet me. I like the routine, there’s like circle time, story time, and the rules.” (Mother)

Characteristics of Educators

Parents/caregivers praised the teachers and ECEs for their caring nature, strong commitment, and growth mindset to the children participating in the program. As such, educators rapidly built rapport with children and their families.

“The teachers are doing great. They’re very friendly. They take real care of the students, you know? Students seem to like [...] their teachers. They’re [...] interacting, asking questions.” (Father)

“I noticed [the] teachers are very welcoming. [...] I’m very satisfied with what they’re doing. It’s amazing that all the children seem to love them. In [a] few [days], even [the] second day, they listen to [their educators...]. It feels like they’ve been their teachers for [a...] long time. They look happy and excited.” (Mother)

Parents/Caregivers' Learning Experiences from the Program

Owing to this high quality level of engagement, parents/caregivers were impacted in the following ways.

Facilitating Learning at Home

Parents/caregivers garnered several techniques to support learning at home by observing educators. Educators also shared ideas and advised family members on strategies to help children read, write, and recite numbers. For example, in order to help children identify numbers, educators recommended presenting them out of order as opposed to consecutive order (i.e., 1 to 10) to avoid promoting rote memorization. Parents/caregivers were also encouraged to seek non-traditional learning opportunities for their child, such as grocery lists for reading and writing experiences.

"[The program] gave me ideas [on] how to [educate] at home, how to go about reading, how the teacher would hold the books and read to them. [...] Sometimes, when I'm in the program and when I'm helping, the teacher would come and say 'No, she had to do it herself.' Right? So that help[ed] me in a way, so that instead of me helping, [I] let her do it and orientate her how to do it." (Mother)

"I learned two new skills from [the teacher], not only to [let] him write all the time, [but] let him build something that he likes and let him know how many pieces are in [it]. How many pieces he use[s] to build [it], and that will help him write. [Also] give him a book. [...] I'm trying to use those strategies. And see if he will write more words." (Mother)

Educators also emphasized to parents/caregivers the importance of encouraging children to take the initiative with various tasks both at school and at home.

"[The teacher] asked him to write his name. [...] Since] I knew that he doesn't know [how] to write it, I started writing it for him. Then she said, 'No, let him write [it] first'. That made me learn [to] let them take the first step. Now at home, [...] I want [...] to make them [...] be the self-starters, to take the first step, instead of [me]." (Mother)

Improving Practices at Home

Interestingly, parents/caregivers shared that they learned and implemented school-based methods of discipline and routine in their homes. For instance, one mother shared that she began using a "time out" chair at home to be consistent with the school environment. Another parent revealed that she established a consistent schedule for activities at home, such as dinner and bedtime.

"When he [is] doing something [inappropriate], [...] he need[s] to know [that] I will give [him] the time out. So I learned from that because I never [used to] give him time out. [...] So nowadays when he's doing [something] bad, [...] I put a chair in the dining room, [a] small chair, and [I say], 'This is the timeout chair.'" (Mother)

"I [established] a routine. Before, [...] she [could] go to bed [anytime], [...] wake up [anytime]. [...] Now I follow the routine because later she go[es] to bed, she can't wake up. I [made a] routine: six o'clock dinnertime. [...] I write it and I put it [on] the wall." (Mother)

Home-School Relationships

Particularly among newcomers, parents/caregivers were appreciative of the program as it afforded them an opportunity to become more familiar and better understand the Ontario public education system.

“Before actually I didn’t know the [education system] in Canada [...]. Now I know the class like [how] they have [...] different activities [...] and I think it is a good opportunity [for me to] learn. [...] And I can talk with the teacher right now because before I didn’t know that was [the] teacher. Now I know [that I can] talk with [the] teacher and it’s good for me and I think it’s good for [...] my child. It’s [a] good opportunity.” (Mother)

Additional Support Needed and Suggestions for Improvement

In concluding the focus groups, all participants were asked if they had any suggestions to improve the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. Some parents/caregivers suggested that educators better adapt the curriculum to the age and abilities of the children. For example, children with little to no previous experience in early years settings may benefit from activities that develop their fine motor skills, such as holding a pencil. Another parent/caregiver suggested that younger children should receive an entirely different curriculum and in a different classroom than older children.

A common suggestion from focus group participants was to extend the length of the program or to begin the program in August. They believed this would help children get more accustomed to a school routine.

“It’s better to increase [a] little bit [of the program] duration, if they can. You know, they are giving [children] a gap. It’s going to [...finish] right now. For one month, they’re going to be back to normal with us, so their routine [is going] back to normal. When they [...] go [...] to the school [in September], they’re going to start again.” (Mother)

Rarely are children at this age identified as having exceptionalities. Thus, another prominent request from some parents/caregivers was additional support (e.g., speech language pathologist, special needs assistants, etc.) for children with special needs. Similarly, additional staff would benefit children and parents/caregivers who have no previous experience in early years settings and feel overwhelmed by the program.

Another recommendation was the provision of more resources and home-based activities for parents/caregivers to do with their child. This would build on the curriculum and extend the learning experience. Finally, parents/caregivers suggested that for children who will be attending Kindergarten in a different but nearby school, educators should arrange field trips to familiarize them to their future learning space.

Conclusion

In summary, parents/caregivers found the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program to be highly beneficial in enhancing their child's readiness for school. Parents/caregivers were highly satisfied with the outcomes of the program. Furthermore, parents/caregivers benefitted from the program by volunteering in the classroom and grasping strategies to continue facilitating their child's learning at home. Although parents/caregivers were mostly pleased by their and their child's experiences, they provided a few suggestions to further enhance the program.

EDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS AND PROGRAM IMPACT ON THEIR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Educators' experiences from and perceptions regarding the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program were gleaned from a focus group, as previously described. Themes that stemmed from this in-depth conversation included program components and implementation, the impact on participating children and their parents/caregivers, and conditions for success.

Program Components and Implementation

Building on the solid foundation established in the preceding years, educators shared their overall impressions of the components and implementation of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, such as the collaborative orientation to program delivery, professional learning, culturally relevant teaching and learning, and parent/caregiver engagement.

Collaboration

Across program sites, educator teams consisted of one teacher and one Early Childhood Educator (ECE), with the exception of the Parkdale site, which also had educators from George Brown College as part of a partnership agreement among the Board, the City of Toronto, and the College. They fully committed to and capitalized on the collaborative nature required to deliver the program from the outset. Teachers and ECEs viewed one another as equal and symbiotic partners, whereby each member of the educator team was invited to share their experiences, knowledge, ideas, and feelings about the program.

*“As an ECE it’s not often that you’re fully embraced as a full partner in the classroom and this [program] was truly that, so it made it a unique experience.”
(ECE)*

“I’m with older children, Grade 4, 5 and 6 [during the school year]. [...] It’s completely different from dealing with Kindergarten, with every aspect of the way. [...] One piece that I really liked about [the program] is that I have a partner who is fully experienced with early education and that helps me a lot [...] because I get to learn about what I don’t necessarily know about Kindergarten. [...] I get to pick up all these little cool techniques and teaching strategies.” (Teacher)

Professional Learning

In addition to the organic and genuine collaboration among educators, there were frequent and meaningful professional learning opportunities. Prior to the start of the program, teachers and ECEs participated in a full-day session in June where they learned about the rationale and objectives of the program, relevant contextual information, theoretical underpinnings, teaching frameworks, and the collaborative planning process. Each Friday afternoon throughout the program, teachers, ECEs, and the program administrative team met for debriefing and further professional learning. These weekly sessions provided the team with opportunities for guided discussions, reflection, collaboration, and to develop a professional learning community. They also sometimes involved guest speakers.

“Each and every Friday we’ll choose a site from the Summer School Program to meet at and we’ll all collaborate on what we’ve done in each site and come together

with a reflection of the week. What were the rocks, what were the wins, what we need to work on? Whatever it is. Just basically connecting. Even pooling ideas. And if we're not able to see each other on the Friday, doesn't matter! You go to Google docs [and] it's all there. We're all collaborating, we're all sharing. [...] And the reason why we share is probably because we're doing it for the best interests of the children." (ECE)

"The training was a great refresher while providing new additional pieces of hands-on activities and information to build capacity." (Teacher)

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Curriculum

Next, educators were deliberate in their teaching and learning approach and environment, such that children's identities were honoured and integrated into the classroom. There were four program sites which took an African-centered approach while two sites were culturally relevant and responsive to the ethnic populations of students the schools served. Owing to the intentionality behind educator recruitment, program design, and materials (e.g., culturally representative puzzles, crayons, paints, dolls, books, etc.), participating children felt empowered, became increasingly engaged, and developed self-esteem as well as a sense of belonging.

"With this program, you empower the students [so that they love] themselves and the skin [they're] in." (Teacher)

"Once we started putting out the more culturally relevant materials, the engagement shot up. The kids were so proud. [...] We had a parent come in and he saw one of the story books and it was [called] 'Tibetan Tales' and he picked it up, he was [amazed] and he took a picture of it [and] sent it to his wife." (Teacher)

Activities such as counting in different languages, looking at the shapes of different iconic cultural landmarks from around the world, making cultural instruments and exploring shadism fostered social and ecological dispositions among participating children.

Parent/Caregiver Involvement

One final key element of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program was the involvement of parents/caregivers as equal partners in their child's day-to-day learning and development. Families were viewed as critical fountains of knowledge. Educators recognized that they had much to learn about the children's ways of being and background from their families. As such, teachers and ECEs invited parents/caregivers into the classroom on a daily basis, sought their assistance with classroom activities, and connected with them in an authentic manner. This does not typically occur during the regular school year.

"The family component for me was huge. It was so lovely to be so immersed in a lot of these families. [...] I tried to connect with my [students'] parents and stuff like that during the school year, but to be so immersed in it was completely different. And it was authentic. And it was genuine and we really wanted their input and we wanted to know about their traditions." (Teacher)

Program Impact on Participating Children

The positive impact of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program on participating children can best be conceptualized according to the four frames of the Kindergarten program, as referenced in Ontario's *The Kindergarten Program* (2016).

Belonging and Contributing

Children's personal, social, and emotional development is nurtured by their engagement with caring individuals and spaces. Not surprising, educators observed noticeable gains in the areas of *Belonging and Contributing* among children participating in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. One teacher explained that over the course of the program, her students became more comfortable in the classroom which promoted their cultural identity, sense of belonging, and confidence levels.

"We had a little boy in our program teach us how to count in Dari. This was a boy that was totally reluctant to come into the classroom even with his mom. He didn't want any part of the program and then he slowly started to feel comfortable in the program and by week 2, he was comfortable enough to stand up in front of everyone – parents, students – and teach us how to count in Dari. It was awesome. It was like a different child." (Teacher)

Children were also reported as engaging in positive, caring, and respectful interactions with their peers, parents/caregivers in the program, educators, and administrators. One educator acknowledged that children came into the program with some interpersonal skills which enabled them to form close friendships.

This interpersonal engagement and expression also transcended the home environment. Namely, parents/caregivers shared with educators that their child began opening up at home about their experiences and relationships afforded from the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, as revealed below.

"One of the biggest indicators for us of their growth and development was the dialogue with the parents. 'Oh, they talk about you every night at the dinner table. They can't stop talking about what you told them, and how the words – and they pretend'." (ECE)

Another educator observed belonging among her students from their engagement in authentic play as they related to their cultural experiences. The children became explorers and investigators of culturally and intentionally placed materials. Further, children were stewards of their own accomplishments and were proud to showcase their learning artefacts.

Self-Regulation and Well-Being

Children's capacity to self-regulate is essential for developing emotional wellness and habits of mind that are crucial for early and lifelong learning. Similarly, well-being is a prerequisite for learning at all ages. Both of these constructs are comprised of cognitive, emotional, social, and physical/biological domains (Ministry of Education, 2016).

There are tremendous gains in self-regulation throughout the early years. This was supported by qualitative data gleaned from the educator focus group. Initially, children were unable to recognize, monitor, or modify their emotions. For instance, many children cried when their parent/caregiver dropped them off in the morning at the beginning. However, over the course of

the program, children became better at recovering effectively and efficiently from such stressors. By the same token, children also became more adept at recognizing, respecting, and helping regulate the emotions of their peers in difficult circumstances. Following, one educator described the development of empathy in one particular child:

“We had a little boy in our program [...] that was totally reluctant to come into the classroom even with his mom. [...] He slowly started to feel comfortable in the program. [...] We were shocked because after that, he started comforting other kids that were crying. [He would say to others], ‘Mommy’s coming back’ and ‘Don’t worry’. And so it was awesome to see that.” (Teacher)

Owing to this program, educators noticed children possessed and expressed stronger convictions as well as routinely questioned the rationale behind certain program elements. One child asked her teacher why they were singing a particular song if it was not in their language. The teacher saw this as a learning moment and discussed the importance of appreciating other languages and cultures. The child accepted this response and engaged in singing this song.

Transitioning from the home to a school setting can be overwhelming for children. They must adjust to a new environment, routine, and people. The Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program provided children with the opportunity to develop school readiness. As a result, participating children demonstrated heightened levels of turn taking, independence, responsibility, and self-reliance. One ECE detailed the progression of classroom management as children understood and followed particular routines and behavioural expectations.

“They’re all sitting. [...] There’s eye contact! They’re actually watching the pictures in the story. Okay, okay. I can teach them more now. [...] So yes, in terms of the short time span of 4 weeks and entering week 3 and having [the children] be able to sit down. It’s good for Kindergarten. Sometimes it takes all the way to February or December to settle down a Kindergarten classroom [in the regular school year].” (ECE)

Finally, forming and valuing one’s own unique identity, as well as the identities of others, is integral to social development and overall well-being. The Africentric or culturally-relevant components of the program contributed to positive cultural identity and a greater sense of self-esteem. Numerous educators provided accounts to this effect. Participating children were not oblivious to diverse representations and some did not initially self-identify proudly or celebrate their differences. On account of such candour, educators promoted values of self-love and honoured individual and group identity represented in the classroom.

“We had students that were Black and they would say things like ‘I don’t like my skin colour.’ Through the program, we actually made them feel that their skin colour was beautiful. There was one book that I read to the students personally, called “The Ugly Duckling”. [...] I would say to the children ‘Is the yellow duck beautiful?’ and they would say ‘yes.’ ‘Is the black duck beautiful?’ And then they would give me their answer. And I told them that the answer is that they’re both beautiful and [...] you could tell that as the program developed, they started to feel more comfortable with their skin colour.” (ECE)

Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours

While the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program provided children with the opportunity to develop literacy and mathematics competencies, there was limited evidence of this from the educator focus group. A few educators mentioned that children had improved their fine motor skills and had been comfortable holding and using writing utensils and other materials. Others addressed the attainment of literacy and mathematics knowledge from an asset-based lens.

“Like looking at them from an asset-based perspective, they came into our environment with already math knowledge, language knowledge. [...] They came into our space with knowledge that we then were just furthering help to enhance.”
(ECE)

Problem Solving and Innovating

Similarly, there was negligible commentary on children’s *Problem Solving and Innovating* skills throughout the educator focus group. Some educators shared stories that demonstrated active curiosity.

Program Impact on Parents/Caregivers

While children were the primary beneficiaries of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, there were also positive, rippling effects on parents/caregivers. From participating in this program, parents/caregivers benefitted from greater comfort in the school setting, enhanced educator-parent/caregiver relationships, and community building with other parents/caregivers.

Previous research has documented a plethora of benefits associated with parent/caregiver involvement in their child’s learning. Nevertheless, their comfort with the school system may impede their engagement as stated by Dr. Charles Pascal, an internationally respected Canadian educator (2009), “Raising [parents/caregivers’] comfort level is a prerequisite to involving them in the program”. Educators described some reluctance on the part of parents/caregivers to come into the classroom at the beginning of the program, despite establishing an authentic and welcoming environment. One educator shared that parents/caregivers “were surprised that we *wanted* them to come in. They were surprised that our door was open [and] that they were welcome”, and discovered that the program design, materials, and activities associated with the program respected and reflected the traditions, languages, and cultures of participating families. This progressively increased their comfort level in the school setting and participation in the program.

“We were [...] in between something and we had done a similar counting activity, counting in your language. So we went over a few of the [counting activities] with the parents that were there and it was funny because then another parent stood up and [said], ‘Well I speak [...] Urdu. I’m going to teach you how to count in Urdu.’ So then she came up with her daughter and [...] they had a little song that they sang and wrote out the numbers and the words. And then another parent said, ‘Oh well I speak a different language.’ So then it turned into this big thing for parents kind of sharing a bit of their culture. [...] I felt so happy when I left yesterday. [...] I thought] this is really nice that the parents now feel comfortable coming into our setting.”
(ECE)

In addition to trepidation with entering the physical learning space, educators experienced a bit of personal reservation from parents/caregivers. This apprehension towards the educator team may have stemmed from parents/caregivers' previous experiences or cultural beliefs. Nevertheless, educators were relentless in their endeavours to build rapport with families and inevitably succeeded.

"I think for me, in the beginning, the parents [were] kind of standoffish. [...] It went from that from the first week to parents coming to me in tears, confiding in me about how they felt about their children, asking my advice about placement for September. [...] I was really touched. [...] I guess it's just something they're not used to having an educator who's open to actually listening to them and valuing them in their space. And I would try to empower them as well. I always told them 'As parents you are the first educators. You're bringing your children to our space with knowledge. You are teaching them.' [...] I found that we built a great rapport with them." (ECE)

"Parents became engaged [...] after we consistently invited them into the classroom. The families had opportunities to be a part of their child's day to day tasks/social interactions and observe their learning from within the week." (Teacher)

Parent/caregiver engagement was not limited to the physical boundaries of the classroom. Considering the many commonalities among parents/caregivers of participating children, such as cultural backgrounds, settlement experiences, English language difficulties, and raising young families, they managed to make personal connections with one another. One educator exemplified how they drew from this sense of community.

"I think what happened near the end [was that] [parents/caregivers] kind of built a connection among themselves. And so even when we were doing the research [by organizing a parent focus group...], it was actually one parent that contacted all the other parents [to participate]." (ECE)

Program Impact on Educators

Educators also shared that their involvement in the program renewed their passion and further inspired their vocation to early years education. Although the dialogue during the focus group was limited, educators appreciated how this experience challenged their teaching philosophy, perceptions, and assumptions.

"I think for me it forced me to do some digging, and research and going online and looking at stuff [...] Just being open, and having an open mind basically and knowing that your regular program during the regular school year is going to look slightly different now because you have that focus." (Teacher)

"And that's what I'm leaving this [Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program] with, this initiative, this year, [has me] feeling more empowered as an early childhood educator and I feel like I just have more tools in my backpack to use in the Fall." (ECE)

"Africentric principles have continued to reinforce my philosophy of education rooted in early years. Students were exposed to meaningful lessons embedded in their culture." (Teacher)

Conditions for Success

Having discussed the impacts of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program on stakeholders, this section examines a number of factors to which its success can be attributed. Conditions that arose during the educator focus group include: an asset-based approach, professional learning community, program resources and support, and parent/caregiver engagement.

Asset-based Approach

Educators delivered this program with an asset-based approach to early years education. With this “glass half-full” mentality, educators emphasized the inherent capacities of children, rather than their deficiencies. As such, educators provided learning opportunities that built on each child’s strengths and interests. While this individualized attention may have been more resource intensive, it maintained high expectations which children surpassed.

“We really were looking at the children as individuals as opposed to [...] herding them all along. [...] Each child exceeded our expectations but in their own way. It wasn’t necessarily like ‘Now, everybody can write their names.’ It was like ‘You did this and this is how far you’ve come and then you did that and that’s how far you came.’ So it was kind of nice to see, individually, how much they’ve grown and how far they’ve come, all in different ways.” (Teacher)

“When you set the bar or expectations really high, you get a better outcome. [...] It’s all about your mindset and your expectations.” (ECE)

It is not surprising that this asset-based approach emphasized empowerment and promoted self-esteem among participating children. Educators maintained that children exuded pride over their identities and life stories because this was cherished and incorporated into the program. This ultimately enabled children to thrive.

“I feel like this program is so powerful and it hits those students in a way that it makes them feel that they’re so important. It’s such a heavy focus on sense of self and sense of identity and belonging and contributing to the community that through the pedagogy and the programming, they can feel very proud of themselves.” (ECE)

Professional Learning Community

During the focus group, educators asserted that their learning community was the basis for delivering the program with ease while efficiently yielding positive effects. For instance, teachers’ and ECEs’ thirst for a meaningful, unique, and professional challenge was quenched by this program. They acquired and refined particular skills as well as informed their current and future teaching philosophy and practices.

“It’s always been a piece that I feel like I’ve either not been as confident as I would like to be, or as thorough as I would like to be. So, it was kind of a nice opportunity for me to learn as an educator and things that I can do and ways that I can sort of reach out to the community and make sure that piece is in my classrooms going forward.” (Teacher)

“I think for me it was definitely to strengthen my practice, to experience new things, and so that I bring that back to my community. And that was really important to me.”

And to work with different people and engage [with] other people around the city instead of my little, small cluster.” (Teacher)

This professional learning community was facilitated by an authentic partnership and shared leadership among teachers and ECEs. Educators cherished opportunities to learn from one another and equally contribute to program delivery without unnecessary tensions.

“I think that was really impressive, that in four weeks, we built not only a friendship but we were able to work together and bring our own ideas into the space.” (Teacher)

“I think I was surprised at how easy it felt. It felt so easy to plan together. [...] Maybe it was the fact that [...] you leave your ego at the door. You’re just open to learning from each other.” (Teacher)

“We always use this banquet analogy. It’s like we’re all going to have a dinner. So what would it be like if everybody brought the same dish? As ECEs [and] OCTs [Ontario College of Teachers], when we come to that table and we all bring a unique dish, imagine how much more rich that table or dinner is going to be.” (ECE)

The collaborative and collective culture that was created among educators also meant that they extended unconditional support and assistance to one another.

“It’s very empowering to know that you’re working alongside another OCT. You’re part of a team that shares everything collectively each week, and your main focus is the children and their success. There’s no power dynamics. There are no egos.” (ECE)

The extensive professional learning community and strong cohesion among educators also helped mitigate the feeling of being alone and/or overwhelmed.

“I think for me, the partnership in the classroom, it was really nice to have a team to work with and not be by yourself because it could be really overwhelming – assessments, making sure that your centres are engaging, making sure that you’re talking to parents.” (Teacher)

Adequate Program Resources and Support

Educators commended the administrative team for their thoughtful and responsive provision of tangible and intangible resources and support. Namely, the literature, games, as well as craft and writing utensils reflected the diversity among the pre-Kindergarten population. These inclusive efforts were holistic and dynamic which engaged and benefitted all stakeholders.

“We are blessed [with] lots of culturally relevant resources such as books, skin tone markers, colors, crayons, you name it. And these children now have access to these materials that they might not normally have in the [Kindergarten] program.” (ECE)

In addition to learning materials, the program was also equipped with an administrative team that strived to provide the best possible learning experience not only for the children and their parents/caregivers, but also for the educators. The administrative team provided

in-person, telephone, and electronic support to teachers and ECEs with constructive feedback, reflection, and praise.

“I just wanted to say again the support system in this program is very huge. Like if you were stuck with something, in ten seconds you could call [a program administrator] and she was ready to answer her phone. [The administrative team] all were very easy to get a hold of. There was never an ‘Okay I got to wait like two days to get a response.’ [...] No, they were there every single day you needed help. It was very active that way. The communication was ongoing. Even with the other sites, if you needed any help from the other people they were available for you too.” (ECE)

“The [administrators] that we have creating this program for us and the ones that you see behind the scenes, they’re really strong. That’s what brought me into the program, because I didn’t know much about the program at first, but I knew and saw the people that run the program and how they are, and how they carry themselves in TDSB. And that was my entry. I wanted to mimic that.” (Teacher)

Parent/Caregiver Engagement

Since learning throughout the early years does not occur in isolation, it is imperative to recognize the role of parent/caregiver engagement. All educators who participated in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program acknowledged this element.

“It is so important for us in the early childhood sector to have parent involvement. [...] It’s just nice to be able to see the collaboration [...] and where it was a month ago to where it is today.” (Member of the George Brown College team)

Irrespective of initial language barriers, teachers and ECEs knew that they had much to learn from their students’ parents/caregivers. They garnered knowledge of their students’ preferences, temperament, and culture. They regarded this as a great privilege they did not have during the regular school year.

“The parent involvement piece [...] was really eye-opening for me because [...] that’s not always something that happens in a Kindergarten program. And I think that really changed my view of it. And I see how valuable it is. And I see how much the parents appreciate being welcomed into the classroom. They don’t feel nervous to come in, like, by today parents felt so comfortable to come into the class and they knew where things were and they could just help themselves. I think that’s something I’m going to take moving forward and try to integrate more into our program at school.” (ECE)

Furthermore, educators appreciated that parent/caregiver engagement necessitated a particular level of trust and vulnerability on the part of families in order for it to be truly effective.

“I also think that the family component for me was huge. It was so lovely to be so immersed in a lot of these families [cultures and customs]. Even today, for our last day, they have a practice where they put these white scarves around us as a thank you or as an appreciation gesture. [...] It almost brought us to tears. It was really beautiful. [...] To be so immersed in it was completely different. And it was

authentic. And it was genuine and we really wanted their input and we wanted to know about their traditions and we wanted to know what they do.” (Teacher)

Conclusion

Taken together, the collaboration, professional learning, culturally relevant and responsive curriculum, and parent/caregiver engagement were highlights of the program for participating educators. Teachers and ECEs witnessed positive changes in children as well as their parents/caregivers and themselves as a result of their involvement in the pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. They believed an asset-based approach, professional learning community, adequate program resources and support, and parent/caregiver engagement were integral components behind the program’s success.

CASE STUDY: SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAM AND EDUCATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AT THE PARKDALE SITE

This year, the TDSB's Early Years Learning and Care Department embedded a unique partnership opportunity within a designated site offering the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. This partnership involved the Toronto District School Board, George Brown College, and the City of Toronto. Parkdale Junior and Senior Summer School was selected for a program of study on the various possibilities for interrelationships occurring within a Full-Day Kindergarten program.

To better understand this partnership opportunity a mixed methods approach consisting of both quantitative and qualitative data was employed. First, parents/caregivers were invited to complete a four-page evaluation survey as the program drew to a close. The survey consisted of demographic questions as well as questions regarding their and their child's experience, involvement, and benefits garnered from the program. There were two open-ended questions that solicited further information regarding program impact and an opportunity to provide additional suggestions. However, possibly due to language barriers, only 10 parents/caregivers submitted a survey. As such, their quantitative evaluation of the program is not included in this Case Study.

Second, a focus group was conducted with parents/caregivers of children who participated in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. The focus group was conducted at the Parkdale site by staff from TDSB Research and Information Services, with support from an interpreter who spoke languages native to the parents/caregivers (e.g., Tibetan). Prior to starting the focus group, parents/caregivers were informed that the conversations would remain confidential and consented to the audio recording of the interview for transcription purposes. There were one male and seven female parents/caregivers in attendance. The focus group lasted 62 minutes. The focus group transcript was analyzed for prevalent themes.

Third, the Parkdale site educator team were invited to participate in a focus group on the final day of the program. Educators were also informed that the conversations would remain confidential and consented to the audio recording of the interview. This focus group consisted of the majority of educators and was approximately 26 minutes in duration. The focus group transcript was analyzed for prevalent themes.

An overview of this opportunity, along with the impact, strengths, and challenges, are considered in the following section.

Overview of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program at the Parkdale Site

Program Site and Participants

This unique iteration of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program was offered at Parkdale Junior and Senior Public School since it housed one of the ten, and newest, George Brown College-managed child care centres, or "lab schools". The Parkdale Child Care Centre is the model lab for the College's diploma and degree programs in the area of Early Childhood studies. The City of Toronto was also involved in this program but mainly from an administrative and funding role and the provision of certain resources (e.g., translator).

This program was promoted through informational flyers and leaflets available at the site and through word of mouth at the Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, More than Child's Play, and in the community. Parents/caregivers registered their child in the program at the Parkdale Junior and Senior Public School office.

At the Parkdale site, there were 10 female and 9 male children participating in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. Based on demographic information collected from the 10 parents/caregivers who returned their parent/caregiver surveys, the average age of the 10 children at the time of the program was 3.80 years. Eight children were born in Canada, and six spoke a language other than English. All 10 children whose parents/caregivers completed a survey had previous experience in a child care centre, a pre-school program, a TDSB Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, and/or other play-based children's program (e.g., drop-in, Ontario Early Years Centre, Family Resource Centre program).

Program Design

The objectives of this new offering of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program were to: increase professional learning and growth of all stakeholders regarding establishing culturally relevant and responsive early years spaces, deepen the learning of all stakeholders on critical pedagogy within the early years, provide opportunities for co-planning and co-learning between all stakeholders, and build the professional skills of all stakeholders through an inquiry-based model.

The program design at the Parkdale site mainly differed from the other five sites with respect to professional learning, which was based on a 3-tier approach:

1. Capacity building sessions: Professional learning sessions were offered and designed to develop educators' understanding of creating culturally relevant and responsive early years spaces, deepen their understanding of critical pedagogy within an early years setting, explore questions and wonderings related to inquiry, and reflect on documentation that captured collaborative learning.
2. Embedded professional learning: TDSB and George Brown College educators engaged in collaboration and co-learning experiences, as well as on-going documentation.
3. Individual reflection and learning through inquiry: Educators engaged in exploring an inquiry based on their own individual curiosity and engaged in documenting this process through a learning story.

The learning goals and program design for children, as well as the parent/caregiver involvement component, at the Parkdale site were similar to other sites.

Program Educators

At the Parkdale site, the pre-Kindergarten team consisted of one Ontario Certified Teacher from the TDSB, one Designated Early Childhood Educator (DECE) also from the TDSB, two Registered Early Childhood Educators (RECE), and two Early Childhood Educator interns, the latter four came from George Brown College. Parkdale educators did not receive any additional professional learning, aside from the full day session that educators across all six sites participated in prior to the start of the program. However, during the four-week program, the Parkdale educators engaged in a daily 60-minute session as a group during which they debriefed and reflected on the day's successes, challenges, and valued one another's experiences and knowledge. They also used this opportunity to plan for the subsequent day. This daily session was in addition to the weekly planning and capacity-building sessions with the rest of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program educator teams from other sites.

Program Delivery

There were multiple elements to the implementation of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, such as the “Nia Circle”, Learning Centres, cultural relevancy, and parent/caregiver engagement. While these elements were not unique to the Parkdale site, the partnership component complimented and served to enhance the delivery of the program.

Nia is one of the seven principles of Nguzo Saba⁵ and represents “purpose”. The “Nia Circle” served as a vehicle for the whole group learning and morning routine. Activities that took place during the “Nia Circle” included independent and partner reading, name puzzles, and attendance activities, among others.

Aligning with the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Full-Day Early Learning - Kindergarten Program document (2011) and more recent The Kindergarten Program (2016), Learning Centres were embedded in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. Learning Centres enable play-based learning in a culture of inquiry (2016, p. 18) as children “learn through play, independent problem-solving, and inquiry” (2011, p. 36). As such, educators designed learning experiences according to the Four Frames of the Kindergarten Program (i.e., *Belonging and Contributing*, *Self-Regulation and Well-Being*, *Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours*, and *Problem Solving and Innovating*) in the Ministry document (2016) and couched these Learning Centres in cultural relevancy. At each Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program site, there were Learning Centres focused on science, mathematics, dramatic play, and literacy.

Learning Centres were also shaped by the voices and inquiries of the children themselves. To demonstrate, one morning at Parkdale, children ran into the classroom chasing a moth that happened to enter with them. This moth garnered significant curiosity from the children and served as a teachable moment for the day. Educators kept the moth in a small plastic aquarium for observation. There were conversations about the moth’s natural habitat, its means for survival, as well as the conversation of loving yourself and your differences. Educators modified some of their previously planned Learning Centres to reflect the children’s interest in the moth and this source of learning. For example, at one Learning Centre, children were invited to draw a picture that reflected their observations of the moth in its temporary home. Educators managed to locate butterfly wings for the dramatic centre. At the end of the program, the classroom teacher retrieved the moth from inside the room, and a couple of children watched as she set it free into its natural habitat.

Cultural relevancy and responsiveness was another strong element at Parkdale. Although the educators were not representative of the large Tibetan population in which the school serves, elements of Tibetan culture as well as African and Caribbean cultures were represented in the space. This was seen through the inclusion of, and work on the Nguzo Saba principles, to the music selection, the dedicated Learning Centres (e.g., Tibetan alphabet and numerals and numbers in the Literacy and Mathematics Learning Centres, respectively), and the resources (e.g., books, skin tone markers, clothing) provided in the classroom. Furthermore, this element of responsiveness is demonstrated through the dual language books and charts displayed throughout the Learning Centres and the beautiful display of Prayer Flags. In Tibetan culture, these flags symbolize elements such as compassion and when the wind blows, it carries forth these elements and well wishes.

⁵ Nguzo Saba refers to the seven principles of Kwanzaa and African heritage which punctuated the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program (Dei & Kempf, 2013).

Finally, parent/caregiver engagement was truly embedded in the classroom. From the onset, parents/caregivers were invited to regularly participate in the program. They were involved in the morning “Nia Circle” and shared songs and knowledge (e.g., literacy, numeracy) of their country of origin. They observed and supported the educator team by co-ordinating Learning Centres, such as planting beans for the planting lesson.

Program Impacts

Children

There were noticeable changes in children stemming from their participation in the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program across all sites. At Parkdale in specific, parents/caregivers shared that participating in the program helped their child adapt to the expectations of a typical classroom setting. They became accustomed to routine (e.g., waking up early, getting ready for school, etc.) and increasingly disciplined and independent. One mother shared that her son said, ‘I don’t need you... I want to be [at school]. ‘Oh I’m going to go to school. I’m getting late’. Program participants also became more social; children learned to share, made more friends, were less reserved, and were more tolerant and compassionate of others’ differences. This socialization also extended to the home environment, where children were excited to tell their families about their peers, educators, and what they did in school. Literacy and numeracy development was also noticeable in children. Parents/caregivers attributed their child’s new interest in books, open-mindedness, trying new things (e.g., fruits, activities), and increased self-confidence to the program.

Parents/Caregivers

Considering that parents/caregivers were an integral component to the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, it is not surprising that they too were positively affected. Parents/caregivers from the Parkdale site communicated that they increased their level of participation in their child’s education and learning environment, which improved their relationship with their child’s educators and peers.

“I think it’s definitely a good idea getting involved. [...] It’s always a learning process. You go to your son’s class, interact with his teacher, with other kids, [observe...] all [of the] activities. It’s definitely a good idea.” (Father)

Parents/caregivers also developed a better understanding of the rich learning that takes place during the early years in a school setting and were able to contribute to this process in ways that they felt comfortable.

“I play with him and when I was there in class, he was painting and I tried to communicate. ‘What’s that? What are you trying to [paint]?’ [...] I tried to figure out basically, and [...] he seems [to be] having fun and telling me different stories which is fun.” (Father)

In addition to engagement and understanding, parents/caregivers were comforted by their child’s increasing level of independence and were less prone to separation anxiety. Some parents/caregivers mentioned that they also improved their time management skills as they needed to get their child ready and arrive at school on time.

Educators

Educators at Parkdale benefitted from their involvement in the partnership-based iteration of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program as well. The principal impact was on the professional growth of teachers and ECEs alike. For instance, TDSB staff described that their awareness and knowledge of child development increased from this rich learning experience, along with an appreciation of the varying philosophies embedded in early child care.

“An advantage of the partnership was working, for me, [with] our colleagues from George Brown, [who] are the Early Child experts, in terms of 0 to 8 learning, growth and development, child psychology, social development ... [...] So having these 4 weeks with them, like I said earlier, it was like being on an AQ course. [...] Being in this 4 week program, I felt like the knowledge from the college was highlighted and it was celebrated and it was actually used every day.” (TDSB Educator)

Staff from George Brown College also credited the collaborative, inter-organizational process at Parkdale for enhancing their understanding of the pedagogy behind the public education system.

“I think it gave us a better appreciation being in the school system because we’re not in the classroom day to day. We do [taking care of children] before and after.” (George Brown Educator)

Educators also benefitted from the opportunity to network and develop relationships with professionals across two different organizations. For the two Early Childhood Educator interns from George Brown College, the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program was a recognized experience to facilitate the completion of their degree requirements.

Strengths and Challenges

From marshalling evidence for this case study, various strengths and challenges associated with the partnership-based offering of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program became evident.

First, this program provided stakeholders with an appreciation for the different philosophies regarding early childhood education. Exposure to the approaches used in public education and early child care sectors, which were made possible through this partnership, were valued and respected and served as an opportunity for reciprocal learning.

“I think it gave us a better appreciation being in the school system. [...] We didn’t really have [the] same understanding of what the day to day running looked like until we actually sat down together as a team. [TDSB staff spoke] about how they do things [...] and then [we] started talking about how we do different things and then all of a sudden, it was just like sparks were happening. Ok we can do this, we can do this, let’s try it this way.” (George Brown College Educator)

Second, the partnership between the Toronto District School Board, George Brown College, and the City of Toronto afforded richer resources and better collaboration among educators. A translator was made available by the City to support parent/caregiver involvement in the research component (i.e., focus groups). Educators also had access to a greater variety of learning resources from the two organizations.

“It was also our access to resources. Let’s say, for example, we’re planting beans at one point, it was like all of a sudden, the Child Care has this book that we could use. We can easily access this part to extend [the Learning Centre]. We noticed the dramatic centre was lacking. We [would] get tubs of material [from the TDSB Early Years Learning and Care Department]. So if what we need isn’t in the tubs, we are spending our own money, or we have to scrounge around to find it. To have the College [say], ‘Oh no problem, we’ll go borrow, oh we got this.’ So it really helped us out, it really made our program what it was, right? [...] I think we kind of filled those gaps with the help of [George Brown College].” (TDSB Educator)

Since the TDSB educators did not previously work or live in the Parkdale vicinity, they were grateful that the ECEs from George Brown College were well-versed with the resources in this community.

“Because we’re not from this area, [...] it was nice [to rely on the George Brown College staff], ‘Where’s this? [...] What can we get for this?’ [...] There was another member of the community that had come in and she kind of informed us of ‘Oh for example, when you see the name Tenzin in your attendance, there’s going to be like 5 of them but none of them go by Tenzin.’ It’s just those little things, like those community details that we wouldn’t have been able to know unless we had people from the community with us, so that was a huge asset.” (TDSB Educator)

The team at Parkdale consisted of three times the number of educators (six versus two) as other sites offering the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program. This is attributable to the inter-organizational partnership taking place at this particular site and was an incredibly appealing component. Not only did this make more educator-children interaction possible, it also afforded diverse skill sets which were drawn from for program delivery.

“Getting things up on Google Drive, the photocopying, tweaking things, being [technology] user friendly [...] that was huge. With this team, I was always thinking, ‘Imagine if I had a team like this during the [school] year’. The students would benefit a thousand fold because you have the research component, you have the OCT lens, the ECE lens. It was like a super team and [...] talking about something and having it done the next day, that’s how literally it went.” (TDSB Educator)

The additional dedicated, daily time for debriefing, reflection, and planning facilitated cohesion and built capacity among the Parkdale educator team. Often, educators intrinsically stayed beyond the allocated time or arrived early because this was deemed a very meaningful and effective component of the partnership.

“I think it was nice too that we had the opportunity to reflect every day and literally have a specified time to sort of talk about our day. We often went over [time] because we like talking; we would be here for hours. [...] It was nice to be allocated that time, and it even kind of helped us. [...] Even on the days we didn’t have that hour, we still stayed and chatted anyway.” (TDSB Educator)

While program administrators anticipated trepidation around shared leadership among teachers and ECEs, the one challenge associated with the program was in fact navigating the differences between the two systems’ (i.e., regular public education versus early child care) approach to learning during the early years. Namely, the K-12 public education approaches early years education based on individual student experiences and with an asset-based lens, whereas early

child care is guided by child developmental and cognitive stages. These real and important disparities between regular public education and early child care permeated various aspects of the program. For instance, Toronto District School Board educators maintained that Learning Centres should have intentional and clearly communicated goals and expectations (e.g., use senses to gather information about the natural world; communicate and represent findings; build a theory based on findings) for children and parents/caregivers, whereas George Brown College educators felt that learning experiences should be less structured. Other areas of divergence were assessments, daily schedules, and read alouds. Ultimately, educators from both camps engaged in democratic partnership and blended convergent practices with mutual respect and in an authentic, unassuming manner.

“You just have to be open minded to it. And you have to make sure you have to be respectful and open to learning right? It’s not just one particular way. You need the right players, I think, the right personalities. It makes a really big difference. You have to be open to learning from each other. [...] Even if your idea doesn’t necessarily get chosen or whatever, you have to be ok with a sort of a compromise and that kind of thing because we didn’t agree all the time about everything and we would talk about it and come to a kind of compromise, and then we would all be happy. I think it takes a sort of educator, certain type of personality to be able to do something like this. And I do think it’s an amazing collaboration and I think more sites should experience it.” (TDSB Educator)

Conclusion

The partnership model of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program is novel and caution is warranted when interpreting both quantitative and qualitative findings. Data support the wide-reaching, positive impact of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program on stakeholders involved with the Parkdale site, as in the other five sites. However, considering that only one site offered this partnership-based iteration of the program, it is difficult to conclusively determine added benefits associated with this partnership, in comparison to other sites. We recommend that, in order to truly evaluate the impact of the partnership-based iteration of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program in comparison to the original approach, it is critical to have more sites offering the former and a control group. Implementing such pre-defined research methodologies would enhance our confidence in the research findings.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings

The early years represents a critical and formative period whereby a dynamic series of inputs, such as genetics, culture, experiences, and the environment, shape the development and trajectory for lifelong learning, conduct, and well-being. Research has corroborated the beneficial effects of early intervention in providing school readiness, numeracy, and literacy foundations prior to starting Kindergarten. Considering the paucity of Canadian literature in this area, the evaluation of this Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program sought to address this research gap.

The overall objective of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program was to provide children and their parents/caregivers with an inclusive, responsive, and safe learning space that enables all stakeholders to thrive. As documented in our 2014 report, this 2016 evaluation ascertained comprehensive and holistic benefits for all those involved in this program. Among participating children, there were significant gains in their sense of belonging, relationships with others, contributions to the school, family, and broader communities, and an ability to self-regulate and care for themselves and others. Children also developed literacy and mathematics knowledge and engaged in creative and analytical thinking. With regards to parents/caregivers, they too developed a sense of belonging in the school setting, with educators, and with other parents/caregivers. Educators were also positively affected by their involvement in the program as it challenged their teaching philosophy, perceptions, and assumptions.

Recommendations

Owing to the rich and varied data sources, several key recommendations for enhancing the delivery of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program arose and are discussed in more detail in the following section.

Recommendation 1: Sustainable Financial Support

While there is currently no external financial support in place for the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, sustainable funding from the provincial government (i.e., Ministry of Education, Ministry of Child and Youth Services) is required for program implementation. Financial resources would also facilitate the realization of the following recommendations.

Recommendation 2: Increase Awareness and Reach across the TDSB School Communities

Although the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program continuously garners increasing interest and operates at capacity, teachers and ECEs involved with the program wished they were able to recommend the opportunity within their local school communities. Parents/caregivers and educators also thought greater effort should be expended to promote and build awareness about the program. Similarly, there was sufficient evidence from parents/caregivers and educators that more children should be admitted to the program at each existing site and that the program should be offered at more schools in the TDSB as there is a need among other communities, irrespective of socio-demographic factors.

Recommendation 3: Improving Program Logistics

Motivated by the continued benefits for children and parents/caregivers involved with the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program, there were a number of suggestions to improve the logistics associated with the program. A persistent belief among stakeholders since the inception of the program was that it should be offered during the month of August or in both summer months instead of only in July, to ensure a smoother transition to the start of school in September. Second, it was recommended that admittance to the program should emphasize children entering Junior Kindergarten as they have not had formal schooling experience. Finally, congruency between home school and program site was emphasized among stakeholders. In other words, most teachers and ECEs delivered the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program in a school different from the school they normally work in during the school year. This saddened many parents/caregivers because their, along with their child's, level of comfort and engagement was very much dependent on the rapport they developed with their educators and the learning space. In fact, less than half (47%) of children who participated will be attending the same school where the program was offered in coming September. To sustain benefits afforded by the program, program administrators should conjure up creative strategies to strive for congruency. That is to say, the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program should be offered at sites within the same family of schools where the teachers and ECEs are employed. Or, program administrators could more heavily focus their educator recruitment efforts in schools where they plan to offer the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program.

Recommendation 4: Additional Support for Children with Special Education Needs

A resounding theme that surfaced from the research was the difficulty in supporting children with special education needs in the program. This difficulty stems from the fact that many children at this age are not formally diagnosed and educators are not equipped with the training and/or resources to support them. Thus, it was recommended that educators continue to serve as advocates for these children and deliver the program with the same fervent intentionality such that modifications and accommodations can be made. Providing a safe space for children with exceptionalities that sets them up for success, as well as builds capacity, and a strong sense of self is essential. Additional human resources (e.g., Special Needs Assistants and/or Child and Youth Workers) would facilitate the implementation and learning needs of all children.

Recommendation 5: Additional Opportunities to Empower Parents/Caregivers

Although the program sufficiently engaged parents/caregivers, stakeholders suggested that the program may be a suitable conduit for providing empowering opportunities to families, many of whom are newcomers or face additional challenges (e.g., socio-economic, cultural and language barriers and inequities). For instance, parents/caregivers would benefit from information sessions or workshops regarding how to support classroom-based learning at home, how to sustain parent/caregiver engagement during the regular school year (e.g., required documentation such as the Vulnerable Sector Check), and how to advocate for their child's needs. Such opportunities would further instill a strong sense of agency in parents/caregivers.

Recommendation 6: Mentorship Component for Educators

Novice teachers and ECEs to the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program admitted feeling overwhelmed at the start of the program. As such, they felt that documentation and resources should be made more accessible to support them with their first encounter with the program. They also recognized the value of a mentorship component or a more mindful approach to assigning educators to sites. More specifically, it was suggested that novice educators be paired with veteran educators at each program site.

Recommendation 7: Improving the Robustness of the Program Evaluation

This innovative Pre-Kindergarten Summer Learning Program afforded stakeholders with positive experiences and numerous short-term benefits in academic, social, cultural, and psychological domains. Future research efforts should involve longitudinal and comparative components whereby children participating in the program are monitored and compared to students who did not participate in such a program. In addition, to truly understand the impact of the partnership-based approach implemented at the Parkdale site in comparison to the original design, it is critical to have more sites offering the former and a control group. Implementing such pre-defined research methodologies would enhance our confidence in the research findings.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Progress Report Template

Appendix B: Parent/Caregiver Survey

Appendix C: Parent/Caregiver Survey Item Responses

Appendix D: Parent/Caregiver Focus Group Questions

Appendix E: Educator Focus Group Questions

Appendix F: Parkdale Educator Focus Group Questions

**Early Years Learning & Care Pre-Kindergarten & Kindergarten
Summer Learning Program
July 5-29, 2016**

Reflections on Learning

Student's Name		TDSB Student Number	
Summer Program School		Teacher's Name	
		Early Childhood Educator Name	
Student's School (September 2016)		Date of Report: July 29, 2016	

Throughout the program, the educator teams have followed your child's learning journey by focusing on the development of their personal well-being, communication and academic skills through play and inquiry experiences.

Reflection on your child's learning provided by the teacher

Early Years Frames of Learning:

- *Belonging and Contributing*
- *Personal Well-Being*
- *Demonstrating Literacy and Mathematics Behaviours*
- *Engagement in play, inquiry, and STEM experiences*

Thank you,

Colleen Russell-Rawlins
Executive Superintendent
Early Years Learning & Care

Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini
Central Coordinating Principal
Early Years Learning & Care

Pre-Kindergarten Summer Program 2016: Parent Survey

Thank you for participating in this parent survey for the 2016 Pre-Kindergarten Summer Program. Your opinions will inform us about what is being done well in this program, and areas in which there may be room for improvement. Please note that your responses to this survey will strictly be kept **confidential** and **anonymous**. Your responses will be combined with responses from other parents for research purposes only.

Instructions for filling out form: For best results, please use a black pen or dark pencil.

Shade Circles Like This--> ●
Not Like This--> ⊗ ⊕

Please tell us about your child:

1. Please select the program site that your child attends:

- Ellesmere-Statton Public School
- Firgrove Public School
- North Kipling Junior Middle School
- Parkdale Junior & Senior Public School
- St. Margaret's Public School
- Tom Longboat Junior Public School

2. My child's gender is: Male Female

3. My child was born: In Canada Outside Canada

4. At home my child speaks mostly:

- English
- A language other than English
- English and Other

5. My child's age is: 3 4 5 6 **Month of Birth:**

6. I am my child's:

- Mother
- Father
- Adult Relative or Guardian
- Other (please specify):

**7. Before this summer program, did your child regularly attend the following programs?
(select all that apply):**

- A child care centre
- A pre-school program
- TDSB Parenting and Family Literacy Centre
- Play-based children's program (e.g., drop in, Ontario Early Years Centre, Family Resource Centre program)
- None

Please tell us about your child's and your experience in this summer program:

8. Your child's and your overall experience:	All the Time	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't Know
a) My child enjoyed the program.	<input type="radio"/>					
b) The program had a friendly and welcoming environment.	<input type="radio"/>					
c) In this program, differences among all people were respected.	<input type="radio"/>					
d) My child was treated with respect.	<input type="radio"/>					
e) My child got along well with other children in the program.	<input type="radio"/>					
f) I felt comfortable to be part of the program.	<input type="radio"/>					
g) In this program my child got the support needed to learn to the best of his or her ability.	<input type="radio"/>					
h) I was invited to share my culture with the students and educators in the program.	<input type="radio"/>					
i) I was invited to share my goals for my child's learning in the program.	<input type="radio"/>					
j) At home my child shared what he/she has learned from this program.	<input type="radio"/>					

9. Your involvement in this summer program:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
a) In this program I had enough opportunities to discuss issues that are important to my child's learning and well-being.	<input type="radio"/>				
b) The educators clearly communicated the expectations for my child's learning to me.	<input type="radio"/>				
c) I was informed regularly about my child's learning during the summer program.	<input type="radio"/>				
d) I was informed regularly about my child's well-being during the summer program.	<input type="radio"/>				
e) I am satisfied with the information I received about the program.	<input type="radio"/>				
f) I had enough opportunities to provide suggestions about the program.	<input type="radio"/>				



10. I believe this summer program had a positive impact on:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
a) My child's feelings about him/herself	<input type="radio"/>				
b) My child's comfort in classroom/school environment	<input type="radio"/>				
c) My relationship with the educators in the class	<input type="radio"/>				
d) My child's ability to share his/her learning (i.e. songs, activities)	<input type="radio"/>				
e) My child's academic skills in literacy (reading, writing)	<input type="radio"/>				
f) My child's academic skills in mathematics	<input type="radio"/>				

11. For each statement below, please tell us what, if any, improvement you noticed in your child as a result of the program:	Lots of Improvement	Some Improvement	No Difference	Don't Know
a) My child seems more comfortable in new situations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b) My child shows interest in books.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c) My child shows interest in writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d) My child shows a greater interest in music instruments and arts.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
e) My child demonstrates self-help skills with regards to his/her belongings.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
f) My child initiates interactions with other children.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
g) My child has a positive self-image.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
h) My child asks for help when needed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Overall Program Impact:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
a) This program did well in building positive student identity.	<input type="radio"/>				
b) The program had high expectations for my child.	<input type="radio"/>				
c) My child was encouraged to try his or her best.	<input type="radio"/>				
d) I am satisfied with the variety of activities during the four weeks.	<input type="radio"/>				
e) I am satisfied with the way educators worked with me to develop my child's learning interests and skills.	<input type="radio"/>				
f) After this program I feel confident about what I can do at home to support my child's learning and well-being.	<input type="radio"/>				
g) Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of learning that my child has received from this program.	<input type="radio"/>				
h) Overall, I think the program was successful in helping my child prepare for school in September.	<input type="radio"/>				



13. Are there any other changes you see in your child as a result of the Pre-Kindergarten Summer Program? Please describe.

14. Do you have any additional suggestions for the program? Please provide.

Thank you for your participation!



PARENT/CAREGIVER SURVEY ITEM RESPONSES

Table 1: Your Child’s and Your Overall Experience (Q8)

	All the time	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Don't Know
a. My child enjoyed the program.	73 (79.3%)	12 (13.0%)	5 (5.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)
b. The program had a friendly and welcoming environment.	79 (85.9%)	9 (9.8%)	4 (4.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
c. In this program, differences among all people were respected.	73 (81.1%)	12 (13.3%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	2 (2.2%)
d. My child was treated with respect.	78 (84.8%)	10 (10.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.2%)
e. My child got along well with other children in the program.	58 (66.7%)	16 (18.4%)	11 (12.6%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.1%)
f. I felt comfortable to be part of the program.	82 (90.1%)	7 (7.7%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
g. In this program my child got the support needed to learn to the best of his or her ability.	73 (81.1%)	8 (8.9%)	5 (5.6%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (3.3%)
h. I was asked to share my culture with the students and educators in the program.	47 (53.4%)	12 (13.6%)	13 (14.8%)	3 (3.4%)	8 (9.1%)	5 (5.7%)
i. I was asked to share my goals for my child’s learning in the program.	50 (55.6%)	16 (17.8%)	13 (14.4%)	3 (3.3%)	6 (6.7%)	2 (2.2%)
j. At home my child shared what he/she has learned from this program.	55 (59.8%)	18 (19.6%)	16 (17.4%)	3 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)

Table 2: Your involvement in this summer program (Q9)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
a. In this program I had enough opportunities to discuss issues that are important to my child’s learning and well-being.	49 (53.8%)	41 (45.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.1%)
b. The educators clearly communicated the expectations for my child’s learning to me.	52 (58.4%)	31 (34.8%)	2 (2.2%)	1 (1.1%)	3 (3.4%)
c. I was informed regularly about my child’s learning during the summer program.	51 (56.0%)	34 (37.4%)	3 (3.3%)	2 (2.2%)	1 (1.1%)
d. I was informed regularly about my child’s well-being during the summer program.	52 (56.5%)	35 (38.0%)	1 (1.1%)	3 (3.3%)	1 (1.1%)
e. I am satisfied with the information received about the program.	60 (66.7%)	26 (28.9%)	2 (2.2%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)
f. I had enough opportunities to provide suggestions about the program.	47 (51.1%)	35 (38.0%)	6 (6.5%)	1 (1.1%)	3 (3.3%)

Table 3: I believe this summer program had a positive impact on: (Q10)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
a. My child's feelings about him/herself	64 (68.1%)	25 (26.6%)	1 (1.1%)	2 (2.1%)	2 (2.1%)
b. My child's comfort in classroom/school environment	65 (69.9%)	23 (24.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (5.4%)
c. My relationship with the educators in the class	59 (64.1%)	29 (31.5%)	2 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.2%)
d. My child's ability to share his/her learning (i.e., songs, activities)	66 (71.0%)	25 (26.9%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.2%)
e. My child's academic skills in literacy (reading, writing)	49 (53.3%)	31 (33.7%)	4 (4.3%)	2 (2.2%)	6 (6.5%)
f. My child's academic skills in mathematics	45 (50.0%)	28 (31.1%)	4 (4.4%)	3 (3.3%)	10 (11.1%)

Table 4: For each statement below, please tell us what, if any, improvement you noticed in your child as a result of the program (Q11)

	Lots of Improvement	Some Improvement	No Difference	Don't Know
a. My child seems more comfortable in new situations.	52 (55.3%)	37 (39.4%)	4 (4.3%)	1 (1.1%)
b. My child shows interest in books.	49 (53.3%)	32 (34.8%)	10 (10.9%)	1 (1.1%)
c. My child shows interest in writing.	41 (44.1%)	39 (41.9%)	13 (14.0%)	0 (0.0%)
d. My child shows a greater interest in music instruments and arts.	44 (47.3%)	37 (39.8%)	10 (10.8%)	2 (2.2%)
e. My child demonstrates self-help skills with regards to his/her belongings.	52 (57.8%)	32 (35.6%)	5 (5.6%)	1 (1.1%)
f. My child initiates interactions with other children.	58 (62.4%)	28 (30.1%)	4 (4.3%)	3 (3.2%)
g. My child has a positive self-image.	64 (68.8%)	22 (23.7%)	5 (5.4%)	2 (2.2%)
h. My child asks for help when needed.	56 (60.2%)	27 (29.0%)	8 (8.6%)	2 (2.2%)

Table 5: Overall Program Impact (Q12)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
a. This program did well in building positive student identity.	59 (62.8%)	32 (34.0%)	1 (1.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (2.1%)
b. The program had high expectations for my child.	53 (56.4%)	30 (31.9%)	6 (6.4%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (5.3%)
c. My child was encouraged to try his or her best.	56 (62.2%)	31 (34.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (3.3%)
d. I am satisfied with the variety of activities during the four weeks.	64 (68.8%)	25 (26.9%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	2 (2.2%)
e. I am satisfied with the way educators worked with me to develop my child's learning interests and skills.	65 (69.9%)	24 (25.8%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	2 (2.2%)
f. After this program I feel confident about what I can do at home to support my child's learning and well-being.	62 (66.0%)	29 (30.9%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)
g. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of learning that my child has received from this program.	66 (70.2%)	25 (26.6%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)	1 (1.1%)

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR STATISTICAL COMPARISONS

Table 6: Differences in Parent/Caregiver Perceptions by Sex

	Male	Female	p
Overall Program Experience	1.39 (0.48)	1.41 (0.57)	0.85
Level of Improvement	1.61 (0.48)	1.48 (0.50)	0.18
Program Impact	1.52 (0.63)	1.60 (0.68)	0.56
Parent/Caregiver Experience	1.63 (0.56)	1.87 (0.95)	0.63
Parent/Caregiver Involvement	1.39 (0.47)	1.68 (0.78)	0.03
Parent/Caregiver Satisfaction	1.30 (0.51)	1.50 (0.81)	0.16

Note: Mean (Standard Deviation)

Table 7: Differences in Parent/Caregiver Perceptions by Birth Place

	Born in Canada	Born Outside of Canada	p
Overall Program Experience	1.38 (0.52)	1.61 (0.41)	0.32
Level of Improvement	1.55 (0.50)	1.60 (0.16)	0.83
Program Impact	1.54 (0.65)	1.77 (0.65)	0.46
Parent/Caregiver Experience	1.70 (0.83)	2.53 (1.19)	0.24
Parent/Caregiver Involvement	1.47 (0.51)	2.30 (1.62)	0.00
Parent/Caregiver Satisfaction	1.35 (0.55)	2.10 (1.067)	0.01

Note: Mean (Standard Deviation)

Table 8: Differences in Parent/Caregiver Perceptions by Language Spoken at Home

	English	English and Another Language	Another Language	<i>p</i>
Overall Program Experience	1.39 (0.59)	1.45 (0.57)	1.36 (0.31)	0.84
Level of Improvement	1.55 (0.48)	1.58 (0.61)	1.52 (0.41)	0.92
Program Impact	1.47 (0.60)	1.73 (0.87)	1.57 (0.53)	0.33
Parent/Caregiver Experience	1.67 (0.82)	1.85 (1.10)	1.75 (0.73)	0.75
Parent/Caregiver Involvement	1.53 (0.59)	1.63 (0.95)	1.46 (0.41)	0.70
Parent/Caregiver Satisfaction	1.35 (0.57)	1.57 (1.03)	1.32 (0.44)	0.38

Note: Mean (Standard Deviation)

Table 9: Differences in Parent/Caregiver Perceptions by Age

	3 Years	4 Years	≥5 Years	<i>p</i>
Overall Program Experience	1.46 (0.68)	1.31 (0.42)	1.53 (0.53)	0.25
Level of Improvement	1.64 (0.51)	1.51 (0.53)	1.56 (0.27)	0.57
Program Impact	1.61 (0.74)	1.52 (0.65)	1.57 (0.56)	0.83
Parent/Caregiver Experience	1.64 (0.72)	1.70 (0.87)	1.99 (0.98)	0.85
Parent/Caregiver Involvement	1.53 (0.59)	1.41 (0.47)	1.89 (0.99)	0.03
Parent/Caregiver Satisfaction	1.41 (0.71)	1.26 (0.48)	1.74 (0.98)	0.04

Note: Mean (Standard Deviation)

Table 10: Differences in Parent/Caregiver Perceptions by Relationship to Child

	Mother	Father	Relative or Caregiver	<i>p</i>
Overall Program Experience	1.39 (0.51)	1.42 (0.66)	1.39 (0.40)	0.99
Level of Improvement	1.56 (0.50)	1.57 (0.50)	1.43 (0.37)	0.79
Program Impact	1.54 (0.68)	1.59 (0.46)	1.57 (0.69)	0.97
Parent/Caregiver Experience	1.72 (0.83)	1.85 (0.92)	1.64 (1.10)	0.60
Parent/Caregiver Involvement	1.49 (0.54)	1.62 (0.48)	1.81 (1.46)	0.40
Parent/Caregiver Satisfaction	1.36 (0.59)	1.33 (0.43)	1.82 (1.46)	0.20

Note: Mean (Standard Deviation)

Table 11: Differences in Parent/Caregiver Perception by Prior Exposure to External Early Learning Programming

	Prior Experience	No Prior Experience	<i>p</i>
Overall Program Experience	1.42 (0.55)	1.32 (0.43)	0.43
Level of Improvement	1.54 (0.46)	1.59 (0.58)	0.68
Program Impact	1.52 (0.57)	1.65 (0.87)	0.40
Parent/Caregiver Experience	1.65 (0.77)	1.99 (1.06)	0.79
Parent/Caregiver Involvement	1.45 (0.51)	1.75 (0.91)	0.06
Parent/Caregiver Satisfaction	1.31 (0.51)	1.62 (0.99)	0.06

Note: Mean (Standard Deviation)

PARENT/CAREGIVER FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How did you hear about this pre-Kindergarten summer program? Why did you decide to enroll your child in this summer program?
2. What were your expectations when you enrolled your child in the program? Did the program meet your expectations? If yes, why? If no, why not?
3. Have you noticed any major changes in your child as a result of the program? Can you list 3-5 things your child learned from this Pre-K summer program? How do you think this program has affected your child's transition to Kindergarten in September?
4. What did your child talk about or share from his/her experience in the program?
5. Have there been any unexpected results or unintended benefits from this learning experience for your child?
6. This Pre-kindergarten summer program was set up to focus on students having a positive sense of their cultural and self-identity. In your opinion, did this happen? If so, how?
7. Were you able to participate in the program with your child occasionally? If yes, what were your observations or reactions to the program? What specific elements or activities of the program do you think your child enjoyed/benefited the most? The least?
8. Have you benefited from participating in this summer program? If yes, can you list 3-5 things that you have learned in the program? How would you do things differently at home to support your child's learning and well-being as a result of this summer program?
9. What additional assistance does your child need next to move forward?
10. Do you have any suggestions for improving the program?

EDUCATOR FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Introduction

1. Please state your role in the pre-Kindergarten summer program, if you have participated in the program before, the name of the summer school where you worked, and the number of years you have been an educator.
2. What were the reasons you decided to be involved in the program?

Perceptions of Program

3. What are your overall impressions of the program? How does this program compare to your previous teaching experience (i.e., experience as a teacher or ECE during the school year)?
4. What changes did you see in children as a result of the program?
5. What changes did you see in parents/caregivers as a result of the program?

Successes and Challenges

6. What were the components of the initiative that most impacted your work? What was your greatest success?
7. What do you think were the greatest challenges throughout the program? What can we do to address these challenges as next steps?

Special Topics

8. How has the intentional focus on Africentric principles in the Early Years influenced/impacted the way you teach? How did it impact the students? The parents/caregivers?
9. For educators who have participated in this program in the past, how would you describe this year's program in comparison with the previous years' program?

Professional Learning

10. Looking back, what do you think of the professional learning you received for this initiative? Was it adequate enough to prepare you for your role in this program?

Recommendation and Next steps

11. What would be your suggestions for things we should keep, do away with, or revise in future iterations of this program?
12. Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you would like to add?

PARKDALE EDUCATOR FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this additional focus group, which is focused on the partnership between the TDSB, George Brown College, and the City of Toronto.

1. Question for George Brown College ECEs: How did you become involved with this partnership at the Parkdale site? Why did you select this site over other placement options?
2. What are your overall impressions of this collaboration of educators from the TDSB and George Brown College? What were the advantages? What were the challenges?
3. How do you think the program was enhanced by the partnership?
4. Would you recommend this partnership approach for other pre-Kindergarten summer program sites in the future?
5. Is there anything that we didn't cover today that you would like to add?

