UNDERSTANDING HOW ONTARIO'S FULL-DAY EARLY LEARNING KINDERGARTEN WORKS FOR FAMILIES: BUILDING A PROGRAM THEORY BASED ON PARENTS' VOICES

Doctor of Philosophy, 2015
Tomoko N. Arimura
Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development
University of Toronto

Abstract

Ontario’s Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten (FDELK) represents a bold policy shift in North America, with its conceptualization and delivery of a universal, integrated early learning program. Informed by service integration goals, the FDELK combines early education and care into a seamless early learning program for 4- and 5-year olds. The current study explored parents’ perspectives and program participation experiences to develop a theory of change for FDELK. Relative to our understanding of program effects, causal mechanisms that help explain how and why programs work are not well understood. By asking parents to attribute observed outcomes to program participation experiences, the goal was to identify key pathways through which program participation influenced outcomes not only for children, but also for parents and families.

Building on the research experience of local service integration initiatives, this study used an innovative method to build a theory of change for FDELK. Qualitative methods were used to explore parents’ perspectives about their: (1) use of the FDELK program and salient features that were most helpful to them (inputs), (2) benefits and challenges associated with participating in FDELK (outcomes), and (3) program participation experiences that were perceived to contribute to identified outcomes (processes). Using transcribed parent interview data collected from 21 FDELK families, texts pertaining to these three topics were thematically coded in NVivo. Using research and theory as a starting point and a guide throughout
the analytic process, patterns of causal linkages between input>process>outcome themes were examined. Following analysis, a three-pathway FDELK theory of change model captured how program participation experiences contributed to a range of child-, parent-, and family-level outcomes.

The findings point to the strengths and weaknesses of the design and implementation of FDELK during year 1. More broadly, the study contributes to our understanding of how and why integrated early childhood programs work for families, and furthers our understanding of how parents navigate early childhood services to meet the needs of their family. It also offers a novel methodology for generating theories of change and capturing parent engagement processes. Implications for research, practice, and policy are discussed.
“…parents are interesting in their own right. Their experiences, satisfaction, and development are topics to be explored without any necessity to justify the exploration on the grounds on the effects of children.”

(Goodnow & Collins, 1990, p.6)

“There is nothing so practical as a good theory.”

(Lewin, 1952, p.169)
Acknowledgements

First and foremost, this study was about honouring parents’ voices. I wish to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of the parents who generously shared their experiences and perspectives with me. Thank you for entrusting me with your stories.

To my research supervisor and mentor, Dr. Carl Corter, thank you for your endless patience and guidance over all these years! I continue to be struck by the breadth and depth of your expertise, as well as your kindness. Thank you for giving me the space and time to nurture my curiosity.

To my supervisory and/or examining committee members, Dr. Janette Pelletier, Dr. Michal Perlman, Dr. Ruth Childs, Dr. Michele Peterson-Badali, and Dr. Geoff Nelson, thank you for your guidance and active participation throughout various stages of this study! Your comments and feedback were absolutely vital to shaping my work. Thank you, Dr. Pelletier, for providing me with the opportunity to interview parents in your study and for your detailed and contextualized feedback. Thank you, Dr. Perlman, for your methodological questions and encouragements to think more deeply about qualitative research in the context of a wider audience. Thank you, Dr. Ruth Childs, for helping me focus on what was most important. Thank you, Dr. Peterson-Badali, for your enthusiasm and thoughtful questions AND for being wonderful teacher to me when I was a brand new SCCP student! And finally, thank you to my external examiner, Dr. Nelson, for your expertise in community psychology and qualitative research. I have admired your work from a far from the time I was an undergraduate student – the innovation behind the design of your studies and your commitment to engaging in research that empowers marginalized populations continue to inspire me.
To Susan Elgie, I cannot begin to express how much I appreciated and needed your guidance as I learned to become a qualitative researcher. Thank you for validating my struggles and reassuring me along the way that I was on the right track.

To my wonderful group of friends and colleagues at JICS and OISE, thank you for your friendship over the years and for your support in helping me prepare for the FOE! I am not sure I would have made it without your encouragements and positivity. A special thanks to Sadaf Shallwani – thank you for sharing your journey with me.

To my friends in Victoria and Toronto, thank you for cheering me on as I made my way through graduate studies at U of T. It has been an epic journey – thank you for sticking with me all these years.

To my family in Victoria, thank you for your patience and endless love. This study is dedicated to you, mom and dad, for instilling in me the importance of education from an early age.

To my better half, Saad Chahine, thank you for enduring the ups and downs as I worked on this study. Your kindness and love enables me to move forward each day.
Table of Contents

Abstract .......................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................... v
Table of Contents ............................................................................................................... vi
List of Acronyms .............................................................................................................. xii
List of Tables .................................................................................................................... xiii
List of Figures ................................................................................................................... xiv
List of Appendices ............................................................................................................ xv

Chapter 1: Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  The Promise of Integrated Early Childhood Services ....................................................... 1
  Ontario’s Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program ............................................... 3
  Current Study .................................................................................................................... 6
  Definition of Key Terms ................................................................................................... 7

Chapter 2: Literature Review ............................................................................................... 12
  Section 1: Background ..................................................................................................... 13
    The FDK Movement ........................................................................................................ 14
      Origins of Kindergarten ................................................................................................. 14
      Rationale for FDK ......................................................................................................... 16
      Evidence Base for FDK Programs ................................................................................. 18
    The Service Integration Movement ............................................................................... 18
      Rationale ....................................................................................................................... 18
      Conceptualizing Service Integration ........................................................................... 20
      Integrated Early Childhood Education & Care. ......................................................... 21
      School-as-a-Hub Approach ......................................................................................... 22
    Evolution of Integrated Early Childhood Services in Ontario ...................................... 24
      TFD Project .................................................................................................................. 25
      Peel Best Start ............................................................................................................. 26
      Ontario’s FDELK Model. ............................................................................................. 27
  Section 2: Theories of Change ......................................................................................... 30
    Mechanisms, Pathways, and Theories of Change ......................................................... 31
    State of the Evidence ..................................................................................................... 33
    Theories of Change: Integrated Early Childhood Programs ........................................ 35
      TFD & PBS Theory of Change Framework .................................................................. 37
      Evidence for Early Learning Environment Hypothesis .............................................. 40
      Evidence for Parent Engagement & Support Hypothesis .......................................... 41
      Summary ..................................................................................................................... 42
    Additional Evidence to Support Pathways 1 & 2 ........................................................ 43
      Enhancing Quality of Care in ECEC Settings: Links to Child Outcomes .................. 43
      Enhancing Continuity: Integration/Transition Strategies & Children’s Outcomes ........ 45
      Enhancing Parent Involvement: Links to Children’s Outcomes ................................ 49
      Summary ..................................................................................................................... 53
    Benefits of Full-Day, Integrated Early Learning Programs .......................................... 53
    State of the Evidence ..................................................................................................... 54
Chapter 5: Results

Key Issues in Interpreting and Reporting Themes .......................................................... 123
Integrity of the Parent Interview Process ........................................................................ 123
Selective Coding & Interpretation of Themes .................................................................... 124
Engagement with the Literature ......................................................................................... 124
Levels of Themes ............................................................................................................... 125
Reporting Prevalence ......................................................................................................... 126
RQ1: Inputs: Family, Work/Study, and Social Support Contexts .................................. 127
Immigrant Families (n = 12) ............................................................................................ 128
   Parent Characteristics ..................................................................................................... 128
   Family Composition & Social Support ........................................................................... 131
   Child Characteristics ....................................................................................................... 132
Non-Immigrant Families (n = 9) ...................................................................................... 133
   Parent Characteristics ..................................................................................................... 133
   Family Composition and Social Support ........................................................................ 133
   Child Characteristics ....................................................................................................... 134
RQ2: Inputs – Program Use ............................................................................................... 134
Parents’ Initial Reactions to FDELK ................................................................................. 134
Parents’ Experience with Core Components of the FDELK Model ................................. 137
   Full-Day Early Learning Program ................................................................................ 137
   Integrated Staff Team ..................................................................................................... 138
   Play-Based Curriculum .................................................................................................. 139
   Extended-Day Program .................................................................................................. 140
   Summary ........................................................................................................................ 140
How Did Parents Use FDELK and Other Programs to Meet Their Needs? .................... 141
What Type(s) of Care Arrangements Were Families Using? ........................................... 146
RQ3: Outcomes – Benefits and Challenges of FDELK .................................................. 147
   Benefits ........................................................................................................................ 147
   Child-Level Benefits ...................................................................................................... 149
      Enhanced Child Daily Life ......................................................................................... 150
      Enhanced Child Well-Being ....................................................................................... 151
      Enhanced Child Development ................................................................................. 151
      Enhanced Child Learning & School Engagement .................................................. 153
      Enhanced Child Readiness for Grade 1 ....................................................................... 154
   Parent-Level Benefits .................................................................................................... 154
   Family-Level Benefits .................................................................................................. 156
   Challenges .................................................................................................................... 157
   Child-Level Challenges ................................................................................................. 159
   Parent-Level Challenges ............................................................................................... 160
      Parent Involvement ..................................................................................................... 160
      Play-Based Curriculum ............................................................................................... 163
      Parenting Stress .......................................................................................................... 163
   Family-Level Challenges ............................................................................................... 165
   Summary ........................................................................................................................ 166
RQ4: Processes – Program Processes Associated with Benefits and Challenges of FDELK .167
Pathway 1 Process Themes Associated with Benefits ..................................................... 168
Chapter 6: Discussion .................................................................................................................. 218
How were Parents Using FDELK and Other Early Childhood Programs? .................. 219
Salient Features of FDELK ........................................................................................................ 219
Reported Use of Early Childhood Programs ........................................................................ 221
FDELK Theory of Change Model .............................................................................................. 224
Three Broad Pathways ............................................................................................................... 225
Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment .................................................................................. 225
  Length of Early Learning Program ......................................................................................... 226
  Quality of Early Learning Program ......................................................................................... 229
  Continuity of Children’s Early Learning Experiences ............................................................ 231
Pathway 2: Parent Engagement & Support ............................................................................. 232
  Parent Engagement ................................................................................................................ 233
  Supporting Parents’ Well-Being & Parenting Role ................................................................. 234
Pathway 3: Family Life .............................................................................................................. 236
According to Parents, How was FDELK Performing as a…? ................................................. 238
List of Acronyms

The following acronyms are used frequently throughout this manuscript:

**Early Childhood Terms:**

- Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)
- Early Childhood Development (ECD)

**Ontario Kindergarten Terms:**

- Kindergarten (KG)
- Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK)
- Half-Day Kindergarten (HDK)
- Junior Kindergarten (JK)
- Senior Kindergarten (SK)
- Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten (FDELK)
- Early Childhood Educator (ECE)

**Integrated Early Childhood Programs:**

- Toronto First Duty (TFD)
- Peel Best Start (PBS)
- Better Beginnings, Better Futures (BBBF)
- Chicago Child-Parent Centers (Chicago CPC)
List of Tables

Table 1 Number of Eligible, Recruited and Interviewed Parents Across Sampled FDELK School Sites.................................................................................................................................................................................. 100
Table 2 Participant, Family and Work Characteristics .................................................................................................................................................................................. 105
Table 3 Salient Features of FDELK ........................................................................................................................................................................................................ 137
Table 4 Program Use............................................................................................................................................................................................................ 142
Table 5 Benefits of Participating in FDELK .................................................................................................................................................................................................. 148
Table 6 Challenges of Participating in FDELK .................................................................................................................................................................................. 158
Table 7 Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment Process Themes .................................................................................................................................................. 168
Table 8 Pathway 2: Parent Engagement and Support Process Themes ........................................................................................................................................... 174
Table 9 Pathway 3: Family Life Process Themes............................................................................................................................................................................... 184
Table 10 Pathway 1 Process Themes Associated with Challenges ........................................................................................................................................ 188
Table 11 Pathway 2 Process Themes Associated with Challenges ........................................................................................................................................ 190
Table 12 Pathway 3 Process Themes Associated with Challenges ........................................................................................................................................ 193
Table 13 Process Themes Associated with with Child Outcome Themes ........................................................................................................................................ 198
Table 15 Process Themes Associated With Parent Outcome Themes ........................................................................................................................................ 201
Table 16 Process Themes Associated with Family Outcome Themes ........................................................................................................................................ 204
List of Figures

Figure 1. TFD and PBS theory of change model. .......................................................... 40
Figure 2. Conceptual framework for the research inquiry. ........................................... 86
Figure 3. Overview of the data analysis process. ......................................................... 114
Figure 4. Pathway 1: Early learning environment. ....................................................... 169
Figure 5. Pathway 2: Parent engagement and support .................................................. 175
Figure 6. Pathway 3: Family life ................................................................................. 184
Figure 7. Summary of FDELK program processes. ....................................................... 196
Figure 8. FDELK pathways associated with child outcomes. ..................................... 199
Figure 9. FDELK pathways associated with parent outcomes. ..................................... 202
Figure 10. FDELK pathways associated with family outcomes. ................................ 205
Figure 11. Frequency of reported pathway 1 process themes by parent immigration status. 206
Figure 12. Frequency of reported pathway 2 process themes by parent immigration status. 207
Figure 13. Frequency of reported pathway 3 themes by parent immigrant status .......... 208
Figure 14. Frequency differences between groups for process themes ....................... 209
Figure 15. Frequency of reported child-level benefit themes by parent immigration status. 210
Figure 16. Frequency of parent-level benefit themes by parent immigration status ........ 211
Figure 17. Frequency of family-level benefit themes by parent immigration status ......... 212
Figure 18. Frequency differences between groups for benefit themes ......................... 213
Figure 19. FDELK theory of change model ................................................................. 217
Figure E1. Challenging pathway 1 processes and associated outcomes ................... 295
Figure E2. Challenging pathway 2 processes and associated outcomes ................... 295
Figure E3. Challenging pathway 3 processes and associated outcomes ................... 296
List of Appendices

Appendix A: FDELK Indicators of Change
Appendix B: Parent Interview Protocol and Record Form
Appendix C: Parent Consent Letter/Form
Appendix D: Coding Templates
Appendix E: FDELK Program Processes Associated with Challenging Outcomes
Chapter 1: Introduction

In the province of Ontario, integrated, school-based early childhood services are offered by the Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten (FDELK) program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015). Phased-in over 5 years beginning in fall 2010, FDELK is a universal program that delivers a full-day of early learning and care to 4- and 5-year-olds at the community school. To date, research studies have monitored the implementation and immediate benefits of the FDELK program (Janmohamed, McCuaig, Akbari, Gananathan, & Jenkins, 2014; Janus, Duku & Schell, 2012; Pelletier, 2012b; 2012c; 2013; 2014; Vanderlee, Youmans, Peters, & Easterbrook, 2012). However, no previous study has systematically developed a theory of change that explains how and why the program works for families. Thus, the current study addresses this gap by examining parents’ perspectives to build a theory of change model that articulates how key program participation experiences are linked to child, parents, and family outcomes.

The Promise of Integrated Early Childhood Services

Universal, integrated early childhood programs are one of the most promising approaches to improving service coherence, quality and accessibility of programs for young children and their families (Harvard Family Research Project, 2010; OECD, 2006). The benefits of providing a universally available system of early childhood services include: (1) reaching all children who may benefit, not just those who fall within targeted high risk groups; (2) reducing the stigma associated with using targeted programs; and (3) increasing public pressure to increase program quality by drawing in the support of middle class users (Barnett, 2010). When service integration goals are incorporated in universal programs, these programs have the potential to: (1) support the multiple needs of children and families
through a more comprehensive menu of available services, (2) improve quality and continuity of children’s early learning experiences, and (3) enhance program and community capacity by fostering collaborative learning and resource sharing opportunities (Pelletier & Corter, 2006).

In Canada, integrated approaches to early childhood services have taken a variety of forms including a networked approach across different locations such as in the Better Beginnings and Better Futures Project, as well as a more centralized hub approach with links out into services at other community locations (Corter & Peters, 2011). Demonstration projects such as Toronto First Duty (TFD) have used the “school-as-a-hub” model to offer a comprehensive array of services for young children including, kindergarten, child care, family support, and other “community” services such as health screenings, nutrition and literacy programs through a single intake process (Corter & Pelletier, 2010). By integrating early education, care and family support services, parents are able to access key early childhood services through a single intake process and children experience greater continuity of high quality early learning environments across settings and/or time (Arimura et al., 2011; Pelletier & Corter, 2005; Zigler, Gilliam, & Jones, 2006). While other comprehensive early childhood programs may include a similar array of services, integrated early childhood programs have explicit goals to bring together services that are traditionally offered by separate funding streams and organizations. When offered universally at school-based sites, integrated early childhood programs have been found to improve children’s cognitive and social-emotional development, increase parent involvement, and enhance the quality of children’s learning environment (Arimura et al., 2011; Corter, Patel, Pelletier, & Bertrand, 2008; Desimone, Finn-
Ontario’s Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program

Informed by the research literature and by successful model programs like the TFD demonstration project, the FDELK program was designed to integrate the programs and practice of kindergarten and child care through a teaching team consisting of a kindergarten teacher and registered early childhood educator (ECE). Additionally, informed by the *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (*ELECT*) framework (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007), the innovation also extends to the curriculum, which requires a play-based approach to learning and development. Compared to a traditional teacher-centered, rote learning approach, the play-based curriculum focuses on children’s high quality play based in and built of children’s natural curiosity for play and expert scaffolding by the teaching team as the foundation for learning and healthy development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a). Finally, FDELK also aims to offer onsite before- and after-school programs (i.e., extended-day options) where there is interest from the families of at least 20 children. Families who require before- and/or after-school care can enrol their children in this optional program that typically operates from about 7 to 9 AM and 3:30 to 6 PM. Parents can choose to enrol their child in the before-school, the after-school or both programs, or not at all. Some of the schools may be also offering programs for older children or offering programs during school breaks or on professional development days (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b)¹.

¹ At the time of the study, only a select number of schools were able to meet the goal of including integrated before and after-school day care for FDELK families. Therefore, integrated services for many of these families did not extend beyond the school day.
The extended-day program was initially intended to be operated by school boards. However, as a result of school boards’ reluctance to take on this responsibility and concerns expressed by child care operators about a loss of revenue, a legislative amendment was made: school boards were given the option of contracting with community providers to deliver the extended-day program. The majority of school boards, including those sampled in this study chose the third-party option. Among English language boards, only the public school boards in Waterloo and Ottawa continued to develop their own extended-day programs (Janmohamed et al., 2014).

Since its first year of implementation, three key research studies have been funded to monitor the implementation and investigate the outcomes of FDELK. The first is a provincial study (2010-2012) conducted in partnership with Queen’s (Vanderlee et al., 2012) and McMaster (Janus et al., 2012) universities that aimed to measure the initial outcomes of FDELK, and to identify effective practices to inform the delivery of the program moving forward. The findings suggested a dosage effect with children with two years of FDELK showing greater decline in developmental risk from Junior Kindergarten (JK) to Senior Kindergarten (SK) compared to children with one year of FDELK, and those with one year of FDELK showing greater decline in risk compared to children with no FDELK experience (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). The second is a regional study conducted by Dr. Janette Pelletier from the University of Toronto. This longitudinal study investigates the implementation and impact of the FDELK program in the Region of Peel. It follows two cohorts of children from JK/SK to Grade 3 (Pelletier, 2012b). Key findings to date also support the positive benefits of FDELK on children’s developmental and learning outcomes (Pelletier, 2012b; 2012c; 2013; 2014). Finally, the third study conducted by researchers at the At-
The Kinison Centre for Society and Child Development, OISE, University of Toronto, examined the impact of FDELK and extended-day programs operated by school boards and community agencies on educators, parents, and administrators. Key findings point to the greater challenges of ensuring quality standards and collaborative practice when extended-day programs are operated by third-party agencies.

Although existing research on Ontario’s FDELK shows great promise, we currently know very little about how or why the program works for children, parents, and families. What key program features and participation experiences are associated with desired outcomes? What salient experiences are most helpful to parents? In the current climate of educational reform that emphasizes investment during the early years, “theories of change” that articulate how and why programs work for families is needed to effectively guide the design and delivery of programs and facilitate program improvement efforts (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013; Weiss, 1995).

To date, theories of change, particularly those that include broader outcomes for parents and families, are often not made explicit, and even when the underlying theory emerges, it is not tested in a systematic manner (Chen, 2005; Weiss, 1997). Moreover, when there are explicit attempts to generate a theory of change, parents rarely play an active role (e.g., Reynolds, 2000). Thus, existing theories of change have been generated based on a combination of research and program stakeholder assumptions with little or no the input from families who use the program.

In the broader early intervention literature, researchers have examined causal pathways though which participation in high quality preschool programs are linked to long-term outcomes in adolescence and adulthood (Reynolds, Englund, Ou, Schweinhart, & Campbell,
While these studies contribute to our understanding of how long-term outcomes are achieved through intermediary changes that take place within the child and the family system, they do not address the question of how proximal program participation experiences contribute to immediate outcomes for children, parents, and families (Hayakawa & Reynolds, 2014). In the service integration literature, there is an emerging theory of change that articulates how program experiences contribute to short-term outcomes. Specifically, in the TFD project, cumulative research findings have highlighted the importance of *enhancing the quality of children’s early learning experiences* and *building meaningful relationships with families* as two broad pathways through which program participation contributes to desired outcomes for children and families (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Pelletier, 2012a). Additionally, there is some evidence to suggest that the program facilitates positive outcomes by *enhancing the quality of daily life for children, parents, and families* (Arimura & Corter, 2010). However, this emerging theory of change has not yet been developed nor tested as a whole.

**Current Study**

Given that there had not been any systematic research to develop and test program theories for FDELK, the current study focused on capturing parents’ voices to develop an *initial theory of change* that explains how the program works for families. As such, qualitative methods were used to explore parents’ perspectives about their: (1) use of the FDELK program and salient features that were most helpful to them (*inputs*), (2) benefits and challenges associated with participating in FDELK (*outcomes*), and (3) program participation experiences that were perceived to contribute to identified outcomes (*processes*). Using transcribed parent interview data, texts pertaining to each of these three topics were thematically
coded in NVivo. By examining the pattern of causal linkages between input>process>outcome themes, a three-pathway theory of change was developed.

This study contributes to the development of theory and practice in early childhood development, parenting, and integrated services in a number of different ways. First, the study builds on the existing evidence base of the TFD model by investigating the impact of integration on children, parents, and families. In particular, a deeper understanding of parent- and family-level outcomes is needed to guide a more comprehensive research on the effects of service integration. Second, the focus on developing a theory of change for FDELK fills an important gap in our understanding of the mechanisms by which integrated early childhood programs lead to desired outcomes for children and their families. By listening to parents’ stories and using their narrative to build a theory of change, this study honours parents as “experts” on their own children’s learning and development. As well, this study provides an opportunity to examine how stakeholder theories compare with parents’ own theories about how programs affect their families. Third, this study offers an innovative methodology for uncovering key program processes that may be linked to program effects. While previous studies have typically used quantitative, confirmatory approaches (i.e., path analysis), this study uses a qualitative, exploratory approach as a sound starting point for building program theory.

**Definition of Key Terms**

Throughout this manuscript, I use a number of key terms that may have multiple meanings or uses. Here, I provide a definition of these key terms and clarify how I intended to use them in this study. If acronyms are used, they are provided in brackets.

*Integration or Service Integration*: First and foremost, this study is about unde-
standing how integrated early childhood services work for families. I use the term integration or service integration to represent collaborative efforts that aim to bring together traditionally separate services into a more coherent system. Ontario’s FDELK is one example of integrated early childhood services because it integrates the program and practice of early childhood education and care.

**Theory of Change:** For the purpose of this study, a theory of change is defined as the story or explanation of how an initiative will achieve its goals (Weiss, 1995). It describes the types of ‘inputs’ or program resources that facilitate key ‘program processes’ needed to bring about the desired outcomes.’ In education, the concepts and methods associated with theory of change have been applied in broader contexts to examine school improvement and reform change processes (Lewis, 2015). I use the terms theory of change and program theory interchangeably as theory of change in this context articulates a theory for how a program works.

**Pathways:** I use the term pathways to refer to the connections between program processes and outcomes. In the current study, analysis of parents’ narratives revealed three pathways or processes though which program participation was linked to outcomes.

**Early Childhood:** Early childhood is commonly defined as a developmental period from birth to age 8 (e.g., OECD, 2001). Therefore, the period includes children younger than compulsory school age, as well as children in primary school. However, when operationalized in the design of early childhood programs, the term may cover a narrower age group, most commonly children under the age of 6 years. This study focuses on the integration of services for 4- and 5 year olds in the Ontario FDELK program.

**Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC).** ECEC is a common term used in the field of early childhood development. It is used to describe all arrangements providing care
and education to children in the period of early childhood regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or program content. In Canada, this definition encompasses child care centres and other regulated care services whose primary focus is to allow mothers to participate in the paid labour force. It also includes kindergarten programs, nursery schools and preschools, whose primary purpose is early childhood education.

**Integrated ECEC.** Integrated ECEC refers to a coherent approach to providing “care” and “education” programs for young children. While the exact nature and intensity of integration efforts will vary across systems, the trend has been to integrate the responsibility for the care and education of young people within the Ministry of Education (UNESCO, 2010; OECD, 2006). The current study focuses on understanding how the integration of ECEC in the FDELK program impacts children, parents, and families.

**Kindergarten.** In Canada, kindergarten is offered through the publicly-funded school system and operates under provincial education legislation. Ontario provides public kindergarten to four- and five-year-old children in the form of Junior Kindergarten (JK) and Senior Kindergarten (SK), respectively.

**Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten (FDELK).** This term refers to the Ontario full-day kindergarten program, which was rolled out in the fall of 2010. I use the term full-day kindergarten (FDK) to refer generically to other to full-day kindergarten programs that do not use Ontario’s integrated approach. Most of the FDK studies that I review in this study were conducted in the US.

**Integrated Staff Team or Multidisciplinary Staff Teams.** These terms are used to describe the staffing model of FDELK. Because FDELK is delivered by a team of teachers with a traditional teaching background and an ECE background the staffing model is consid-
ered to be multidisciplinary and represents the integration efforts of educators from two different disciplines working together to deliver the program.

**Extended-Day Program.** This term refers to an important design element of FDELK. It represents a fee-based, onsite before- and after-school program for families who require care for their children beyond the school day. These programs typically operate from about 7 to 9 AM and 3:30 to 6 PM. Parents can choose to enrol their child in the before-school, the after-school or both programs, or not at all. Some schools may offer before- and after-school programs run by a third-party child care provider. Some of the schools may be also offering programs for older children or offering programs during school breaks or on professional development days. At the time of the study, only a select number of schools were able to meet the goal of including integrated before and after-school day care for FDELK families.

**Toronto First Duty (TFD) Project.** The TFD project was a local demonstration study that examined the feasibility and potential benefits of integrating existing but fragmented early education, child care, and family support programs into a single seamless service platform to promote the healthy development of children from conception through primary school, while at the same time supporting parents’ work or study and parenting responsibilities. The evidence base of this study informed the provincial policy for the design and implementation of FDELK.

**Best Start and Peel Best Start (PBS).** Introduced in 2004, Best Start is Ontario’s early learning and development strategy that requires the province and municipalities to work with parents, service providers, and different ministries. The plan puts the central recommendation of the Early Years Study (McCain & Mustard, 1999) into action. In planning for Best Start, community-based Best Start networks (such as PBS) were established to plan and
implement the Best Start Plan at the local level. PBS scaled up the TFD school-as-a-hub model and provided further support for the feasibility of integrating existing services at school sites.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The current study focused on building a conceptual understanding of how FDELK, a full-day, integrated early learning program, benefits or challenges families based on the perspectives of families who are the direct recipients of this program. To set the stage for the analysis and discussion of the findings, I conducted a selective review of the literature focusing on two areas – theory of change and parent perspectives – that most closely examine the research questions of this study.

In section one, prior to reviewing the literature on theory of change and parent perspectives, I introduce two important movements in education that influenced the design of the Ontario FDELK program: (1) full-day kindergarten (FDK), and integrated early childhood programs. This section is intended to be a background to the rest of the chapter.

In section two, I review the relevant literature on theories of change to examine the question: How do full-day, integrated early learning programs work? Overall, the literature on theories of change pertaining to early childhood programs is not well established given that researchers and program stakeholders rarely test program theories, let alone articulate them explicitly. When they are articulated and tested, the theory of change model typically reflects program stakeholder beliefs and assumptions; families are rarely asked to directly theorize about the inner workings of a program. Despite these limitations, there is a promising body of literature on local service integration initiatives that examine how program experiences for children and parents may contribute to short-term outcomes. Cumulative research findings from the TFD and PBS studies have highlighted the importance of two broad program pathways: (1) enhancing the quality of children’s early learning environment, and (2) building meaningful relationships with families (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Pelletier, 2012a).
Additionally, there is some evidence to suggest that these programs facilitate positive outcomes by enhancing the quality of daily life for children, parents, and families (Arimura & Corter, 2010). Because this emerging theory of change has not yet been developed nor tested as a whole, I also draw on other literature that further supports these program pathways. Finally, given the limited state of research on theories of change, I supplement the review by examining outcome studies that have investigated the impacts of full-day, early learning programs.

In section three, I introduce the broader literature on parental cognitions as an area of inquiry focused on examining the content, sources, and consequences of parents’ beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, attributions, and goals/expectations about child development and parenting. I then examine how parents’ perspectives are examined in the early childhood intervention literature.

In section four, I summarize key findings and highlight major gaps in the literature.

Section 1: Background

As a background to the literature review, I first introduce two important movements in education that influenced the design of the Ontario FDELK program: FDK, and integrated early childhood services. These two movements have progressed largely separately with little cross referencing of theory, practice, and policy. However, in Ontario, Canada, the FDELK² program has evolved directly from demonstration studies that investigated the feasibility of integrating key streams of early childhood programs including early education, child care and family support. While the length of the school day is comparable to other FDK programs

Note. Throughout this paper I use FDELK to refer specifically to the Ontario full-day early learning kindergarten program. I use FDK to refer generally to other programs that offer full-day programming but do not follow the Ontario model.
abroad, the integrated and multidisciplinary teaching team, play-based curriculum, and the before- and after-school care (i.e., extended-day program) that is integrated with the FDELK are quite unique. Therefore, I review the service integration literature as the primary literature (for the content and delivery of the FDELK program) and FDK literature as the secondary literature (for the length of the school day).

**The FDK Movement**

**Origins of Kindergarten.**

The term kindergarten was first coined by a German educator and philosopher Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) who was most interested in children’s development spanning the transition in education from the family to the school. The word kindergarten literally means “children’s garden,” which hints at Froebel’s philosophy of educating children’s body, mind, and soul through play, outdoor experiences, music, movement, spontaneity, creativity, and independence. Froebel’s kindergarten philosophy gained widespread support among the educated Germans in the 1800s and quickly spread to other European nations including England, France, Holland, and Italy (Shapiro, 1983).

In North America, kindergarten first took root in the US when Froebel’s student, Margaret Meyer Schurz, opened the first kindergarten in Watertown, Wisconsin for her own daughter and children of friends in 1856. In Canada, the first kindergarten opened in Charlottetown in 1870. Most of these early kindergartens were established primarily for children of immigrant families and the urban poor, and were typically funded by charitable organizations. During WWI, when there was a huge influx of immigrants from Europe to urban centres in North America, many privately operated kindergartens were incorporated into the public school system. During WWII, due to shortage of teachers, most kindergarten pro-
grams operated on a half-day schedule. While state and community-run kindergarten programs expanded in the 60s and 70s, they largely remained half-day programs (Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Prochner, 2000).

In the US, FDK experienced a re-emergence starting in the 90s. By 2012, 76% of all kindergarteners were enrolled in a FDK program. Furthermore, when enrolment was examined by ethnicity, it was clear that black kindergarteners were more likely than other kindergarteners to be enrolled in FDK programs (Child Trends, 2012). In Canada, the availability and accessibility of FDK varies greatly across the country. However, the provision of province-wide FDK has become increasingly common, with currently 6 out of 13 provincial jurisdictions consistently offering some form of FDK for 5-year-old children. Ontario is the only province that offers a 2-year FDK program for 4- and 5-year-olds (Friendly, Halfon, Beach, & Forer, 2012).

Several demographic and sociocultural factors are commonly cited for the recent increase in FDK programs. First, the growth of single-parent families and dual-working families has heightened the need for full-time care for preschool children of all ages. Second, for growing number of children, kindergarten is rarely the first out-of-home care experience. More and more children under age five are attending preschool and child care programs. As a result, these children are considered to be ready for engaging in a full-day of early learning experiences. Third, given that many children in the US do not speak English at home, kindergarten has been increasingly viewed as a means to help these children catch up in their language skills prior to entering primary school. Fourth, there is increasingly a priority to im-

---

3 This includes Prince Edward Island, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and British Columbia. In Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Alberta there is a mixture of half-day and full-day kindergarten programs (Friendly et al., 2012).
prove childhood equity. Proponents argue that the public funding of FDK programs has the potential to ameliorate educational and health disparities among children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Finally, increased accountability measures for schools and rising state standards have heightened pressures on educators to accelerate students’ movement through the academic curriculum (Brownell et al., 2014; Cooper, Allen, Patall, & Dent, 2010; Lee, Burkham, Ready, Honigman, & Meisels, 2006).

**Rationale for FDK.**

With Ontario’s recent move to provide province-wide full-day program for kindergarteners, the value of such program has been fiercely debated. Cooper et al. (2010) provided a summary of potential positive and negative effects of FDK compared to HDK. According to these researchers, proponents typically highlight academic gains and school readiness as primary benefits for children. Non-academic benefits, such as children’s socio-emotional development including, enhanced social skills, peer relations, and self-esteem and confidence have also been suggested. These positive child outcomes are thought to stem from mechanisms operating in classrooms via the quality of instruction that children receive. For instance, it is thought that teachers have greater opportunity to provide individualized instruction, and thereby increase the chances of earlier identification and remediation of learning challenges. Additionally, proponents argue that FDK provides teachers with the opportunity to provide less hurried instruction with ample opportunity for repeated learning, which, in turn, increases children’s learning outcomes. For parents and families, FDK is thought to enhance *family daily life* (with easier scheduling and transportation of children), *family financial functioning* (with lower child care costs), and *parent involvement* (with presumably greater involvement occurring from easier access to teachers). From a societal perspective, FDK is seen as a
means to level the playing field for disadvantaged children, including children from minority backgrounds, as well as a means to alleviate the costs to society stemming from poor educational attainment, incarceration, and health problems.

Opponents of FDK are not only concerned with whether the program will deliver its promises, but also with the potential negative effects on children and classroom processes. Of most concern is that FDK may raise expectations about what children should know when they enter the first grade. Skeptics argue that in order to meet these higher expectations, the kindergarten curriculum will become increasingly focused on structured academic learning, which would compromise the developmentally appropriate programming that should be in place for kindergarteners. Additionally, lengthening the school day and accelerated learning may also result in adverse outcomes for children’s well-being including, fatigue, which, in turn, may increase irritability and other socio-emotional issues such as stress and anxiety. Exposure to older children misbehaving may also have a negative impact. All of these issues may result in a less than enjoyable experience for children, rather than a boost in motivation and confidence envisioned by proponents of FDK. Skeptics also worry about the potential decline in the quality of instruction from teachers dealing with the same students for the whole day and reduced planning and preparation time. For parents, FDK may not fully support their child care needs as most work schedules are not compatible with school hours. And finally, from a societal perspective, some are concerned that FDK may erode parents’ sense of responsibility for their children, will increase operational costs of kindergarten programs taking away valuable funding from other programs, and still may not reach the most disadvantaged children (Cooper et al., 2010).
Evidence Base for FDK Programs.

FDK programs across North America are likely to vary considerably with respect to the schedule (full-day, every day, full-day, alternate day, etc.), pedagogy, curriculum and staffing model. However, apart from the large literature on length of day as the primary analytic focus, there has been little emphasis on linking aspects of program design and implementation to program outcomes. This is a problematic situation in that regardless of length of day or program schedule, the content and instructional strategies used in the FDK program are paramount to its success or failure. Beyond the categorization of programs as full-day or half-day, FDK researchers offer very little or no other program descriptions. Thus, FDK findings, particularly those stemming from meta-analyses or large-scale designs, are not interpretable within the context of how the program was delivered.

The Service Integration Movement

Rationale.

Integration is a growing part of the service reform across different service sectors. In the field of early childhood, advocates have identified a range of practical and conceptual reasons for bringing together services for children and families: (1) supporting the holistic and healthy development of children including, enhancing school readiness and supporting their transition to school; (2) promoting equitable access to services; (3) creating continuity for children in early childhood service settings; and (4) building organizational and community capacity.

The first argument relates to principles of child development and acknowledges that children develop within multiple, interconnected domains and when one developmental domain is ignored, other domains may suffer (Bennett & Kaga, 2010; Blank & Berg, 2006).
Another inter-related principle is based on social-ecological systems theory that stipulates that children’s development is influenced by multiple, interrelated contexts (Lerner, Rothbaum, Boulos, & Castellino, 2002). Thus, if programs are to be effective, they need to work together to intervene at multiple points in the child’s ecology across multiple developmental domains (Pelletier & Corter, 2006).

The second argument is based on principles of population health and social determinants of health that emphasize equity and better outcomes for all children (Maggi, Irwin, Siddiqi & Hertzman, 2010; Hertzman & Power, 2004). This perspective recognizes early childhood development to be an important determinant of health and well-being over the life course and advocates for equitable provision of services to eliminate social gradients of health (Low, Low, Baumler, & Huynh, 2005). To this end, the integrated delivery of early childhood services is thought to be a key strategy for eliminating a range of barriers to equitable access and participation. This, in turn, is thought to reduce the ‘readiness gap’ for children at the community level (Colley, 2005; Finn-Stevenson, Desimone, & Chung, 1998; Pelletier & Corter, 2006).

The third argument is firmly rooted in the importance of fostering continuity in children’s learning and every day experiences (Bennett & Kaga, 2010; Corter et al., 2008; Pelletier & Corter, 2006). Continuity can take shape in a variety of different ways, but, generally, it implies that children experience greater consistency in their daily interactions across settings (i.e., horizontal continuity) or as the child transitions through developmental milestones across time (i.e., vertical continuity) (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Evidence suggests that continuity fostered through integration strategies can lead to higher quality of learning environments for children (Henrich, Ginicola, Finn-Stevenson, & Zigler, 2006) and greater parent
Lastly, the fourth argument focuses on improving organizational and community capacity to meet the complex needs of children and families. The use of integrated staff teams to deliver early childhood programs can bring about cohesiveness and foster learning and skill development among educators who are traditionally from different disciplines (Pelletier & Corter, 2006). For example, common professional development opportunities can be a cost-effective strategy for building organizational capacity and offer other benefits such as enhanced peer support networks, peer learning, and development of mutual respect.

**Conceptualizing Service Integration.**

Within the broad service integration literature, several dimensions are used to classify and describe the diverse range of initiatives. For instance, in their review, Wong and Sumison (2013) note that the term service integration was used to capture integration occurring at different *organizational levels* (i.e., policy-, organizational-, program-, and client-centered integration). Initiatives such as the TFD demonstration project that require the coordinated delivery of multiple streams of existing services fall under organization-centered integration. In contrast, the transformation of provincial policy as with the FDELK program require integration at the policy level with alignment and consolidation of roles and responsibilities between Ministries of Education and Children and Youth Services. A body of research has also classified the *intensity of relationships* that characterize service integration initiatives along a “continuum of change” (e.g., Konrad, 1996; Selden, Sowa, & Sandfort, 2006). Although different authors have used different labels for the points on the scale of that continuum, the in-
tensity of the level of integration can be characterized as ranging from loosely structured informal relationships (e.g., cooperation) to unified formal relationships (e.g., integration).

**Integrated Early Childhood Education & Care.**

It is clear that integrated approaches in early childhood services can vary significantly with respect to they are conceptualized and operationalized in reality. However, a growing policy trend is the integration of the early “care” and “education” of young children (OECD, 2006; UNESCO, 2010). The term Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) refers to all arrangements providing care and education to children under compulsory school age regardless of setting, funding, opening hours or program content. In Canada, this definition encompasses child care centres and other regulated care services whose primary focus is to allow mothers to participate in the paid labour force. It also includes kindergarten programs, nursery schools and preschools, whose primary purpose is early childhood education.

Given its multi-sectoral nature, integrated ECEC approaches have been described to require complex system reform, and all countries face difficulties in achieving coordinated approaches to delivering ECEC services. In addition to the obvious financial challenges associated with any system reform initiatives, the different histories of child care and early education add significant challenges to achieving a coherent and unified ECEC system (Bennett & Kaga, 2010; Friendly, 2008). In Canada, ECEC systems are not only divided between care and education, but provide access to only a limited portion of preschoolers. For instance, in Canada in 2012, regulated child care space was available to only 22.5% of 0 to 5-year-olds even though 61.7% of children within this age range had mothers who were in the paid labour force (Friendly et al., 2012). Kindergarten programs designed to provide early childhood education are typically half-day and do not begin until age five in much of the country.
This leaves most preschool-age children under the age of 5 years without early childhood education and many working parents without coherent care, often requiring them to use “patchwork arrangements” that mean multiple transitions for children.

Despite these challenges, the provision of high quality, integrated ECEC has become an important priority as policy makers seek to improve the quality and continuity of children’s early experiences and the make the most efficient use of resources (OECD, 2001; 2006; 2012). While Canada has no national approach to ECEC, at the provincial level there has been a movement toward integrating responsibility for child care in Ministries of Education. At this time, seven jurisdictions have moved responsibility for child care into their Ministry of Education: Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia (Ferns & Friendly, 2014).

School-as-a-Hub Approach.

In countries with long-established ECEC traditions, such as Belgium, Denmark, France, and Sweden, attention to children’s transitions has led to the integration of preschool/child care, school, and extracurricular programs into a seamless full-day service at the same site (OECD, 2006). In North America, where there is no national approach to ECEC, there has been an increase of integrated ECEC services at school sites at the local levels that is paving the way for a coherent provincial/state-level ECEC policy (Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 2007).

The idea of using the school for various ‘non-academic’ services is not new and is in fact inherent in the community school movement that began several decades ago (Dryfoos et al., 2005). Given that schooling is universal and it is normative, the use of the community school to deliver a range of services is thought to remove some of the stigma associated with
accessing services at specialized clinics. Furthermore, the use of schools as a site for integration can also be looked upon as a cost effective approach: Public schools are part of an annual investment that is already supported by tax dollars and used for only part of the day, 10 months a year; the use of schools to provide non-traditional ECEC services means that we are building on a system that already exists, as opposed to creating a whole new system (Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 2007).

Furthermore, aside from the practical reasons of using schools as a site of integration, there are policy-related arguments for situating early childhood programs under the leadership of the education system. For example, OECD’s Starting Strong II report (2006) states that the advantages of situating integrated programs within ministries of education are that their primary focus is children and that many of the subsystems necessary for a quality program (e.g., a training authority, an evaluation body, etc.) are already in place. Evidence gathered for the OECD reviews show that countries that have already developed integrated systems under a lead ministry at the national level have been able to address the care and education of children more holistically and coherently.

Finally, recent studies, investigating the effects of pre-kindergarten programs on children’ academic and social adjustment, also suggest some benefits of providing early childhood services at schools. Specifically, studies have found that children who attended programs located in public schools may not experience behavioural problems that are usually associated with being in care from a young age, for longer periods of time. For example, when Magnuson, Ruhm and Waldfogel (2007) compared the effects of pre-kindergarten programs co-located in schools with kindergarten with programs located elsewhere, they found higher externalizing behaviours for children attending pre-kindergarten elsewhere. Notably,
academic readiness did not differ according to where the pre-kindergarten program was located. These findings suggest that situating early childhood programs within public schools may reduce negative behavioural outcomes associated with early care while maintaining academic benefits.

There are of course some arguments for not using the school as a site for integration. Zigler and Finn-Stevenson (2007) note that, “lack of space, a poor track record in serving low-income and non-English speaking children, an overburdened educational system, and presumed parental dissatisfaction with schools” are some of the arguments voiced against placing programs such as child care in schools (pp.178). Another major concern is that since schools are traditionally associated with more direct academic instructional orientations, children in school-based early childhood programs will be subjected to formal didactic instruction in academic skills at younger and younger ages (Finn-Stevenson & Zigler, 1999).

Evidence from OECD countries suggests that with the exception of Sweden, there is no clear evidence that the integration of ECEC programs within education has resulted in “schoolification”4 (Bennett & Kaga, 2010).

**Evolution of Integrated Early Childhood Services in Ontario**

    Local service integration initiatives such as the Better Beginnings, Better Futures, Toronto First Duty (TFD) and Peel Best Start (PBS) research projects, along with other evidence from national and international jurisdictions, have helped to inform the recommendations found within the Premier’s Report on Early Learning in Ontario – *With Our Best Future in Mind* (Pascal, 2009). This section describes the key design principles and the existing evidence base of school-as-a-hub models that have influenced the conceptualization and implement-

---

4 The term “schoolification” has been used to describe the process whereby early childhood institutions become accountable to the standards, practices and expectations of primary school education.
mentations of a universal, school-based, integrated early childhood program in the form of Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten (FDELK).

**TFD Project.**

The TFD project was a school-based integrated early childhood service initiative. The project’s primary aim was to test the feasibility and potential benefits of integrating existing but fragmented early education, child care, and family support programs into a single seamless service platform to promote the healthy development of children from conception through primary school, while at the same time supporting parents’ work or study and parenting responsibilities. During Phase 1 of the project (2002-2005), five pilot school sites in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) implemented the TFD model. At each site, there was to be integrated, universally available service core consisting of child care, school kindergarten, and parent education programs. Other community services, such as public health and child and family mental health also joined, with variations in the mix across the sites. Parents were free to choose which aspects of the integrated mix they would use for their family. In reality, virtually every 4- and 5-year-old child at the five sites attended half-day, non-mandatory, kindergarten whether or not they participated in the other TFD services. Staff teams worked together to integrate the existing curriculum requirements for the provincial kindergarten program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) with the programming approaches of child care in the Day Nurseries Act and the parent engagement approach of the Toronto District School Board parenting programs. The overall pedagogical approach was child-centered and play-based. The integrated 4- and 5-year-old program maintained a staff/child ratio of 10:1 throughout the entire day, which was half of the 20:1 ratio that the
Ministry of Education established for traditional kindergarten classrooms (Corter, Bertrand, Griffin, Endler, Pelletier, & McKay, 2002; Corter & Pelletier, 2010).

During Phase 1, research and development focused on documenting the implementation process as the sites worked toward an integrated model of service delivery using TFD’s five dimension of integration (i.e., integrated governance, seamless access, integrated early learning environment, early childhood staff team, parent participation (Corter et al., 2002). Additionally, program outcomes were measured at three levels: (1) programs, professionals and policy; (2) children and families; and (3) community impacts and awareness. The study employed mixed-methods, case study and quasi-experimental methodologies, combining quantitative and qualitative data to understand how the program was implemented, including the challenges and successes at each site, and what immediate program effects were evident (Corter et al., 2007).

**Peel Best Start.**

Following the feasibility testing in the TFD project, the school-as-a-hub model was scaled up in the Region of Peel when the municipal government, in partnership with the district school boards and Peel Best Start (PBS) network, began implementing integrated early childhood services at five English-language and two French-language school sites. The PBS network was established in 2005 following the announcement of Ontario’s Best Start Strategy for providing a comprehensive system of services that supports young children and their families. On November 25, 2004 the government of Ontario introduced its Best Start Plan, a comprehensive early learning and care strategy that requires the province and municipalities to work with parents, service providers, and different ministries to support healthy child development and early learning. The plan puts the central recommendation of the Early Years Study (McCain & Mustard, 1999) into action. A five-year federal funding commitment was announced to expand regulated early learning and child care spaces and subsidies, and to plan for community or neighbourhood hub delivery system to bring together key services for young children and their families (Best Start Expert Panel, 2007). In planning for Best Start, community-based Best Start networks (such as Peel Best Start) were established to plan and implement the Best Start Plan at the local level.
families. In the Region of Peel, Best Start Early Learning Centres, located within neighbourhood schools, were established to offer an integrated system of services that supports families with children from birth through the transition into school. The scope of services covers a broad range, including preschool, kindergarten, child care, public health, and parenting programs (Region of Peel, n.d.a).

As with the TFD project, PBS project included a comprehensive research and evaluation component that tracked the implementation process and measured the impact on staff teams, children and families. The research design employed the same methodological approach and research tools as the TFD project, but also included a control group of five matched, non-integrated school sites as a comparison. From the fall of 2008 to the summer of 2010, two cohorts of children were followed at the Best Start and control group sites (Pelle-tier, 2012a).

*Ontario’s FDELK Model.*

Both the TFD and PBS projects were designed with the explicit aim of influencing practice and policy at multiple levels of government. The cumulative evidence base from these local projects gave politicians a concrete picture that system reform in the form of integrating existing early childhood systems is not only feasible but a good strategy for supporting the healthy development of children, enhancing parent involvement, and the quality of family life (Corter & Pelletier, 2010). Additional studies from other provinces and countries (e.g., Quebec CPEs, US Schools of the 21st Century, and UK Sure Start) also strengthened the evidence base.

Indeed, it is clear that these projects made a significant contribution to Pascal’s (2009) vision for the implementation of full-day learning for 4- and 5-year-olds. As the Spe-
cial Advisor on Early Learning, Pascal outlined a comprehensive plan of action for the implementation of full-day learning within a broader plan for moving Ontario Best Start’s goals for a universal, integrated system to support children from 0 to 12 years and their families. Pascal’s vision included: (1) two-year, FDK program available to all children who turn 4 by December 31 with parents having the options of a half, full, or a fee-based extended-day (school hours + before- and/or after-school hours) of programming; (2) at the request of 15 families or more at a school, fee-based extended-day (before- and/or after-school) programming for 6 to 8-year-olds and after-school programming for 9 to 12-year-olds; and (3) development of Best Start Child and Family Centres, preferably at school sites, to offer range of early learning/care options for children up to age 4, as well as a broad spectrum of parenting and family support programs, including prenatal/postnatal, nutrition, early identification and community referral services.

Based on this blueprint, the Ontario government approved the 5-year, phased-in implementation of FDELK for 4- and 5-year-olds, starting in the fall of 2010. The integrated TFD staffing model is reflected in the delivery of the FDELK program by staff teams comprised of a licensed early childhood educator (ECE) and a kindergarten teacher. ECEs generally have more direct training in child development, but teachers have a stronger foundation in Ministry of Education and school board curriculum assessment and learning expectations. The FDELK staffing model thus combines the skills and expertise of two education professionals and recognizes the important contributions that both educators offer. Also, the play-based curriculum that was delivered by TFD’s integrated staff teams and endorsed by children in their interviews is an important element of the FDELK program. As described in the FDELK draft document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a), the program combines the
provincial kindergarten curriculum and the pedagogical principles supported in the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) framework (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007). The curriculum has been described as child-centered and play-based.

There are, however, other design features of TFD and PBS that have not been adopted in the design and implementation of FDELK. First, in the TFD, service integration included multiple services but in the FDELK program is limited to kindergarten and child care. This may have important implications for outreach and family engagement as some of the success of the TFD in engaging families may have stemmed from the wider menu of services that included family-centered programming that brought parents in direct contact with the child’s school community (Corter & Pelletier, 2010). At the current time, there is ongoing planning to move forward with the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres, which would extend the integrated service platform to include programming for younger children and a more coherent menu of parenting and family support services (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b). Whether the centres will be located at school sites and how well programs will be integrated with the FDELK and other school-based programs remains to be seen. Second, the flexible child care enrolment options offered to TFD families are not available to FDELK families. At some of the TFD sites, parents were able to flexibly enrol in full-time or part-time care as needed on a week to week basis. In contrast, the enrolment options at most extended-day programs remain limited to full-time care and part-time care at select locations. Thus, the child care needs of families with changing work schedules (e.g., on call schedule) or those needing occasional care are likely unmet by the extended-day program. Lastly, program quality was regularly assessed in TFD sites as an important indicator guiding the im-
provement by staff teams and their leaders. In the FDELK program, there is no corresponding measurement of program quality (Corter & Pelletier, 2010).

Nevertheless, Ontario’s FDELK represents a ‘bold public policy initiative’ as described by Pelletier (2013). The FDELK program does not simply double the time that 4- and 5-year-olds spend in school. The service integration design principles of multidisciplinary staff teams and a curriculum grounded firmly in play-based learning principles distinguishes this program from other FDK programs such as those in the US.

Section 2: Theories of Change

In this section of the literature review, I examine the question: How do full-day, integrated early learning programs influence children’s developmental outcomes? This question explores the mechanisms or pathways through which programs produce desired outcomes. In examining this question, I focus on the emerging evidence base of the TFD and PBS studies. Cumulative research findings have highlighted the importance of two broad program pathways: (1) enhancing the quality of children’s early learning environment, and (2) building meaningful relationships with families (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Pelletier, 2012a). There is also some evidence for a third pathway that may facilitate positive outcomes by enhancing the quality of daily life for children, parents, and families (Arimura & Corter, 2010).

I then draw from three additional areas in the literature (i.e., quality of children’s early learning environments, continuity of children’s early learning environments, and parents’ involvement in children’s learning and development) to further build on the evidence base for the TFD and PBS theory of change model.

Finally, to supplement the review of the theory of change literature, I also examine the question: What are the benefits (and challenges) associated with participating in full-day,
integrated early learning programs for educators, children, and parents? The primary literature that I draw from is the existing research on the Ontario FDELK implementation. However, given that this literature is still in its infancy I also draw from the US FDK literature.

**Mechanisms, Pathways, and Theories of Change**

There is now a widespread interest in mechanism-based explanations of social phenomena across the social science disciplines (Astbury & Leeuw, 2010). In the evaluation literature, the term “mechanism” was popularized by Chen in his work on theory-driven evaluation (Chen 1989; 1990; 2005). He has argued that theory-driven evaluation provides a better understanding of the causal mechanisms underlying the relationship between the intervention and its effects. In this literature, an important distinction is made between “implementation theory,” which provides operational details about how the program is carried out, and “program theory,” which deals with the mechanisms that intervene between the delivery of program services and the occurrence of outcomes of interest (Weiss, 1997). There are also important distinctions made between two types of causal mechanisms. Chen (2005) describes mediating causal mechanisms as a component of a program that intervenes in the relationship between the intervention and an outcome. In contrast, moderating causal mechanisms are described as a component of a program that conditions the relationship between the intervention and an outcome; the relationship between the intervention and an outcome is manifested only in the presence of the moderating mechanism. Finally, an important characteristic of mechanisms is that they are usually hidden, and, therefore, not in plain sight of program stakeholders. Moreover, mechanisms are sensitive to variations in context; therefore, they

---

6 Theory-drive evaluation is an approach to evaluation that focuses on the assessment of program theory that outlines how the program causes the intended or observed outcomes. In essence, it evaluates whether the causal assumptions underlying a program are functioning as they had been projected to by stakeholders (Chen, 2005).
should not be seen as universal laws that apply always and everywhere (Pawson & Tilley, 1997).

In human development, mechanisms are often conceptualized as intervening variables within the major ecological systems of individuals, families, schools and communities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). They may also be viewed as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) or developmental priming mechanisms (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). In evaluation research, mechanisms are often called “active” ingredients that give rise to and help maintain program impacts (Reynolds, 1998) or “pathways” through which program effects are achieved (Corter et al., 2012; Pelletier, 2012a). The conceptual frameworks that describe these pathways may be referred to as “theories of change.”

Reynolds (2000; 2004; 2005) argues that knowledge about mechanisms advances child development and policy research three key ways. First, he argues that causal inferences can be strengthened by identifying mechanisms that account for how programs influence outcomes. If the identified mechanisms lead to a coherent explanation of the main-effect relation, causal inference is enhanced. Increased levels of confidence about program effects help to garner support for intervention strategies for continued funding and/or scaling up. Second, understanding the pathways of intervention effects is important for program design and implementation. Empirically supported mediating paths can help establish key principles of effectiveness in the design, modification, and validation of programs. Moreover, to the extent that findings across studies share a common mechanism, program replication and expansion in different contexts would be more successful.

7 In the current study, I use the term pathways to refer to causal program processes rather than the term mechanisms that is used by Reynolds and colleagues.
Despite these arguments, comprehensive models examining the pathways of intervention effects have rarely been tested. First, at a very basic level, program stakeholders rarely make explicit their program theory of how intervention intends to influence participants and contribute to improvements in their lives (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). Reynolds (2004) notes that this lack of focus on program processes is situated within a broader research context where evaluation methodology remains largely focused on main effects and internal validity more than issues concerning moderators and mediators, generalizability and program features associated with success. Second, even when program theory is made explicit, it is costly to collect a rich array of data to account for program processes and long-term outcomes; fruitful investigations of causal mechanisms require an array of variables to account for potential program effects, which can then be linked to outcomes at various stages of development.

**State of the Evidence**

As a whole, in the early childhood literature, causal mechanisms are rarely examined as program stakeholders typically do not make explicit their own program theories and extensive longitudinal data are required to test program theories (Reynolds, 2004). To my knowledge, causal mechanisms have not been tested directly in the FDK given that program theories have not been made explicit though classroom instructional processes have been hinted to be potential mechanisms (Cooper et al., 2010). In the preschool literature, a handful of researchers have examined the long-term effects of three well-known preschool studies: (1) the Perry Preschool study by David Weikart, Lawrence Schweinhart and colleagues; (2) the Abecedarian Project by Frances Campbell and colleagues; and (3) the Chicago Child-Parent Center (CPC) program by Arthur Reynolds and colleagues. Each program provided high-quality educational enrichment to children at risk in group settings characterized by
small class size, a focus on language and cognitive skills, and well-qualified and compensated teachers (Reynolds, Englund, et al., 2010). All three groups of researchers have used Reynolds’ confirmatory program evaluation (CPE) methodology\textsuperscript{8} to investigate his proposed five broad categories of mechanisms (5 Hypothesis Model): (1) cognitive advantage, (2) motivational advantage, (3) social adjustment, (4) family support, and (5) school support (Reynolds, 2000). The first three mechanisms represent direct, child-focused mechanisms whereby desirable outcomes are achieved through improvements in children’s domains of development. The latter two mechanisms acknowledge the two most proximal influences within a child’s ecology: families and schools. Family support factors include improvements in parent-child interactions, parent involvement, and parenting skills; school support factors include continued exposure to high quality learning environments subsequent to the intervention and low school mobility.

A comprehensive review of findings across the three preschool studies can be found in Reynolds, Englund et al. (2010). In summary, the cognitive advantage hypothesis was consistently found to account for the largest share of the impact of preschool participation on a variety of adult outcomes. In the Perry Preschool and Abecedarian Project, the cumulative model that included child behaviour factors (i.e., cognitive advantage, social adjustment, and motivational advantage) accounted for the largest percent of the impact of preschool participation on educational attainment. In contrast, in the Chicago CPC program, the cumulative model that included all five hypotheses accounted for the largest percent of the impact on educational attainment. Additionally, in contrast to the other two programs, the Chicago CPC

\textsuperscript{8} Reynolds developed CPE as a methodology for investigating the causal inference about the relationship between program participation and measured outcomes. He describes it as a theory-driven impact evaluation in which hypotheses about program effects are tested based on the program theory (Reynolds, 1998; 2004; 2005).
program appeared to directly influence family support factors. Together with the cognitive advantage and school support factors, family support factors appeared to initiate the cumulative advantages leading to positive long-term outcomes. In contrast, changes relating to social adjustment and motivational factors emerge as a result of cascading changes within the cognitive, family and school domains. Thus, the cognitive advantage, family support and school support factors may be considered as short-term outcomes that we would expect to see in similar two-generation early interventions and social adjustment and motivational factors may play an important role in the transmission of program effects into adolescence and adulthood.

Although the evidence base generated from the three preschool studies has enhanced our understanding of how causal mechanisms operate to influence key outcomes in adulthood, these studies have not examined the more proximal causal mechanisms that explain how preschool participation leads to enhanced outcomes for children and families in the short-term. Indeed Hayakawa and Reynolds (2014) noted: “Although the five hypothesis model is a useful tool to help organize and understand the direction of various effects impacting educational and social outcomes as it captures processes within a large time period, it lacks the specific identification of microprocesses that occur across development” (p.3003). As such, in the subsequent section, I provide a focused review of an emerging theory of change that articulates how proximal program experiences in school-based, integrated early childhood programs contribute to positive outcomes for children and families.

Theories of Change: Integrated Early Childhood Programs

In contrast to the well-established preschool intervention literature, the evidence base for integrated early childhood programs is just emerging. The majority of research and de-
velopment efforts have focused on monitoring program processes and measuring program
effects without explicit examination of the linkages between the two. In their study of inter-
agency collaborations, Selden et al. (2006) hypothesized that integrating ECEC services may
be related to seven possible changes: (1) diversity of services provided to clients, (2) class-
room quality, (3) children’s school readiness, (4) children’s school readiness via higher class-
room quality, (5) teacher pay, teacher satisfaction with pay, or teacher salaries, (6) teacher
satisfaction with employee benefits, and (7) lower voluntary staff turnover. The first four hy-
potheses relate to program processes that directly involve children’s and parents’ experiences
of participating in integrated ECEC services, whereas the latter three relate more to processes
that directly affect the teaching staff. When these hypotheses were tested using data drawn
from 20 sites that were collaborating across two out of three policy domains (i.e., Head Start,
state preschool programs, and departments of social services), the authors found evidence to
support hypothesis 6 (i.e., teachers were significantly more satisfied with their benefit as the
intensity of collaborative relationship increased), suggesting that working across policy do-
mains does benefit staff through management processes. Additionally, they found that the
intensity of collaborative efforts was associated with greater diversity of services available to
children and their families, as well as with program quality as measured by the Early Child-
hood Environment Ratings Scale-Revised (ECERS-R; Harms et al., 1998). Notably, in their
interviews with teachers, the authors found that collaboration helped to involve teachers in
their larger professional community, allowing them to attend in-service trainings where they
could meet teachers from other programs. Thus, presumably, the impact of collaboration on
aspects of program quality may be a result of teachers’ ability to gain ideas and practices
from their greater involvement in professional development and through their interactions
with other professionals. Finally, the study found evidence for the impact of collaboration on children’s school readiness scores. Not surprisingly, classrooms of higher quality were associated with greater student school readiness. Furthermore, parent perceptions of teacher quality were a significant predictor of children’s school readiness, which further signals the value of including parents’ voices in evaluating program processes and outcomes.

In summary, Selden et al.’s (2006) analysis provides a promising glimpse of how collaborative relationships across traditionally disparate policy domains add value – both for the organisations and for the families they serve. In particular, the relationship between collaboration and program quality, with teachers’ greater involvement in their larger professional community possibly mediating this relation is interesting, and is further explored in the subsequent analysis of TFD and PBS’s theory of change. Moreover, the relationship between collaboration and greater diversity of services has important implications for supporting the multiple needs of families, as well as the needs of parents whose needs may or may not be served by early childhood services that do not operate beyond a single policy area.

**TFD & PBS Theory of Change Framework.**

Early childhood policies and practices over the past several decades have been guided by complementary key theoretical models of human development that have been refined over time. These include the *transactional model* formulated by Sameroff and Chandler (1975) and later adapted by Sameroff and Fiese (2000), the *ecological model* first articulated by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and later adapted by many developmental scholars (e.g., Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), and the *risk and resilience model* developed by Werner and Smith
Garmezy and Rutter (1983), and Rutter (2000). Taken together, these frameworks underscore the extent to which life course outcomes are influenced by a dynamic interplay among the cumulative burden of risk factors and the buffering effects of protective factors that can be identified in multiple social-ecological contexts. These frameworks also emphasize the influence of reciprocal child-adult interactions in the developmental process, thereby underscoring the importance of stable and nurturing relationships, as well as the recognition that young children play an active role in their own development.

The theory of change for integrated early childhood programs borrows heavily from ecological developmental frameworks that emphasize the dynamic interplay of interactions between the child and his/her environments. Unlike targeted preschool interventions that focus on substituting children’s poor home environments, integrated early childhood programs focus on enhancing the quality of children’s environments across multiple contexts, including early learning and care environments. When this is achieved, children experience a continuity of high quality interactions across all key developmental contexts (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Thus, the goal is not to substitute a poor home environment with a high quality preschool environment. Rather the aim is to create a seamless, high quality early learning and care environment by asking program staff to work together, and to build capacity in the home environment by increasing parents’ involvement in their children’s learning and development, enhancing access to multiple services through a single intake process, and by supporting parents’ own needs for health and well-being. As such, integrated early childhood programs op-

9 More recent frameworks such as those proposed by Hertzman (2012), Sameroff (2010), Shonkoff (2010) are integrative in nature, bringing together multiple frameworks into a unified theory of human development. All of these frameworks take account of the dynamic interplay between genetic and environmental factors in explaining development over the lifespan. Collectively, these advances in our conceptualization of human development reflect an emerging science that integrates genetics, epigenetics, neuroscience, and developmental science.
erate under the principle that children thrive when high quality learning environments are available across multiple contexts particularly in the home, early learning, and child care settings.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the theory of change that is emerging from the TFD and PBS research is clearly aligned with the aforementioned goals of integrated early childhood programs. This model views outcomes for children as a function of two process pathways between service integration efforts and improvements in children’s development. The first pathway (i.e., early learning environment hypothesis) represents improvements in program quality through enhanced staff teamwork and continuity across early learning environments. The second pathway (i.e., parent engagement and support hypothesis) represents improvements in parent engagement, support and outreach through enhanced connection to the child’s school community, parent involvement opportunities, and equitable access to services. These improvements are associated with parent outcomes such as parent empowerment and self-efficacy (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Corter et al., 2012; Pelletier, 2012a). There is also some evidence to suggest that the program facilitates enhanced quality of family life by reducing transitions for children, reducing parenting daily hassles, and consolidating the family daily routine (Arimura & Corter, 2010); although this process is included in the second pathway, it may be better represented in a third pathway that captures program processes that influence the practical aspects of daily life for families with young children.
Evidence for Early Learning Environment Hypothesis.

The first pathway (early learning environment hypothesis) suggests that as the quality of children’s early learning environment improves via enhanced teamwork and continuity across early learning and care settings, children experience enhanced developmental outcomes. In the TFD project, pre-post comparisons (i.e., early vs. full implementation) at TFD demonstration sites and comparisons with matched community sites at full implementation using the EDI suggested that the program participation was associated with modest improvements in children’s developmental readiness in the social-emotional domain (Corter et al., 2008). When these summative findings were further examined in the context of other findings in a case study, findings showed that over the course of implementation, program environment quality ratings and children’s EDI scores improved in the relevant areas assessing quality of interaction and social-emotional development. In the PBS study, child outcome data have not yet been analyzed in relation to the quality of children’s early learning environment and intensity of teamwork within the integrated staff teams. However, as with the TFD study, findings from PBS suggest a strong positive correlation between intensity of
teamwork and the quality of the early learning environment (Pelletier, 2012a).

There is also evidence that TFD participation enhances continuity throughout children’s early learning experiences. In both TFD and PBS research, children who participated in full-day, integrated early learning programs reported fewer transitions throughout their day compared to children who participated in traditional HDK programs and non-integrated child care programs. Additionally, children in TFD and PBS settings did not distinguish between their early education and care environments, while children enrolled in traditional HDK programs with child care requirements perceived clear differences with respect to program expectations, staff characteristics, and behavioural codes (Arimura & Corter, 2010; Pelletier, 2012a).

While these studies did not provide clear cause-and-effect conclusions, when taken together, they provide converging evidence to support the early learning environment hypothesis.

**Evidence for Parent Engagement & Support Hypothesis.**

The second pathway (parent engagement and support hypothesis) suggests that program participation influences changes in the family system via improvements in parent involvement, family life, and equitable access to resources that support parents. These changes, in turn, influence child outcomes. Thus, in other words, program effects are mediated by parent-level processes. To date, parent-mediated program effects have not been examined in TFD and PBS. However, the existing evidence suggests that participation in TFD is associated with enhanced parent involvement and self-efficacy (Patel & Corter, 2013), reduced parenting daily hassles and enhanced social support (Arimura & Corter, 2010). Furthermore,
findings suggest that project outreach was successful in bringing underserved groups\textsuperscript{10} into the TFD programs (Patel, 2009). The PBS research has replicated the findings pertaining to reduced parenting daily hassles stemming from daily caregiving and use of early childhood programs (Pelletier, 2012a).

Although the TFD and PBS evidence base pertaining to the second pathway is in its infancy, the idea that children’s outcomes are mediated by parental or family processes is a key premise in early interventions with a two-generation focus. In general, two-generation programs that include explicit focus on parents operate on the premise that helping parents to enhance their parenting capacity or employment prospects and can be an effective way to support children’s early development (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014). While programs have rarely made explicit their theory of change including specific outcome goals for parents, processes through which those outcomes are expected to occur, and program strategies and activities to facilitate these processes, a new wave of two-generation programs has sought to rectify the flaws of earlier efforts.

\textit{Summary.}

The evidence base for theories of change is just beginning to emerge in the early childhood service integration literature. The theory of change framework that is emerging in the TFD and PBS research delineates two major pathways: (1) a child-mediated pathway that emphasizes improvements in the quality of children’s learning environment; and (2) a parent and family-mediated pathway that emphasizes improvements in parents’ involvement in children’s learning, level of parenting daily stress, and availability of social support and re-

\textsuperscript{10} The TFD neighbourhoods were characterized for the most part by lower SES families and high immigration, which are factors often associated with lack of school connection. Findings suggest that outreach efforts connected more of these families with the school community as an active partner in their children’s learning (Patel, 2009; Pelletier & Corter, 2005).
sources. The framework has not been tested in its entirety; there is some correlational evidence linking program participation to relevant outcomes.

**Additional Evidence to Support Pathways 1 & 2**

In order to further build on the evidence base for the TFD and PBS theory of change model, I draw from three additional areas in the literature: (1) quality of children’s early learning environments, (2) continuity of children’s early learning environments, and (3) parents’ involvement in children’s learning.

**Enhancing Quality of Care in ECEC Settings: Links to Child Outcomes.**

In the broader early childhood literature, the established view is that the conditions of care that children experience in ECEC settings contributes to their developmental outcomes (Lamb & Ahnert, 2006; Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000). Indeed, there is a sizeable evidence base to suggest that the quality of children’s early learning environments is a salient aspect of children’s early education and care experience that accounts for a significant proportion of the variation in their development (a detailed review can be found in Phillips and Lowenstein, 2011).11

Overall, the bulk of the evidence in the child care and preschool literature suggests that the quality of children’s early learning experiences matter, but the effects are more modest than those attributable to the family. For example, the prevailing finding from the NICHD

---

11 Studies have shown that the quantity of care also matters particularly with respect to children’s socio-emotional functioning [see Belsky (2001) for a review of the evidence]. However, when studies such as the NICHD’s Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development have examined both quantity and quality of care, indicators of quality of care have been consistently found to be a stronger predictor of children’s developmental outcomes across the early years (NICHD Early Child Care Network, 1998). In the context of the current study, I focus on quality of care as a key condition of care that has an important influence on child outcomes, partly as it is an aspect of care that can be manipulated from a program stakeholder perspective.
Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development (SECCYD)\textsuperscript{12} is that quality of care is consistently, but modestly associated with improved cognitive and language outcomes at 15, 24, 36, and 54 months, even after controlling for multiple child and family characteristics (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2000, 2002b, 2006; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network & Duncan, 2003).\textsuperscript{13} For children from poor quality home environments, high quality ECEC settings can have compensatory effects; generally, stronger associations have been found for language and academic outcomes than for social-emotional outcomes (Burchinal, Kainz, & Cai, 2011; Keys et al., 2011). Furthermore, research examining the dual and cumulative effects of poor home and child care quality has found that: (1) children who experienced poor quality home \textit{and} child care environments (referred to as the “double jeopardy” niche) exhibited the highest levels of mother-reported problem behaviour and lowest levels of prosocial behaviour; and (2) children from lower equality home environments were able to benefit from the compensatory influence of high quality child care (Watamura, Phillips, Morrissey, McCartney, & Bub, 2011). Finally, when multiple indicators of quality are examined simultaneously, the most proximal indicators of quality, that is, children’s daily interactions with their adult caregivers/teachers, appear to be most predictive of children’s developmental outcomes (Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011). This is consistent with theoretically-driven expectations (such as those proposed by the TFD/PBS framework) that the mechanisms through which early education and care programs directly impact children’s learning

\textsuperscript{12} The most extensive data on the relations between care quality and child development come from the NICHD SECCYD. This 10-site longitudinal study, which followed 1,364 children born in 1991 from infancy through elementary school, aimed to examine how variation in non-maternal care and early education are related to children’s development. The study protocol involved data collection via home visits, child care visits, and laboratory assessments. Regular phone interviews were conducted gather information about the arrangements families were relying upon starting at birth (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005).

\textsuperscript{13} It is important to note here that these findings are for all types of non-parental care including home-based care provided by relatives and non-relatives and centre-based care.
and development involve proximal processes, such as the daily interactions that children have with their adult caregivers/teachers. Structural quality\textsuperscript{14} also matters but only goes as far as to promote the conditions in which process quality can flourish (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002a).

**Enhancing Continuity: Integration/Transition Strategies & Children’s Outcomes.**

Building on the quality of care literature, the rationale for fostering continuity in early childhood is based on the premise that: (1) optimal child development unfolds in the context of stable and predictable, high quality learning environments across key settings (i.e., home, school, and community contexts) at any given time or over time; and (2) strategies that enhance continuity by supporting children’s transitions are linked to improvements in children’s developmental outcomes. Indeed, enhancing continuity in children’s early experiences is a core integration principle that is being realized not only in integrated early childhood programs (Corter et al., 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2014; Pelletier & Corter, 2006), but also in transition/readiness initiatives (Ahtola et al., 2011; Kagan & Tarrant, 2010), and in extended early childhood programs (Reynolds, Magnuson, & Ou, 2010).

Continuity can take shape in a variety of different ways, but, generally, it implies that children experience greater consistency in their daily interactions across settings (i.e., horizontal continuity) or across time (i.e., vertical continuity) as a result of strategies that eliminate or ease their transition (Saracho & Spodek, 2003). Strategies that address vertical transitions focus on enhancing continuity as children transition through developmental stages; the transition from preschool to primary school is a key vertical transition that is the focus of

---

\textsuperscript{14} Structural quality refers to structural features of ECEC settings, which may be associated with sensitive and simulating adult-child interactions. The most commonly studied features include: (1) the experience and educational backgrounds of caregivers/teachers, (2) group size, and (3) the ratio of adults to children (Phillips & Lowenstein, 2011).
much transition research and intervention efforts. On the other hand, strategies that address *horizontal transitions* focus on enhancing continuity of children’s experiences across multiple settings, simultaneously, at any given time (Kagan, 1991).

As the ideas about transition and continuity took hold, so did new efforts associated with them. Ranging from simple, one-time activities to more comprehensive, multi-component programs, transition and continuity-inspired efforts have taken on many forms. For example, in comprehensive, school-based integration programs, such as the TFD project, the goal was to reduce or even eliminate some transitions (Arimura et al., 2011). Specifically, *horizontal transitions* were reduced when school, child care and family support professionals partnered to deliver seamless programs, which fostered stability of relationships for children throughout the day. Sharing of space, use of a common pedagogical framework, and governance structures all led to a cohesive learning environment for children across settings. Continuity across the school and home environments was fostered through parent involvement activities, as well as parent education and support services. *Vertical transitions* were minimized when school staff made efforts to reach out to families and prior-to-school services in the community including preschool and child care programs. Onsite family drop-in programs, which brought families with preschool children into the school, fostered relationships and enabled schools to be in a better position to plan for individual children and anticipate supports for families. Other forms of integrated, school-based early childhood programs are also gaining ground abroad, including integrated preschool services with schools in Australia. This type of system reform promotes the vertical alignment of preschool and school-age programs and makes preschool programs universally accessible to all children (Dockett & Perry, 2014).
Other similar efforts, such as those associated with the PK-3 movement in the US (see Reynolds, Magnuson, et al., 2010 for a review), also aim to achieve vertical continuity through the alignment of pedagogical and curriculum approaches across the early childhood period. By definition, PK-3 programs are planned interventions that begin during any year of a child’s life before kindergarten and which continue up to third grade. PK-3 programs are designed to encourage stable and predictable learning environments across the early childhood period, which is increasingly viewed as a sensitive if not critical period in children’s development. PK-3 strategies include: (1) increasing the program length to foster consistency of relationships and greater support for the transition period that; (2) enhancing organizational capacity to offer a coordinated approach to delivering services such as integration of programs within a single site; (3) promoting alignment of instructional practices across programs and services; and (4) encouraging family support services, including parent involvement in children’s education, resource mobilization, and access to health services. Well-known examples of PK-3 programs include the Chicago CPC program and Abecedarian Project, which are also known as model preschool programs that have a strong evidence base for long-term effects.

In the case of the FDELK program, some horizontal transitions may be eliminated altogether as a result of the program’s full-day schedule, and the provisions of a seamless early learning and care program with consistent learning and behavioural expectations that stretch across the whole day builds continuity in children’s social and pedagogical experiences. Moreover, the vertical transition from preschool/child care to school may be eased with the presence of the ECE teachers in the classroom (Pelletier, 2013).
Consistent with the TFD and PBS findings, the accumulated evidence suggests that continuity fostered through integration strategies are linked to higher quality of learning environments for children (Henrich et al., 2006) as was found in the TFD and PBS studies, and greater parent involvement (Desimone et al., 2000; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006; Pianta et al., 2001).

In the case of PK-3 programs, there is evidence to support the added value of school-age programs above and beyond the preschool programs (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; Reynolds, Magnuson et al., 2010). For example, in the Chicago CPC program, children participating in the preschool plus school-age follow-on services were found to have higher academic achievement when compared to children receiving only the preschool or school-age programs (Conrad & Eash, 1982). Extended program participation (i.e., 4 or more years of services) was associated with lower rates of school remedial services and delinquency infractions (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001). At the age 24 follow-up, extended program participation was associated with higher rates of high school completion and full-time employment, and lower rates of receiving 1 year or more Medicaid and violent arrest (Reynolds et al., 2007). Additionally, when Reynolds, Magnuson et al. (2010) explored the prevalence of individual PK-3 practices15 using the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort (ECLS-K; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004) and then examined the association between PK-3 practices and children’s academic success, they found that: (1) by the third grade, children who did not experience the PK-3 practices were further behind their peers on important indicators of school success; and (2) children who experi-

15 PK-3 practices were defined as specific elements or components of extended early childhood programs that are hypothesized to be associated with children’s outcomes. These elements included: (1) preschool, (2) full-day kindergarten, (3) reduced class size, (4) teaching practices, (5) parent involvement activities, and (6) school stability.
enced half of the PK-3 practices performed better than those who experienced none of the practices, but they performed worse than children who experienced all components. Moreover, among the PK-3 practices, attendance of preschool program showed the highest estimated economic returns, which ranged from 4 dollars to 10 dollars per dollar invested.

*Enhancing Parent Involvement: Links to Children’s Outcomes.*

Researchers, practitioners and policy makers have identified parent involvement as a protective factor for young children’s positive development. Indeed, numerous parenting and parent involvement interventions have been designed and implemented to strengthen parent involvement in children’s lives. These programs range from one-generation programs, such as parenting and home visitation programs that view parents as the direct recipients, to two-generation (2G) early childhood programs with early education and strong parent involvement as core components. In the case of 2G early childhood programs, such as TFD and Chicago CPC, parent involvement has been conceptualized to have an added benefit for children’s developmental success above and beyond the direct influence of stable, high quality learning environments for children (Reynolds, 2000; Patel & Corter, 2013). Indeed, as a form of family engagement strategy, parent involvement has been identified as a key element of effective early childhood education programs, as parent involvement has been identified as a key mediator in the influence of program effects on children’s developmental outcomes (Hayakawa & Reynolds, 2014).

Parent involvement is a broad construct consisting of multiple elements. Epstein’s widely cited framework differentiates six types of school-related parent involvement opportunities: (1) involving parents in parenting/family support programs, (2) involving parents in parent-school communication, (3) involving parents at school, (4) involving parents in home-
based learning, (5) involving parents in school decision making, and (6) involving parents in school-community collaborations (e.g., Epstein & Saunders, 2002). More recently, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) proposed a conceptualization that places school-driven forms of parent involvement (termed “parental involvement with schools”) at one end and parent-driven forms of parent involvement (termed “parental engagement with children’s learning”) at the other end of the continuum. Their conceptualization places emphasis on the changing relationships between parents and schools – that is, a move from information giving (on the part of schools) to a sharing of information between parents and schools and a move from the prioritization of the school’s needs and desires to joint decisions between parents and schools.

While research on parent involvement has largely focused on the kinds of involvement parents engage in at home and school, as well as its consequences on children’s development, the field has also expanded to understand the factors that motivate parents to get involved. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) offered a model of parent involvement that focused on understanding why parents become involved in their children’s education and how their involvement influences student outcomes. They proposed that parent involvement is motivated by personal, contextual, and life-context variables. Personal motivators include parents’ role construction for involvement (i.e., parents’ beliefs about what they are supposed to do in their children’s education) and their sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed in school. Contextual motivators include parents’ perception of invitations to get involved from the school in general (i.e., school climate for parents and families), initiations from teachers, and invitations from the child. Their framework has generated more than a decade’s worth of research on various factors that influence parent involvement. This literature gener-
ally supports the predictive influence of parental role construction on parents’ involvement at home and school (see Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005 for a review). Research to date also suggests that parental role construction for involvement is related to other hypothesized motivators of parents’ engagement including, student, teacher, and school invitations, and parental self-efficacy (see Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013 for a review). For example, when Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey (2013) examined the relationship between parents’ perception of school-related contextual motivators of parent involvement and their role construction for involvement, they found that parents’ perceived student invitations, school expectations of involvement, and school climate had the largest effects on parents’ role beliefs. These findings suggest that what actions schools take to encourage parents’ involvement behaviours also help to shape positive parental beliefs about what they are supposed to do to support their child’s academic success.

Based on series of meta-analyses examining the association between parent involvement and children’s academic achievement, the research community has determined that as a general construct, parental involvement is strongly associated with children’s school outcomes. For example, Wilder’s (2014) synthesis of nine meta-analyses revealed that regardless of how parent involvement and academic achievement were defined and measured, it was found to be consistently and positively related to academic achievement. Moreover, the relationship was strongest if parental involvement was defined as parental expectations for academic achievement and weakest if parent involvement was defined as homework assistance. Finally, the relationship between parent involvement and achievement was found to be consistently positive across different grade levels and ethnic groups.
There is also research to suggest that not all types of parent involvement programs are associated with children’s academic outcomes. Jeynes (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of 51 studies examining the relations between various kinds of parent involvement programs and children’s academic achievement of preschool, primary, and secondary school children. Results revealed significant positive relations between parental involvement programs overall and academic achievement, both for younger (i.e., preschool and primary school) and older (i.e., secondary school) children and for four types of parental involvement programs [i.e., programs that emphasized: (1) shared reading, (2) partnership between schools and families, (3) checking homework, and (4) communication between schools and families]. The overall effect size for parent involvement programs was .30 ($p < .01$), whereas effect sizes for specific types of parent involvement programs varied from .28 ($p < .05$) for programs emphasizing communication between the school and family to .51 ($p < .01$) for programs emphasizing shared reading. Notably, programs that emphasized partnerships between the school and family had an effect size of .35 ($p < .05$), which was the second largest effect size found in this study.

Given these findings, comprehensive programs that include both early education and a strong parent involvement component based on a philosophy of mutual partnership and collaboration would also produce robust effect sizes for children’s academic achievement. Indeed findings from the Chicago CPC program support the efficacy of an intensive early education program with mandatory parent involvement component on influencing children’s educational attainment outcomes; program participation was directly linked with increase in parents’ reports of their involvement in preschool and kindergarten, which, in turn, was associated with greater reading achievement and less grade retention through at least eighth grade.
(Miedel & Reynolds, 2000). Overall, parent involvement was found to be an important influence on children’s long-term success along with the intervention’s effects on cognitive ability (Reynolds, Ou, & Topizes, 2004; Reynolds, Temple, & Ou, 2010).

**Summary.**

In conclusion, the existing research on quality of care and continuity of children’s learning environments informs the conditions in which optimal child development unfolds. Together, extended, and comprehensive early childhood programs that promote stable, and predictable learning environments that are of high quality (particularly with respect to the quality of children’s relationships with their caregivers) appear to provide the highest returns of investment. Additionally, the parent involvement literature suggest that as a general construct, parent involvement is consistently and positively related to children’s academic achievement though the relationship tends to be strongest if parental involvement is defined as parental expectations for academic achievement. Across various types of parent involvement programs, those that emphasize family-school partnerships and family literacy activities may produce the strongest benefits for children’s academic development.

**Benefits of Full-Day, Integrated Early Learning Programs**

In examining the program effects of full-day, integrated early learning programs, I provide a review of the Ontario FDELK and the US FDK literature.\(^\text{16}\) I first describe the state of the evidence base in each of these areas, including the analytic focus and methodological strengths and weaknesses, then review program effects on: (1) educators and program quality, (2) children, and (3) parents and families.

---

\(^{16}\) The findings pertaining to the program effects of the TFD and PBS projects are not presented here, as they were reviewed earlier as part of the evidence supporting the theory of change for integrated early childhood programs.
**State of the Evidence.**

Of the two areas of research, the FDK literature is the most prolific and established area of inquiry with decades worth of studies. Most of the FDK studies to date have focused examining the relative effectiveness of FDK versus HDK programs. For example, a sizeable proportion of the evidence pertaining to the advantages of FDK have been generated from the *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K)*\(^{17}\), a study designed to examine the relations among children’s developmental trajectories and their family, preschool, and school experiences (e.g., Cannon, Jacknowitz, & Painter, 2006; DeCicca, 2007; Lee et al., 2006; Votruba-Drzal, Li-Grining, & Maldonado-Carreno, 2008; Walston & West, 2004; Yan & Lin, 2005).

From a methodological standpoint, FDK studies have been generally characterized as using non-randomized assignment with matched comparison groups. Descriptive analyses of group characteristics have generally revealed that children who attend FDK are often statistically different from their HDK counterparts along many socio-economic variables. In particular, studies have found that there was a greater representation of children from lower SES, ethnic minority, and single-parent households in the FDK group than the HDK group (e.g., Cooper et al., 2010; Lee et al., 2006; Walson & West, 2004). Additionally, FDK studies have been criticized as focusing narrowly on academic outcomes without the holistic consideration of other developmental domains and not sufficiently taking into account the quality of the home and non-parental care environments (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008). Perhaps most problematic is the emphasis on the length of the school day as the primary analytic focus without careful conceptual consideration of other program features that may influence program ef-

\(^{17}\) The dataset consisted of a sample of nationally representative children entering kindergarten in the fall of 1998. These children were followed until the spring of the fifth grade (Denton, West, & Reaney, 2001).
ffects. In particular, as an area of inquiry, the FDK literature has failed to critically examine the quality of instructional and teacher-child interactions in FDK classrooms as potential mediators of program effects. Taken together, all of the above issues continue to seriously compromise the causality argument for the effectiveness of FDK (Cooper et al., 2010).

In contrast, the FDELK literature base is still in its infancy. As such, much of this early work has focused on documenting implementation processes to identify effective practices and measuring immediate and short-term program effects on educators, children, and parents. Methodologically, the strength of the FDELK research lies within the mixed-methods design and the inclusion of the voices of key stakeholders (i.e., program staff/leaders, children, and parents/caregivers). On the other hand, given that FDELK studies have not employed an experimental design, causal interpretations could not be made. While the Peel FDELK study employs a quasi-experimental design, using demographic profiles of schools (i.e., level of social risk) to match control sites to FDELK sites, the comparability of families and staff from the two groups is unclear. For instance, the selection of the FDELK sites was based on demographic profile of schools as well as the sites’ ability to provide the full vision of services. Therefore, prior to implementation, most of the FDELK sites already offered a more comprehensive set of services including drop-in parent and child programs. Thus, these schools may have already had a higher capacity (including leadership support) to offer a broad spectrum of services.

**FDELK Findings.**

The evidence pertaining to the benefits of FDELK for educators suggests that despite the challenges of interdisciplinary teamwork, educators benefited professionally from working with their early learning partner and perceived that children and families benefit directly
from having two adults in the classroom work together to deliver the curriculum. For example, both kindergarten and ECE teachers reported that there were advantages of having two adults in the classroom in terms of classroom management. ECEs also reported benefits in terms of enhanced communication with parents and assessment and evaluation. Kindergarten teachers reported additional benefits such as having more ideas to work with and children receiving more individual attention (Vanderlee et al., 2012). Across all three studies, joint planning time and professional development opportunities were seen as the key to building early learning teams (Janmohamed et al., 2014; Pelletier 2012b, 2013; 2014; Vanderlee et al., 2012). In the Peel FDELK study, notable improvements were observed over time in interdisciplinary teamwork, which were accompanied with improvements in classroom quality (Pelletier, 2014). These findings are clearly consistent with the findings from the TFD and PBS studies.

At this time, the evidence regarding the developmental benefits of FDELK for children is mixed depending on: (1) the question being raised; (2) the comparisons being made; (3) and the group of children being examined. In the provincial study that examined data from the Early Development Instrument (EDI; Offord Centre for Child Studies, 2005)\(^{18}\), 2-year FDELK participation was associated with the most reduction of vulnerability compared to 1-year or no FDELK participation; this finding suggests that among those who are devel-

---

\(^{18}\) The EDI is an inventory of school readiness that kindergarten teachers complete for each child in their class generally in the spring term after 6 months or so of experience with the class. It is comprised of more than 100 items categorized into five domains: (1) physical health and well-being, (2) social knowledge and competence, (3) emotional maturity, (4) language and cognitive development, and (5) general knowledge and communication skills. The Ontario Ministry of Education’s commissioned research examined: (1) group differences in EDI scores among three groups of children (i.e., children with 0, 1, & 2 years of FDELK) in year 1 and 2; and (2) the relationship between program dosage (i.e., 2, 1, or 0 years) and reductions in the percentage of children identified as “vulnerable” on the EDI (Janus et al., 2012). Each child was classified as “vulnerable” (scored at or below the 10\(^{th}\) percentile) or “not vulnerable” (scored above the 10\(^{th}\) percentile) on each of the EDI domains: Physical Health and Well-being; Social Competence; Emotional Maturity; Language and Cognitive Development; and Communication Skills and General Knowledge.
opmentally at-risk, larger dose of FDELK reduces the most developmental vulnerability. Al-
so, among children who were not instructed in their primary language, FDELK participation
(2- or 1-year) was associated with lower vulnerability compared to no FDELK participation.
This suggests that among English/French as a Second Language (E/FSL) students, FDELK
participation enhances developmental readiness. However, this study also suggests that for
the larger population of children, FDELK participation is not necessarily associated with en-
hanced developmental outcomes when compared to no FDELK participation (Janus et al.,
2012). The Peel FDELK findings are also mixed. Cohort comparisons of FDELK children
(year 1 vs. year 3) revealed that children who began kindergarten in year 3 scored significant-
ly higher on a number of early academic measures (i.e., phonological awareness, number
knowledge, early writing, and drawing complexity) than children who began in year 1 of im-
plementation (Pelletier, 2014). This suggests that, as the implementation of the FDELK mod-
el improved over time as measured by the Indicators of Change tool, so did child outcomes.
These findings are consistent with TFD findings pertaining to cohort differences in children’s
developmental readiness from early implementation to full implementation (Corter et al.,
2008). Overall, the strongest longitudinal evidence is for vocabulary development: FDELK
children (those who started FDELK in JK and SK) consistently showed an advantage in vo-
cabulary knowledge over their HDK peers until grade 2. However, children who began
FDELK in SK showed advantage over their HDK peers in more academic areas than children
who began FDELK in JK (Pelletier, 2014). There is also some promising evidence regarding
the benefits of the FDELK program on children’s development of self-regulation skills: In
year 3, FDELK children demonstrated significantly greater ability to self-regulate compared
to HDK children. Furthermore, a classroom observation measure that examined children’s
self-regulation opportunities showed that in FDELK classrooms boys and girls were more able to self-regulate during small group and play periods and were less able to self-regulate during whole group and transition periods (Pelletier, 2014; Timmons, Pelletier, & Corter, 2015).

Finally, the evidence pertaining to benefits for parents suggests that many parents experienced positive benefits for themselves and for their child. In the provincial FDELK study, parents of FDELK children at the case study school sites were interviewed about their perceptions of the program. In general, findings suggest that most parents were happy with the FDELK and extended-day options as it provided them with the opportunity to return to school or work while reducing the number of transitions for their child. Parents also reported that their child benefited from the integrated staff team as they received more attention, were happier, and experienced more diverse learning opportunities. While the majority of parents were happy with FDELK, some parents expressed concerns related to: (1) what their children were learning in the play-based program and the implications for grade 1 readiness; (2) lack of children’s supervision during outdoor and lunch time; (3) high enrolments in some classes with 30 children; and (4) the long day for the younger and ELL children. With regard to parent involvement, the findings suggest that parents were taking opportunities to be involved in their child’s learning in the home, at school, and in the classrooms. Barriers to parent involvement included parents’ own negative childhood experiences with schools, work schedule conflicts, and no previous communications or involvement experiences (Vanderlee et al., 2012). In the Peel FDELK study, parents of JK/SK children in FDELK and HDK completed surveys in year 1 and 3 about their children’s developmental readiness and their own well-being. Findings from both years showed that FDELK parents in comparison to HDK parents
rated their children higher on all eight areas of development, with four areas showing significant differences between the groups. Furthermore, findings of the Parenting Daily Hassles survey that measured the frequency and intensity of daily hassles associated with using early childhood programs revealed that FDELK parents reported less frequent and intense daily hassles compared to HDK parents (Pelletier, 2012b; 2014). Finally, in the FDELK Extended-Day Program study, a large percentage of parents who received child care subsidies reported that the combination of FDELK and the extended-day program facilitated their ability to work. These parents also reported reduced family stress as a result of these programs because they did not have to go through the extensive search for child care, nor deal with the hassles of transporting kids to and from school to child care. Overall, parents found their daily life being more predictable and less stressful. In contrast, the findings pertaining to parent involvement were mixed. That is, parents were equally divided as to whether their involvement with their child’s learning increased or decreased as a result of their participation in FDELK. When this issue was explored further in focus groups, some parents who were used to walking their child into the child care room and talking regularly with staff about their child’s day felt that school policy and culture excluded them from being involved in their child’s school life; other parents reported being more involved in classroom activities and the school council. Other reported challenges included: (1) large class sizes and lower adult to child ratios compared to licensed child care classrooms; (2) rushed lunches, lower quality of food and lack of food choices for snacks; and (3) the full-day being too long for younger children (Janmohamed et al., 2014).
**FDK Findings.**

The FDK literature suggests that the longer school day is associated with short-term gains in children’s academic skills, but the evidence pertaining to the benefits of FDK on non-academic outcomes is less clear (see Cooper et al., 2010 for a review). Specifically, when compared to children attending HDK, those attending FDK tend to perform better on tests of reading, math, and science, and have fewer special education placements and grade retention (Cannon et al., 2006; Clark & Kirk, 2000; Cryan, Sheehan, Wiechel, & Brandy-Hedden, 1992; Elicker & Mathur, 1997; Gullo, 2000; Lee et al., 2006). These advantages tend to be small to moderate (Cooper et al., 2010; Hahn, Milstein, Jones, Hunt, and the Community Preventive Services Task Force, 2014). Overall, demographic factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, poverty status, and ELL status appear to partly explain with how much children gain academically from the FDK experience. In particular, children from disadvantaged backgrounds including those from minority and lower SES backgrounds appear benefit slightly less than their non-disadvantaged counterparts (Cannon et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2006; Walston & West, 2004). Moreover, the existing literature suggests that ELL children fare better in FDK than HDK programs, but FDK may not be enough for these children to catch up with their non-ELL peers who also participate in FDK given that ELL children do not gain more literacy knowledge than their non-ELL peers in FDK (Bingham & Hall-Keynon, 2013; Hall-Kenyon, Bingham, & Korth, 2009). Regardless, the majority of studies suggest that the academic gains observed at the end of the kindergarten year for all children fade by the first grade and disappear by the third grade partly because HDK children grow at a steeper rate from kindergarten onwards (Cannon et al., 2006; Cooper et al., 2010; DeCicca, 2007; Votruba-Drzal et al., 2008). Factors associated with economic disadvantage (such as limited
cognitive stimulation in the home environment and enrichment activities in the summer months), as well as lower quality of subsequent schooling experiences appear to partly account for these fade-out effects. A few studies that have examined long-term impacts of FDK have found that for among children from disadvantaged backgrounds, FDK participation was associated with longer-term benefits beyond the third grade.

The research on the benefits of FDK on parents and teachers is much less extensive compared to the research on child outcomes. Generally, both parents and teachers favour FDK over HDK programs, citing advantages for both children and teachers (Elicker & Mathur, 1997). One study found that FDK mothers were more likely to work than FDK mothers, but this finding was confined to the kindergarten year (Cannon et al., 2006). Research on classroom processes generally suggest that FDK classrooms are not necessary different from HDK classrooms with respect to program quality and instructional practices (Hall-Kenyon et al., 2009; Walston & West, 2004). Therefore, extending the time alone is likely not sufficient to guarantee a higher quality of instruction in the classroom. More research is needed to examine these classroom characteristics, as well as other important out-of-school contexts, in order to understand how FDK participation influences observed short-term academic gains in children and why these effects are short-lived.

**Summary.**

Overall, across both areas of research, it is clear that the primary focus is on understanding the impact of programs on children’s academic skills and/or developmental readiness. In contrast, the impact of programs on educators, program quality, and parents is not well understood, particularly in the FDK literature. With respect to child outcomes, the FDK literature suggests that children enrolled in FDK program experience short-term gains in their
academic skills. However, it is unclear whether this is due to the length of the day or changes in teaching and/or classroom processes that is facilitated by the full-day schedule. In contrast, the FDELK literature pertaining to children’s outcomes is mixed; however the findings consistently suggest that educators benefit professionally from working in a multidisciplinary team and parents perceive broad scope of benefits for themselves and their children including enhanced capacity to work, lower family stress, and enhanced child well-being and developmental outcomes. Notably, findings pertaining to parent involvement were mixed. Some parents were able to take advantage of opportunities to be involved in their child’s learning in the home, at school, and in the classrooms, while others experience a decline in their involvement as they transitioned from child care to the FDELK program.

Section 3: Parent Perspectives

In this section, I first introduce the literature on parental cognitions as an area of inquiry focused on examining the content, sources, and consequences of parents’ thoughts and beliefs about child development and parenting. Although this area of inquiry does not overlap with evaluation research in early childhood and contemporary work has narrowly focused on the implications of parents’ cognitions on children’s academic development or maladaptive behaviour, I highlight key findings to show that: (1) parents’ do indeed have cognitions of varying sorts about child development and parenting, which are influenced by their own histories and broader cultural and societal contexts, and (2) it is useful to study parents’ cognitions to understand how they approach parenting tasks and make decisions relating to care and well-being of children. In reviewing this literature, I selectively examine parental attributions and goals or expectations as two types of parental cognitions that are most relevant to the current study.
I then examine how parents’ perspectives are studied in evaluation research in early childhood. I highlight existing studies that have examined parents’ perspectives to understand: (1) parents’ goals and expectations for using early childhood services, (2) the role that early intervention has in shaping parents’ goals and expectations for their children, and (3) how parents make child care decisions.

**Parental Cognitions: Development According to Parents**

**Historical Context.**

Despite parents forming the cornerstone of theories about human development, interest into their own mind and needs remains largely marginalized within the mainstream field of developmental psychology (Athan & Reel, 2015). In his review of Goodnow and Collins’ (1990) seminal book, *Development According to Parents*, Palacios (1992) noted: “…for decades we acted as if people did not have ideas about the development and upbringing of their children, or as if these ideas were not important or could not be studied. For years, we were unaware of the fact that, apart from the developmental psychology of those dedicated to studying development, the other developmental psychology exists – that of those who play the main role in this development, that is to say, parents and children” (p.51). Indeed, throughout much of the twentieth century, developmental scholars have been largely blind to the importance of understanding parents’ subjective beliefs, firstly, as a valid area of study in and of itself, and, secondly, as a core component of human development. Goodnow and Collins (1990) pointed out that this lag of interest in parents’ beliefs was in large part due to the era of behaviourism, which dominated the thinking of developmental psychology until the rise of cognitive psychology in the late twentieth century.
In the late 80s, subjects such as the structure and content of parents’ ideas, their origins and variability, and their relation with parenting behaviour and child outcomes became an interest to developmental psychologists as an extension of cognitive approaches to child development; analyses of children’s development had moved towards arguing that the effects of socialization depended on the child’s interpretations and the child’s capacity to assimilate new information in relation to the old. Goodnow and Collins (1990) also acknowledged that this increased interest in parents’ ideas coincided with shifts towards “everyday” psychology that focused on understanding development within the context of everyday practices and interactions (p.3).

The increased interest in understanding parents’ perspectives during the 80s and 90s stimulated the publication of articles and books on this topic (e.g., Goodnow, 1984, 1988; Goodnow & Collins, 1990; Holden & Edwards, 1989; Miller, 1988; Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992). Much of this early work was pioneered by Jacqueline Goodnow and Irving Sigel and centered on the content, sources and consequences of parents’ beliefs related to childrearing (see Goodnow & Collins, 1990 for a review).

An underlying premise derived from the study of parental cognitions is that parents hold beliefs, including attributions and attitudes, about childhood and childrearing that broadly inform their parenting practices and guide their relationships with children. Moreover, the child’s environment, both interpersonal and physical, is created within the context of the contents of parents’ cognitions. Current models of parenting assert that parents’ cognitions are a source of parental practices that have an ultimate effect on child outcomes (Bornstein & Lansford, 2009).
Within this contemporary study of parental cognitions, Goodnow (2002) pointed out that, “questions about parents’ perceptions of the world outside of the family are becoming more salient as the recognition arises that neighbourhood and community conditions influence children’s development, with parents’ perceptions and coping strategies as one route by which this influence comes about (p.441). Indeed, the goals of the current study are aligned with this new focus that emphasizes the importance of parental cognitions in understanding how families make decisions about accessing childrearing support, and how families reap benefits from these sources of support.

*Conceptualizing Parental Cognitions.*

‘Parental cognitions’ is an umbrella term used to refer to a wide array of cognitions that parents have about child development and parenting. In earlier studies, researchers used the term ‘beliefs’ interchangeably with other social cognitions, such as ideas, attitudes, or attributions (Holden & Buck, 2002). However, more recent efforts have emphasized the importance of considering them as distinct constructs (e.g., Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). These authors offered the following definitions: (1) “Parental beliefs are ideas or knowledge that parents consider to be factual or true”; (2) “Attitudes build on beliefs by adding an evaluative dimension (i.e., a negative or positive valence) to ideas about the target entity or attitude object”; (3) “Perceptions are a type of belief. They are ideas about the attributes, characteristics, and behaviors that an individual develops about a particular person or social group”; (4) “Attributions build on perceptions by assigning or inferring a cause or intention to the observed characteristics or actions of an individual”; and (5) “Parental goals and expectations are the outcomes that parents hope to achieve when they interact with or socialized their child – the behavior or traits that they want their child to develop” (p.4).
Among these types of parental cognitions, parental attributions are most central to the current study: By asking parents to theorize about how FDELK participation has led to benefits and challenges for their family, I asked parents to make causal inferences about the outcomes they have observed in relation to their participation in FDELK. Additionally, parents’ goals and expectations are also relevant to this study as, presumably, the nature of their participation in FDELK and the attributions about the usefulness of the program are influenced by what they hoped to obtain from FDELK. I review these two parental cognitions in greater detail below.

**Accuracy of Parents’ Cognitions about Child Development.**

Researchers who have assessed parents’ beliefs about their children’s abilities have found that parents are reasonably accurate at estimating their children’s general cognitive abilities; when they do err, the dominant error is most cases is overestimation of the child’s ability (Hunt & Paraskevopoulos, 1980; Miller, 1988; Miller, Manhal, & Mee, 1991). Similarly, when researchers at DYG, Inc. (2000) conducted a national survey of parents, elderly adults, and childless adults to assess their knowledge of development of children 0 to 3 years old, findings suggested that adults are generally well informed about many areas of child development. However, there were areas in which there were significant knowledge gaps. Overall, parents of young children who had four-year college degrees knew more about child development than less educated groups, and fathers showed greater knowledge gaps than mothers.

**Parental Attributions.**

Early interest in parental attribution was characterized by the examination of attributions as a stable personality trait. However, when developmentalists came to think of parent-
ing processes as context sensitive, parental attributions were seen as operating on a contingent fashion (Bugental & Happaney, 2002). According to this perspective, parental attributional processes are activated in response to relevant events in the caregiving environment and serve to moderate and/or mediate their reactions to those events. Thus, children’s developmental outcomes are altered by the qualifying or intervening role of parental attributions. In addition, parental attributions came to be understood as shaping and being shaped by their own individual history in a transactional manner (Sameroff, 1975).

In line with the rest of the parental cognition literature, previous studies have also focused on the content, sources, and consequences of parental attributions (Bugental & Happaney, 2002; Miller, 1995). Sources of parental attributions include both proximal experiences with children in a caregiving relationship (Miller, 1995), as well as distal experiences, such as their early history with their own parents or through cultural values about the nature of children and parenting (Chiang, Barrett, & Nunez, 2000). Generally, findings suggest that although parental attributions appear to be updated as a result of later experience, they appear to be strongly influenced by parents’ own early history, both within their own family and within their own culture (Bugental & Happaney, 2002).

The examination of the relations between parental attribution and parenting behaviour or children’s outcomes have primarily focused on understanding the processes of child abuse (Okagaki & Bindham, 2005). In general, studies have found that when parents attribute negative intentions to rather innocent or ambiguous child behaviour, they are more likely to respond with more coercive parenting strategies, and, therefore, are at higher risk of abusing their child (Dadds, Mullins, McAllister, & Atkinson, 2003). More relevant to the current study, several studies have examined parental attributions about the causes of their children’s
school achievement. In line with parent involvement frameworks that highlight the role of parents’ self-efficacy beliefs as predictors of involvement (e.g., Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), studies have shown that when parents attributed achievement to internal and controllable factors within themselves, such as parents’ own effort, they are more likely to have stronger beliefs about the importance of getting involved in children’s learning and schooling, which, in turn, was associated with more frequent, self-reported parent involvement behaviours (Georgiou & Tourva, 2007). In another study, both parents’ and children’s attributions about academic success were associated with children’s achievement outcomes (O’Sullivan & Howe, 1996). Thus, parents’ explanations about the causes of their child’s academic success appear to influence their own behaviour (via their self-efficacy beliefs about involvement) and their children’s attributions about academic success, which, in turn, appears to influence their academic outcomes. However, these associations must be examined in the larger context of parents’ involvement with children’s learning, including the value of education that parental instil in their children through their goals and expectations for the child and through the sacrifices that parents make in order to provide educational opportunities for their children. I provide a more detailed review of the parent involvement literature in section three.

**Parents’ Goals & Expectations.**

In the parental cognition literature, much of the research on parents’ goals and expectations has been framed within the context of broader cultural values (Bornstein & Cote, 2004; Bornstein & Lansford, 2009; Bornstein, Putnick, & Lansford, 2011). As such, many studies have focused on cross-cultural variations in parents’ goals and expectations for their children. To date, studies have shown that differences in parental goals and expectations
arise, in part, because societies have different expectations for the adult members of their communities. For example, many Western societies encourage independence, self-reliance, and individual achievement among their children. In contrast, in many Asian and Latin American cultures, interdependence, cooperation, and collaboration are widely held values. These differences are related with differences in the socialization goals and strategies which parents adopt for their children (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005).

Building on these cross-cultural variations, studies have also examined cultural influences on parents’ goals and expectations for children’s academic outcomes. For example, in a series of multinational studies, Stevenson, Lee and Stigler (1986) found that Chinese and Japanese mothers set higher expectations for their child’s school performance as compared to American mothers. Moreover, these differences in parents’ expectations have been attributed to differences in broader cultural values and beliefs (Tamis-LeMonda, Way, Hughes, Yoshikawa, Kalman, & Niwa, 2008). Similar differences have been found within immigrant families in the US. In a study of Asian American, Latino, and European American families, Asian American parents had higher expectations for their child’s educational attainment as compared to other parents (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998). These findings suggest that parenting cognitions, related to childrearing and socialization, are perhaps resistant to change via acculturation processes. Indeed, some researchers argue that parenting cognitions are adopted from one’s culture of origin and remain largely intact as parents acculturate to the country of destination (Bornstein & Cote, 2004).

In addition to cultural influences, researchers have also focused on variations in parents’ developmental expectations associated with differences in socio-economic status (SES). Early work on this topic showed that parents’ work requirements that varied by SES was re-
lated to differences found in the goals parents had for their children. For instance, parents who worked in more participative environments emphasized the importance of cooperation among family members at home (Crouter, 1984). Other studies have found that higher SES mothers generally give earlier age estimates for children’s attainment of developmental milestones than lower SES mothers (Mansbach & Greenbaum, 1999; Williams, Williams, Lopez, & Tayko, 2000).

Finally, beyond examining variations in parents’ goals and expectations, studies have also focused on its association with parenting behaviours and children’s outcomes (Bornstein & Cheah, 2006; Cheah & Chirkov, 2008; Rowe & Casillas, 2011). In particular, many have argued that parents’ goals for their children are especially important for children’s development in that goals may motivate parents’ actions and guide their interpretation of children’s behaviour (Bornstein & Cheah, 2006; Goodnow, 2006; Super & Harkness, 2002). For example, Rowe and Casillas (2011) examined the relations between parents’ goals for their children and their communication with toddlers. Findings revealed that parents who mentioned long-term educational goals talked more frequently about academic topics with their children, compared to the parents who did not mention educational goals. In another study, researchers focused on periods of developmental transitions, such as the transition to school, as parents may become most aware of their goals, may adopt new goals, and differentiate goals for certain contexts during times of change and upheaval. Specifically, Denmark & Harden (2014) asked low-income, Central American immigrant mothers’ goals for their children’s behaviour at home and at school when children were transitioning to preschool. They found that nearly all mothers emphasized relatedness-oriented goals for their children at home and at school, but emphasized autonomy-oriented goals predominantly for the school context.
Mothers’ goals for the home context predicted teacher reports of children’s social cooperation and approaches to learning in the classroom. While these studies found significant associations between parents’ goals, behaviours and child outcomes, others have failed to find significant correlations (e.g., Cote & Bornstein, 2000). Okagaki & Bingham (2005) pointed out that one reason for not finding strong relations is that parents’ hopes and expectations may not be accompanied by an accurate knowledge of how to make them achievable.

Summary.

In summary, the following conclusions can be drawn from the review of the parental cognition literature. First, one of the core findings from the early studies was that parents do indeed have social cognitions of varying sorts about children and about development (Miller, 1988). The observed variability in parents’ cognitions can partly be accounted for by parents’ cultural background and socio-economic status (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005).

Second, parental cognitions do indeed affect: (1) parenting behaviour, and (2) children’s developmental outcomes (Goodnow, 2002; Sigel & McGillycuddy-De Lisi, 2002; Bugental & Happaney, 2002; Holden & Buck, 2002). Studies have found low to moderate correlations between parents’ beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, attributions and expectations and their parenting behaviour (Okagaki & Bingham, 2005). The association between parents’ cognition and children’s outcomes has been found to be mediated, at times, by children’s own beliefs (Andre, Whigham, Hendrickson, & Chambers, 1999; Jacobs, 1991). In other studies, the relation between parental cognition and children’s outcomes has been found to be mediated by parenting behaviour (Abu-Rabia & Yaari, 2012).

Third, several findings support the accuracy or rather the validity of using of parents’ cognitions to inform theory and practice in early childhood. Analysis of the complexity of
parents’ reasoning about developmental processes has shown that while there is variability in the complexity of parental reasoning, the majority of parents have a good basic understanding of development that would permit them to interpret adequately the child development issues they may face with their own children (Sameroff & Feil, 1985). Moreover, research studies examining the accuracy of parents’ beliefs pertaining to the development of children’s abilities have shown that parents are reasonably accurate at judging their children’s overall intellectual ability (Hunt & Paraskevopoulos, 1980; Miller, 1988; Miller et al., 1991). Together, these findings suggest that not only do parents have various social cognitions about children and their development, which have consequences for how they behave toward their children and for their children’s developmental success, the majority of parents have the capacity to speak meaningfully about the goals that they have for their children and the factors that may contribute to their children’s developmental success.

Fourthly, research on parental attributions has primarily focused on understanding parents’ causal explanations for children’s challenging behaviours. This line of research explores the underlying processes that lead to child maltreatment and abuse. There is a much smaller area of research dedicated to understanding parental attribution about children’s educational success. To date, there is emerging evidence to support within family socialization processes for achievement related attributions, which, in turn, appear to influence achievement outcomes. To my knowledge, no previous studies have attempted to use parents’ causal attributions to build a theoretical understanding of the pathways in which early childhood programs influence children’s development.

Finally, on the topic of parents’ goals and expectations, the existing literature supports the theory that parents’ hopes and dreams for their children motivate their own actions,
which, in turn, influence children’s outcomes. Much of this literature is examined in the context of cultural variations relating to childrearing values and norms, as well as variations relating to SES. While there is some evidence that early childhood programs may influence parents’ optimism for their children’s success, in general, it is not regular practice to incorporate parents’ goals and expectations in the design and implementation of programs.

Parents’ Perspectives in Early Childhood Intervention Research

Although parental cognitions are rarely examined in early childhood intervention research, there are some noteworthy examples that highlight the benefits of inviting parents to share their beliefs and perspectives when designing, implementing and evaluating the success of interventions for young children and their families.

Parents’ Perspectives About Early Childhood Services.

Although there is a strong practical argument to be made for eliciting family input when designing and delivering programs in the first place, the practice of designing programs and services based on hearing from families is not a pervasive part of current practice in early childhood services. In reality, family involvement in early childhood programs is typically limited to participation in governance-related activities. This is problematic given that governance only captures the interest of a small minority of families. Patel, Corter and Pelletier (2008) argued for the need to move beyond governance as a means for seeking family input: “Professionals and organizations need more effective means for knowing ‘where families are coming from’ and must take families’ needs and aims into account in designing and delivering early childhood programs and services” (p. 103).

In the TFD Project, a number of strategies were used to elicit input from families throughout their participation (see Patel et al., 2008 for a full description). First, childhood
professionals conducted goal assessments as families came into contact with early childhood services. Most families reported multiple goals in connecting to TFD services, including goals for themselves as well as for their children. In general, goals for children outweighed the goals parents had for themselves, but findings suggested that they valued the TFD multi-pronged aims of supporting child development and supporting parents, both in their roles as parents and in their needs for child care (Patel et al., 2008). Second, parents were asked to provide feedback on their experiences with the TFD integrated service approach (via surveys and focus groups) for program improvement purposes. Findings suggested that while the majority of families reported feeling ‘very satisfied’ with TFD services, many also felt that they were not part of the planning for programs. This perspective was surprising to the sites, but upon reflecting on this issue, program staff worked to improve family engagement throughout the implementation period. Over time, significantly more families reported feeling that their opinion was valued and that teachers/staff asked their opinion about programs and services. Staff teams at each site also heard the feedback from families and made a variety of adjustments.

Overall, the use of parents’ perspectives in the TFD Project highlights the benefits of eliciting family input for program improvement, family engagement and program accountability purposes. The current study extends this spirit of listening to parents’ perspectives by placing parents at the centre of the theory building process for the FDELK program.

*Early Intervention Programs and Parents’ Goals and Expectations for Their Children.*

Beyond the use of parents’ perspectives to inform program design, implementation and evaluation efforts, altering parental cognitions may itself be a desirable outcome of par-
ticipating in early childhood intervention programs with a focus on parent involvement. That is, if program participation can influence parents to have appropriately higher goals and expectations for their children, this may influence parents’ supportive behaviours toward their children, which, in turn, may enhance children’s school success.

In the early childhood intervention literature, there is some evidence to suggest that program participation may influence parents’ goals and expectations for their children. For example, when Galper, Wigfield, and Seefelt (1997) sampled former Head Start parents and assessed their beliefs about their children’s prospects for the future, they found that despite experiencing the adverse effects of poverty, most parents were quite optimistic about their children’s academic abilities and believed that it was important that children do well in school. Moreover, parents projected a high level of future education and job attainment for their children, although they were less confident that they would have the resources to make this possible. Researchers alluded to the intervening influence of Head Start on parents’ goals and expectations for their children: “these parents’ positive beliefs about their children may be grounded in the Head Start experience which is designed to emphasize success for every child and promote parent involvement in the child’s education (p.904). Additionally, beyond parents’ positive outlook on children’s future prospects, researchers found that parents’ beliefs predicted children’s attitudes toward school and to their performance on mathematics and reading achievement tests. Taken together, these findings suggest that enhancing parents’ beliefs about children may enhance children’s performance, and they underscore the importance of including a parent component in the design of early childhood intervention programs.
Parents’ Child Care Decisions.

In the early childhood literature, parents’ perspectives are also examined in the context of understanding parents’ child care decisions. One of the consistent findings stemming from child care studies is that children are not ‘randomly assigned’ to non-parental care. That is, parents select child care providers deliberately or are limited in their selection based on: (1) parent and child characteristics including family beliefs and cultural values, (2) characteristics of child care services, and (3) the cost and availability of different child care options (see Honig, 2002 for a review).

The choice to use non-parental care is itself an important step in child care decision making. Generally, the primary reason for choosing non-parental care arrangements for a young child is parental work force participation. Parents may also turn to child care to enhance their children’s development (Kim & Fram, 2009). For instance, parents appear to choose Head Start participation, at least in part, because of the learning opportunities their children experience (Brookman & Blanton, 2003).

Once parents decide to access child care services, they must choose from the variety of arrangements available to the family. Cultural factors and parental SES appear to have significant influence on parents’ choice of child care arrangements. For example, research suggests that highly educated parents are more likely than other parents to use centre-based care (Huston et al., 2002). This may stem from cultural norms about socialization, cognitive stimulation, and the importance of preparing young children for success. Parents’ ethnicity also appears to explain child care choices. For example, Hispanic parents tend to prefer relative care or informal care provided by Hispanic caregivers. This is in part because of greater trust in these arrangements to provide warm caregiving, discipline that is consistent with par-
ents’ expectations and practices, and exposure to Spanish language and other cultural practices important within the home environment (Uttal, 1997). Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that parents make different choices based on the child’s age. For infants and toddlers, caregiver warmth is often prioritized, and relative and non-relative home-based care is more common (Ehrle, Adams, & Tout, 2001). For older children, parents are more likely to choose centre-based child care arrangements (Early & Burchinal, 2001).

Although parents generally rate quality related to child care (e.g., curriculum child-staff ratio, facility and equipment, sensitive and responsive caregiving interactions) as being more important than practical factors (e.g., proximity to home, availability, flexible hours of operation, and cost) there is evidence that parents are most influenced by practical factors in the actual decision making (Johansen, Leibowitz, & Waite, 1996). In an attempt to understand parents’ child care choices from a more person-centered and holistic perspective, Kim and Fram (2009) used data from the National Household Education Survey of Early Childhood Program Participants of 2005 ($n = 4570$) to identify profiles of parents based on their scores on seven indicators of child care priority. Specifically, parents of children who were using non-parental care were asked to rate the importance of seven factors: (1) location, (2) cost, (3) reliability, (4) learning activities, (5) child spending time with other kids of same age, (6) times during the day that caregiver is able to provide care, and (7) number of other children in child’s care group. Using latent class and multinomial logistic regression analyses, the authors identified four distinctive classes of parents: (1) Class 1 parents (35%) ranked all seven indicators as very important, (2) Class 2 parents (18%) prioritized practicality factors, (3) Class 3 parents (9%) did not rank any of the indicators as highly important, and (4) Class 4 parents (37%) emphasized learning and quality-focused factors. Not surprisingly,
membership was associated with family characteristics: (1) parents in the ‘everything important’ class (class 1) were the most disadvantaged based on education level, reliance on social assistance, and single-parenthood status; (2) parents in the ‘learning-focused’ class (class 4) had higher income, higher education levels, and greater share of two-income households; (3) parents in the ‘practicality focused’ class (class 2) were more likely to be working mothers, and on average had younger children; and (4) parents in the ‘something else’ class (class 3) were descriptively similar to ‘learning-focused’ parents, except the child was younger on average and household income was slightly lower. Overall, ‘learning-focused’ parents were more likely to choose center-based care whereas practicality-focused parents preferred home-based relative or non-relative care arrangements. Similar findings emerged in a study examining parents’ decision-making priorities for using state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. Grogan (2012) found that among parents from varying SES and ethnic backgrounds, two categories of priorities emerged: (1) characteristics that described program quality, and (2) characteristics associated with practical features of care. Furthermore, parents’ SES, progressive beliefs about childrearing, involvement in children’s learning at home, as well as child characteristics relating to only child status, and children’s early academic skills were found to be uniquely related to parental endorsement of quality and practical consideration.

**Summary.**

In summary, several conclusions can be drawn from this section of the literature review. First, in general, the practice of examining parents’ perspectives to inform program design and delivery and to evaluate program effectiveness is not a pervasive part of practice in the field of early childhood intervention. To date, the extent to which parent perspectives are
examined in relation to early childhood interventions is typically limited to measuring parent satisfaction levels; when there is a parent involvement component, parents may also be asked about changes in their parenting behaviour and their involvement in their children’s learning. Second, despite the lack of focus on parental perspectives in early childhood intervention studies, there are notable examples that showcase the benefits of eliciting input from parents at all stages of their participation. Moreover, there is also some evidence to suggest that enhancing parent’s goals and expectations for their children’s academic success and future work-life prospects may be an important outcome that has implications for children’s own beliefs about their schooling and their academic performance.

**Section 4: Synthesis of Findings and Gaps in the Literature**

Taken together, the literature review highlighted several major gaps in our current understanding and use of parent perspectives in early childhood intervention research and in our understanding of how programs work in early childhood:

1. Our existing understanding of parental cognitions has not been applied in the early childhood intervention literature to inform the design, implementation and evaluation of programs;
2. in general, program stakeholders rarely make their program theory explicit and when a theory of change is developed, parents are rarely consulted;
3. our existing understanding of causal mechanisms underlying the success of early childhood intervention programs is primarily based on a handful of preschool studies that have systematically examined the pathways through which long-term outcomes are achieved via intermediate outcomes; and
although there is promising evidence to support a theory of change for integrated, school-based, early childhood services, the framework has yet to be developed and tested as a whole.

The ability to account for proximal mechanisms that explain immediate or short-term changes in children and families has important implications for the on-going implementation of program and the design of new programs. For instance, the explicit articulation and testing of program theories may reveal that desired outcomes stem from unaccounted program processes or may explain how unintended outcomes arise. Based on these revelations, program stakeholders can make informed changes to the design and implementation of programs. Furthermore, as argued by the proponents of theory-driven evaluation, the identification of causal mechanisms strengthens the causal argument that the observed outcomes can be attributed to the intervention and not to other unaccounted, confounding factors. This has important policy implications regarding the kinds of programs that should be funded to address key priority areas.

Furthermore, the use of parents’ perspectives in building a program theory for FDELK is important for several reasons. There is ample evidence to suggest that parents’ beliefs about children’s education and development are predictive of important child outcomes. Furthermore, research suggests that the majority of parents have a good basic understanding of development that would permit them to interpret adequately the child development issues they may face with their own and parents are reasonably accurate at judging their children’s overall developmental skills. Moreover, there is value in comparing the views of families (who are the direct recipients of services) with those of program staff/administrators and researchers. In the clinical literature that examines therapeutic change, there is substan-
tial evidence to suggest that client’s own theory of change is more predictive of their outcomes than clinician’s theories about therapeutic change for the client (Duncan & Miller, 2000). Therefore, without the inclusion of parents’ perspectives in the development of program theory, we may continue to be ignorant of processes and experiences that are most salient or impactful for families.
Chapter 3: Goals and Scope of the Study

In this chapter I describe the goals of the current study and situate them within the theory of change approach, which originally evolved for evaluating complex community-based initiatives and is now being applied to other types of initiatives. I then present the conceptual framework and the corresponding research questions for the study.

Goals of the Study

The primary goal of the study was to use parents’ perspectives and their program participation experiences to develop a theory of change for how and why FDELK works for families. For the purpose of this study, a theory of change is the story or explanation of how an initiative will achieve its goals (Weiss, 1995). The theory provides clear and testable hypotheses about how change will occur and what it will look like. It describes the types of ‘inputs’ or program resources that facilitate key ‘program processes’ needed to bring about the ‘desired outcomes.’ As a roadmap, a theory of change identifies measurable indicators of success and keeps the process of implementation and evaluation transparent, so everyone knows what is happening and why.

As part of this goal, I was interested in expanding the scope of outcomes associated with the FDELK program. To date, the majority of evaluation research on FDELK and similar initiatives have focused on measuring child academic outcomes and, at times, parenting behaviours (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013). I was curious to see whether parents would report a broader scope of outcomes if they were encouraged to think about the influence of the program on the entire family system: Would parents report outcomes experienced at the child-, parent-, and family-levels? Perhaps, most importantly, I also wanted to explore what broad categories of program processes would emerge if parents
are asked to theorize about how their participation in the program influenced the outcomes that they observed for their family. In order words, what key program experiences would parents associate with the outcomes that they attribute to the FDELK program? Finally, given that previous efforts to develop and test theories of change have rarely involved parents as active participants, this study examined the feasibility and a potential methodology for engaging parents in a theory generation process.

Theory of Change Evaluation Approach

The goals of the current study can be situated within a particular research approach that evolved out of evaluating complex community-based initiatives (CCIs). CCIs are multidimensional with different program strands operating at different ecological levels - from community, to institutional, to personal interactions. In CCIs families are able to access a varied mix of services in order to meet their family’s unique needs (Connell & Kubisch, 1995). Comprehensive early childhood programs such as the TFD project have been referred as CCIs because they offer a menu of services aimed for children, parents, and families (Patel et al., 2008). Although the FDELK model as implemented by the province of Ontario is primarily an early education and care program focused on enhancing the early learning experiences of 4- and 5-year-olds, Pascal’s full vision represented a CCI with multiple strands of services to support the healthy development of young children and their families. The theory of change approach appears to have evolved as a response to the challenge of evaluating CCIs in the evaluation sector, however, the core concepts and methods have been applied in

19 Pascal’s vision also included the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres, preferably at school sites, to offer range of early learning/care options for children up to age 4, as well as a broad spectrum of parenting and family support programs, including prenatal/postnatal, nutrition, early identification and community referral services.
many sectors (e.g., education, health, and international development) to examine change processes at various organizational levels (e.g., programs, organizations, and institutions).

Given the comprehensive scope of programs and varied uptake of services by families, efforts to measure and document CCI effects have been met with significant challenges. Connell and Kibisch (1995) noted:

Up to this point, CCIs have had three general options to follow: (1) retreat to process documentation of the initiatives and greatly reduce expectations about obtaining credible evidence of their impacts, (2) try to “force fit” the initiatives themselves into the procrustean bed of existing and accepted evaluation methods in order to estimate their impacts; and (3) put off evaluating CCIs until the initiatives are more “mature or “ready” to be evaluated using existing strategies (p. 1).

The theory of change approach was proposed as an alternative methodology to researching CCIs that meets both the need to estimate these initiatives’ effects on short- and long-term outcomes and the need to understand how they produce those outcomes. This approach is rooted within the theory-based research tradition that places emphasis on the importance of grounding research efforts in sound theory (Chen, 1990; Weiss, 1995) and has evolved to more general use in education for school improvement purposes (Lewis, 2015). The goals are to make explicit a theory of change that explains how and why an initiative works, measure the intended CCI activities/processes and outcomes, and analyze the alignment of the intended vs. actual findings including their implications for adjusting the initiative’s theory of change and its allocation of resources (Connell & Kibisch, 1995; Connell & Klem, 2000; Blamey & Mackenzie, 2007).

The primary advantage of a theory of change approach to researching CCIs is the fulfillment of both accountability and program improvement needs. That is, initially it assesses whether an initiative is achieving its predetermined goals, thereby meeting program stakeholders’ need for accountability. Subsequently, it examines why and how a program succeeds or does not succeed, assisting program stakeholders in the
task of better understanding and improving their initiative. Ultimately, the construct validity of the initiative (i.e., degree to which the initiative achieves outcomes in a way that is intended) is enhanced by this approach (Chen, 2005).

The theory of change approach to examining the effectiveness of CCIs represents a systematic and cumulative study of the links between processes, outcomes and contexts of the initiative. Given that there has not been any systematic research conducted to develop and test program theories for the FDELK program, the current study focused on the initial stage of this comprehensive approach: surfacing and articulating a theory of change based on parents’ voices. As such, the study is inherently exploratory in nature and does not test the theory. The goal was to capture a variety of perspectives in order to begin developing a comprehensive “inventory” of outcomes and program processes based on parents’ voices. Thus, at this stage of research, the findings were not intended to be representative of the general population of families participating in FDELK.

**Conceptual Framework**

Although the aim of the study was to generate a program theory for FDELK through an inductive process based on parents’ experiences and perspectives, it was useful to have a general conceptual framework in mind to guide the inquiry process. The conceptual framework shown in Figure 2 outlines the scope of the study by identifying the core elements that were investigated. It also illustrates pathways through which FDELK was thought to influence child-, parent-, and family-level outcomes. This model was primarily based on program stakeholder theories and on the research experience of the TFD and Peel Best Start projects (Corter et al., 2012; Pelletier, 2012a). It was also informed by the social science literature, as reviewed in the previous chapter, that examined key dimensions of program experiences for
children (i.e., quality and continuity of children’s early learning experiences) and for parents (i.e., parent involvement).

Figure 2. Conceptual framework for the research inquiry.

The ‘inputs’ outlined in the model include program resources accessed by families, as well as important child, parent and family characteristics, and work/study and community contextual factors that may influence the ways in which families participate in programs and experience program effects. The ‘processes’ represent hypothesized pathways by which integration may influence outcomes. These three broad pathways capture the day-to-day program processes that operate within: (1) children’s early learning environment, (2) parents’ interactions with the FDELK program or the broader school community, and (3) the daily routines of children and parents. Processes that are thought to operate through the first pathway primarily relate to the quality of children’s learning experiences in their early learning environment. The second pathway, relationships, captures the processes that operate through the development of relationships within the FDELK community. In the TFD project, relationship building was a key process in engaging parents to participate in their children’s learning
(Corter et al., 2012). The third pathway, Daily Routines, is thought to operate by enhancing the daily lives of children and parents, including siblings and relatives who do not participate directly in the program. Finally, ‘outcomes’ represent major categories of effects at the level of the child, parent, and family that I expected to capture in parents’ own experiences with the FDELK. Each of the components of the conceptual framework was examined through the data to develop a conceptual understanding of how integration in the form of FDELK influences outcomes as experienced by parents.

**Research Questions**

The goal of this study was to develop a theoretical understanding of how FDELK, an integrated, school-based model of delivering early childhood programs, works for families. To this end, the following research questions were developed to generate a theory of change for FDELK based on parents’ own perspectives:

RQ1: How were families using FDELK and other early childhood programs? *(Inputs)*

RQ2: What benefits and challenges were families experiencing as a result of participating in FDELK? *(Outcomes)*

RQ3: What features or processes associated with FDELK were thought to have influenced the outcomes reported by parents? *(Processes)*

RQ4: How were the contextual variables at the child, parent, and family levels associated with reported program use, processes and outcomes? *(Contextualizing Program Inputs, Processes and Outcomes)*

RQ5: Based on the synthesis of parent perspectives, how was FDELK working for families during year 1 of implementation at the four school sites? *(Linking Inputs/Contexts, Processes, Outcomes to Articulate a Theory of Change Model)*

87
Chapter 4: Method

In this chapter, I elaborate a rationale for using qualitative methodology to build a theory of change for FDELK using parents’ voices. Next, I discuss my philosophical beliefs and relevant interpretative frameworks that guided the research inquiry. Given the inherently interpretive nature of the study, I follow practices recommended by authorities on qualitative research (e.g., Creswell, 2013) by disclosing my personal and professional biases in relation to this study in a subjectivity statement. This statement is intended to convey how my research experience and personal background influenced the design and implementation of the study. Following this, I describe the research design of the study. Finally, I provide a brief review of perspectives on validation in qualitative research and describe validation strategies that I used to demonstrate the ‘credibility’ of the study.

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry was the preferred method of investigation as it allowed for the exploration of parents’ experiences with the FDELK program in a detailed and contextualized manner, without having to assume which variables would be relevant and salient for parents ahead of data collection. This approach also highlights parents’ voices as the basis for constructing a conceptual understanding of how FDELK works in the context of the daily lives of families who participate in this program.

Philosophical Assumptions and Interpretive Frameworks

Creswell (2013) notes, “all researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a study” (p. 20). Indeed, the concept of reflexivity (whereby the researcher is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that she bring to a qualitative research study) is often described to be a key process in qualitative research. Yet,
more importantly, qualitative researchers make their philosophical beliefs known to the reader as they actively shape how research questions are formulated and how information is sought to answer the questions. For instance, analytic decisions, such as what validation strategies to employ, are governed by the researcher’s philosophical beliefs and the corresponding interpretive framework that s/he uses.

In conducting this study, my ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions stemmed from the traditions of social constructivism. In social constructivism, researchers strive to seek understanding of the world through the lived experiences of and interactions with others. Multiple realities are co-constructed between the researcher and the participants. Furthermore, individual values are honoured, and are negotiated among individuals (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). My methodological assumptions are more varied and reflect as well elements of postpositivism, in the use of a conceptual framework to guide the data collection and analysis stages of the inquiry. As a researcher whose earlier experience was primarily with quantitative methods, I wanted to establish some parameters for the inquiry based on previous research. I was also cognizant of the challenges of using a purely inductive method that does not allow the use of previous research to guide the inquiry process. Taken together, perhaps my methodological beliefs are better captured by the traditions of pragmatism, as my methodological choices were not constrained by any one system of philosophy and instead focus on “what works” (Patton, 1990). Therefore, the research design of this study does not fit neatly into a single qualitative approach such as grounded theory (e.g., Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2007), case study (e.g., Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) or phenomenology (e.g., Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). Instead it borrows from the inductive theory generation tradition of grounded theory, while still allow-
ing for the use of previous research knowledge or theory to guide the data collection and analytic processes.

Accordingly, in the current study, I had in-depth conversations with each parent to capture the subjective meanings that parents had attached to their lived experience of participating in the FDELK program. I expected multiple perspectives to emerge from the interviews based on the unique context of each family. Thus, the perspectives reported in the study are inherently subjective in nature and specific to the realities of the participating families. As the researcher, I played an active role in making sense of parents’ subjective experiences. The ways in which I established rapport with parents and interpreted their experiences during the interview by reflecting, paraphrasing and summarizing their narratives directly informed my later interpretation of the textual data during the coding and analytic processes. Moreover, the extensive review of the literature and my involvement in the TFD project influenced my interpretations of parents’ narratives. As such, concern with coding reliability was therefore less relevant. Rather, issues such as the reflexivity of the researcher, methodological coherence (i.e., alignments of one’s epistemological position, identified research questions and the selection of analytic strategies), use of audit trail, and the richness of the descriptions produced were important requirements for demonstrating transparency of the research process and ultimately the trustworthiness of the study (King, 2004).

**Subjectivity Statement**

A subjectivity statement is commonly used by the qualitative researcher to identify how her personal and professional standpoints may affect her work, and to convey this information to the readers for their consideration of the study’s quality or validity (Preissle, 2008). In this section, I describe how my personal background, professional interests, and
previous research experiences led to the conception of the current study and guided the inquiry process.

My longstanding interest in parenting and family processes stems from my childhood experiences growing up in an immigrant household. My parents were born and raised in Japan. After completing his post-secondary education, my father decided to move to Calgary, Alberta to setup his practice as a dental technician; he was attracted to the vast, unspoiled terrain of the Canadian Rockies. My mother worked as a paralegal secretary in an Australian Law Firm in Japan and had an opportunity to complete an internship in Seattle. My parents met through a mutual friend, fell in love and got married a few years later. My parents settled in Victoria, BC, my hometown, to raise a family. In the 80s and 90s Victoria was largely made up of middle class, Caucasian families. It is much more diverse now, with growing representation of visible minority families from Chinese, South Asian, Arabic and other backgrounds. In earlier years, I watched my father work long hours to establish a business while my mother raised three children in an unfamiliar country without her social network of family and friends. As a child, I witnessed firsthand the struggles that newcomer families face when adjusting to a new country, culture, and society. Also, as my own social network grew, I became keenly aware of how my family differed from those of my peers and I began to wonder why.

As the eldest of three children, I was the first to attend school (requiring my parents to navigate and participate in the Canadian school system), to challenge my parents’ rules and expectations during adolescence, and to make decisions about furthering my education at the post-secondary level. I assisted my parents by translating documents to lessen the impact of language barriers and mediated family interactions to reconcile the cultural and genera-
tional gaps that existed between members of my family. In many respects, I was a ‘cultural broker’ and a ‘mediator’ for my family. These experiences challenged me to be open about understanding perspectives that were founded on different contextual and developmental experiences and fostered my ability to attune to the feelings of others. Above all, it gave me an opportunity to contribute to the functioning of my family, which, in turn, fostered a sense of self-efficacy early in my development. So it may not be such a big surprise that I entered the field of psychology as an undergraduate student at the University of Victoria. After completing my undergraduate studies, I worked as a research assistant at the Centre for Community Based Research. There, I immersed myself in the study of community programs that support families.

Taking these experiences with me, I began my graduate studies in School and Clinical Child Psychology at OISE. My interest in families and community programs brought me to work with Dr. Corter who was researching the implementation and impact of the TFD model of integrating kindergarten, child care and family support programs at community school sites. At the time I joined the TFD research team in 2005, they were in the midst of wrapping up Phase 1 of the project (2001-2005). The school-as-hub model had been implemented at five community sites, and research had tracked the implementation and impact of this model at 3 levels of analysis: (1) programs, professionals and policy; (2) children and families; and (3) community impacts and awareness. One of the profound lessons learned from phase 1 of TFD was that as teamwork improved at each of the sites, program quality also improved (Corter et al., 2009). Additionally, positive effects were also observed on parents’ engagement with the child’s school and learning (Patel & Corter, 2013) and on children’s social-emotional development (Corter et al., 2008). In essence, a theory of change was
emerging from these findings, suggesting that service integration fosters professional teamwork leading to higher program quality and increased parent engagement (Pelletier, 2012a). As a student who had a longstanding interest in understanding family processes and examining the impact of community-based initiatives on families, Phase 2 of the TFD project (2006-2008) provided a fascinating context to conduct my MA research study. Given the positive program effects observed for parents, I wanted to further understand the processes by which TFD benefited parents’ daily lives. What features of the TFD model enabled parents to become more engaged with their children’s learning? What immediate benefits did parents encounter as a result of their participation in TFD, which, in turn, led to their enhanced engagement? For my MA thesis, I decided to hone in on the theory that parents’ participation in integrated services enhances their daily lives by: (1) reducing frequently occurring minor parenting hassles associated with having a child enrolled in half-day kindergarten, and (2) expanding parents’ social support network (Arimura, 2008; Arimura & Corter, 2010).

Although the study was based on a small sample, it provided preliminary evidence to support the theory that service integration in the form of a school-as-hub model does make a difference in the daily lives of parents who juggle multiple responsibilities and multiple services. Participation in TFD, with its integration of multiple services, was associated with fewer parenting daily hassles and lower levels of daily parenting stress. In addition, there was evidence to suggest that parents had expanded their social support networks to include members of the school community20. Aside from the research evidence gained from the study, the experience gave me the opportunity to listen to parents’ voices. While data were largely collected using a questionnaire, I met with each parent and facilitated the data collection pro-

20 Some of these findings have been subsequently replicated in a larger ongoing study of FDELK in the Region of Peel (Pelletier, 2013).
cess. After the completion of the study, I yearned to hear more stories from parents and to capture a more complete and intricate picture of how programs like TFD changed their lives. After tinkering with many ideas for a dissertation proposal for my PhD research, I was given yet another valuable research context when FDELK began to roll out in 2010 and I was able to work within the framework of a larger study in the Peel Region near Toronto (Pelletier, 2013).

My experience with the TFD project and my understanding of the scholarly literature on service integration, early childhood programs, and parenting greatly influenced the way I approached the current study at various stages, from conception to design to analysis. Firstly, I wanted to build on my MA study, but, at the same time, did not want to be limited by it. I could have chosen to further investigate parenting daily hassles and continue to develop a measure that I had created for my MA research; however, I chose not to as I was not yet convinced that previous research efforts had done justice to understanding the range of outcomes that parents and families may experience from being a part of an integrated community of early years services. Instead, I chose to explore this further using a qualitative study that would enable me to further build on the theory of change of how integrated services in the form of FDELK benefit parents and families. The overall design of the study was informed by its goals, which were to explore and understand the impact of FDELK on families from the perspective of parents. I also wanted to explore parents’ own theories about how FDELK led to the changes that they observed in themselves and in their children. The design of the parent interview, which was the primary data collection tool, was largely influenced by my research experience with TFD and my knowledge of the literature. The semi-structured interview protocol was specifically designed to capture essential elements (i.e. programs, pro-
esses, and outcomes) of parents’ own narratives that would enable me to construct their theory of change model of FDELK. This program-process-outcome structure was later used to construct the initial template that was used to organize the codes generated from the parent interview transcripts. During the interview process, I was able to use interviewing techniques that I had honed in my clinical training to build rapport and to elicit further elaborations when greater detail or clarity was needed. When interviewing a parent from immigrant backgrounds, I let my own personal background as an individual growing up in an immigrant family guide my reflective responses and formulation of follow-up questions. When interviewing a parent who had undergone extensive developmental assessments for her child, I let my clinical knowledge guide me as well. At the same time, I was mindful that the role that I played in these interactions was that of a researcher and not of a clinician or a representative of the school system. At times, parents inquired about my clinical background and often elicited my opinion about the development of their child. In these moments, I gently redirected these questions and encouraged parents to consult with others who have the knowledge and responsibility to answer such questions. During the transcription and analysis of the interviews, I saw themes in my data that were similar to findings from the TFD project and from the broader literature on full-day kindergarten. I wrote memos to capture these observations. I also saw themes that were unexpected or new. Overall, by engaging in line-by-line coding and allowing the initial template to evolve over the course of analysis, I was able to let the data emerge from the page. I saw that a theory emerged from parents’ narratives – one that I had not fully considered or imagined.
Research Design

Context

The implementation of FDELK in Ontario provided an opportune historical moment and context to understand parents’ perspectives about how service integration influences families with young children. In year 1 of implementation (2010/11), 35,000 four- and five-year olds in 600 schools participated in FDELK, representing approximately 15% of Ontario’s total kindergarten population. In the Peel region, 4,000 4- and 5-year olds attended FDELK across 20 schools in the Peel District School Board and 16 schools in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. These schools were chosen by the school boards in consultation with their municipalities based on several criteria. For year 1 implementation, schools boards were asked to consider the availability of space in schools (i.e., schools not requiring capital funding support), impact on local child care programs, and the needs of the local communities (Region of Peel, n.d.b).

Research and evaluation efforts were already underway in the Peel Region by the time FDELK rolled out in year 1. The current study was embedded within a larger existing study (i.e., Full-Day Early Learning/Kindergarten in Peel: A longitudinal comparison of full-day, half-day, and Best Start sites) conducted by Dr. Janette Pelletier in collaboration with the Regional Municipality of Peel, the Peel District School Board and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. From here on, this larger study is referred to as the Peel study. The Peel study began as a 2-year project (2008-2010) examining the implementation and impact of Peel Best Start. Five school sites were chosen to implement the Peel Best Start model of integrated early childhood services based on demographic profiles of social risk (i.e., schools higher in social risk were selected for inclusion) and availability of the site to
provide space for integrated delivery of kindergarten, childcare and parenting supports. As previously described in the literature review chapter (Chapter 2), the Peel Best Start employed a school-as-hub model of service integration, similar to the TFD model. The study employed a mixed-method, longitudinal, within subjects design (i.e., children were followed over time from JK/SK to SK/Grade 1), as well as a cross-sectional, between-subjects design (i.e., children from Best Start sites were compared to children from half-day kindergarten, control sites). In 2010, when the initial roll out of FDELK took place in Ontario, this study expanded to include seven FDELK school sites (Pelletier, 2012a).

During year 1 of FDELK implementation, the Peel research team collected data from children, parents, staff and kindergarten classrooms from January to May of 2011. Child data were collected through activities and interviews, which examined early literacy and numeracy skills, as well as children’s perception of kindergarten through drawings and finger puppet interviews. Parent data were collected via surveys, which examined parents’ perception of early childhood programs in the community, levels of parenting daily stress, and levels of their child’s school readiness across developmental domains. Staff data were collected through a survey on perceptions about the integrated staff team and benefits of FDELK and focus groups that aimed to measure the degree to which staff teams and the early learning programs were functioning in an integrated manner. Data on classroom environmental quality were collected using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (Pelletier, 2012a). The data collection for the current study occurred largely after data collection was completed at the school sites (i.e., May to July of 2011). I obtained ethical approval from the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office as an amendment to Dr. Pelletier’s larger Peel study.
Sampling and Recruitment

The sample was drawn from a database of FDELK families who had consented to participate in the larger Peel study. This study provided an ideal setting to conduct the current study as approximately 170 FDELK parents were already engaged in research during year 1 of FDELK implementation. My previous research experience with the TFD project taught me that parents are very difficult to recruit for research. This makes perfect sense given their hectic schedules - whatever free time that they can afford is usually dedicated to their family. Therefore, having access to a group of parents who were already committed to a research project provided a valuable access point for recruiting participants for the current study. Additionally, the qualitative data collected for this study complemented the quantitative survey data that were collected from parents to understand their perspectives on early childhood programs, school readiness and daily parenting stressors. By hearing parents’ own stories about how FDELK has affected their lives, I hoped that this study would further uncover important parenting and family level processes that may be operating to produce program effects.

The distribution of parents participating in the Peel study across the four sampled FDELK school sites is shown in Table 1. These parents had completed at least one survey from the parent questionnaire package consisting of: (1) the Full-Day Kindergarten Peel Parent Survey, (2) the Early Childhood-Parenting Daily Hassles questionnaire, and (3) the Parent’s Rating of Children’s Readiness form (Pelletier, 2012a). Of the seven participating FDELK school sites, four school sites were sampled for the current study as it was not feasi-

Given the limited sampling of FDELK families who were using the extended-day program, I also sampled two families who were using the onsite, integrated child care service at Best Start school sites. By supplementing the FDELK sample with two Best Start families, I hoped to capture parents’ perspectives regarding the importance of integrated before and after-school care options for families.
ble to sample all seven school sites due to time and resource constraints. The strategy applied for selecting school sites was primarily based on the timing of the data collection that was underway for the larger Peel study. That is, in consultation with the research team, it was agreed upon that I would approach a school once child data had been collected at the site so that school staff and families would feel less overwhelmed by research activities taking place at the school.

Once the school was identified as a data collection site, administrative consent was first sought from the school principal. I was initially introduced as a student researcher in an email from the project manager of the Peel study. I later met each principal in person to describe the purpose and nature of the study. Once administrative consent was obtained, a database of potential participants was created for the school site.

Given that the goal was to explore parents’ experiences of participating in the FDELK program, the primary eligibility criterion was that the participant was taking part in the larger Peel study as parent of a FDELK child. Moreover, the availability of current contact information and demographic information (i.e., parent employment status, parent education level, marital status, and family composition) was a logistical requirement for recruitment purposes. Beyond these basic eligibility requirements, efforts were made to ensure that the sample was comprised of parents with varying personal, family and work characteristics, as the goal of this study was to gather in-depth, contextualized data from parents from a variety of life contexts. In other words, given that it was not possible because of time constraints to recruit and interview all eligible families, I prioritized my recruitment efforts based on the goal of sampling parents with varying backgrounds.

The number of eligible, recruited, and interviewed parents is also shown in Table 1.
The number of parents recruited includes parents for whom I left voice messages regarding the research opportunity and was unable to subsequently speak with over the phone. When I was able to reach the parent over the phone, the majority of them agreed to participate; only two parents declined. There was no pattern that differentiated participants from non-participants based on the examination of personal, family, and work characteristics.

Table 1

*Number of Eligible, Recruited and Interviewed Parents Across Sampled FDELK School Sites*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Site</th>
<th>No. Peel Study Participants</th>
<th>No. Eligible</th>
<th>No. Recruited</th>
<th>No. Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site A</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site B</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site C</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site D</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The name of school sites are anonymised for confidentiality purposes.

**School Sites**

The schools sampled for the current study were located in the Peel Region, which is a regional municipality in Southern Ontario, Canada. The Peel Region is part of the Greater Toronto Region and the school neighbourhoods were mainly suburban with some higher density areas with high rise apartments. The region consists of three municipalities (i.e., Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga) and four school boards representing English and French languages, as well as public and Catholic schools. For the Peel study, seven English language FDELK school sites were chosen from the Peel District School Board (PDSB) and Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB) (Pelletier, 2012a). Of the seven FDELK sites, two public schools in Mississauga and two Catholic schools in Brampton were sampled for the current study. School sites are not named throughout this manuscript for ethical considerations and are instead referred to as school sites A to D, which were named in no
particular order.

Although it was not the intent of this study to carry out detailed case study comparisons of the school sites, a brief description is provided here to highlight some characteristics and features that were common across sites, as well as those unique to each school site.

Firstly, the Indicators of Change ratings collected in May to June of 2011 are useful to report here, as they captured the degree to which integrated early learning services were working together towards the end of year 1 of FDELK implementation when parents were interviewed for the current study. The Indicators of Change tool was first developed by Jane Bertrand and the TFD team (Bertrand & Toronto First Duty Team, 2005) as a measure to monitor progress of integration at the demonstration sites. Since then, it has been adapted and used to examine the progress of integration at FDELK sites in the Peel study (Pelletier & Bertrand, 2015; Pelletier, Brent, & Anderson, 2014). The adapted version (see Appendix A) measured progress across three key dimensions: (1) Early Learning Environments, (2) Early Learning Team, and (3) Parent Participation (Corter et al., 2012). The individual indicators within the three dimensions measured progress across the FDELK and extended-day programs. The indicator ratings suggested that the four sites generally reported fairly high levels of integration even in the first year of implementation. Relatively speaking, ratings were higher for the dimension of Early Learning Environment; with the exception of one school site, ratings generally fell within the coordination to integration range along the continuum. In contrast, ratings were relatively lower for the dimension of Parent Participation; ratings fell within the communication to collaboration range (Pelletier, 2012b).

An important feature of FDELK, the extended-day program, was not yet operational at three of the four school sites. Given that childcare options and other early year program-
ming varied across the school sites, I now describe them in greater detail below.

**School Site A.**

Located in the city of Brampton, this school offered an on-site, extended-day program operated by one of the largest not-for-profit organizations in Canada\(^2\). The extended-day program offered care for kindergarten and school-age children Monday to Friday from 7:30 AM to 6:00 PM during the school year only. However, the program was not yet licensed during year 1 of FDELK implementation. Therefore, families could not apply for a childcare subsidy for this program. Enrolment was low for kindergarten children during its first year of operation at this school site.

**School Site B.**

Located in the city of Brampton, this school was situated near a community centre and a public library. At the school, an on-site, licensed childcare program, operated by a not-for-profit organization, provided before- and after-school care for school age children only. The extended-day program for kindergarten children was not yet operational at this school site due to low enrolment. Several licensed daycare centers were situated off-site within walking distance from the school. The Ontario Early Years Centre for this community was located approximately 20 minutes by car from the school.

**School Site C.**

Located in the city of Mississauga, this school was situated in close proximity to the Ontario Early Years centre, community centre, and a public library. At the school, an on-site,

---

\(^2\) Although school boards were initially tasked to take on the responsibility and delivery of onsite before- and after-school care at school sites in the form of extended-day programs, a legislative amendment enabled school boards with the option of contracting with community providers to deliver the extended-day program. Thus, the implementation of extended-day programs varied considerably across the province, with some schools taking on the responsibility delivering the extended-day programs, and many others contracting out this service to community daycare providers (Janmohamed et al., 2014).
licensed childcare program, operated by a not-for-profit organization, provided before- and after-school care for school age children only. Similar to school site B, the extended-day program for kindergarten children for this site was not yet operational at this school site due to low enrolment.

**School Site D.**

Located in the city of Mississauga, this school has a rich history of service integration in the early years. As a school site that already offered an early years hub, it was chosen as a Peel Best Start site in 2008, and later in 2010, it was selected as a FDELK site. At the on-site hub, the Child and Family Early Learning Centre worked together with the Ontario Early Years Program to provide programming and resources for families of children birth to 4 years. The on-site licensed childcare program, operated by a not-for-profit organization, offered before- and after-school care for school-aged children. Due to low enrolment, no formal before- and after-school care for FDELK children (i.e., extended-day program) was available for the 2010/11 school year. However, informal arrangements were made for some children by enrolling them in the school-age program.

**Participants**

A total of 24 families from four FDELK school sites participated in the current study. Table 2 contains the demographic information pertaining to participants’ personal, family and work characteristics. The majority of the parent interviews were conducted with one par-

---

23 The Peel District School Board encourages parents or caregivers with young children to visit schools and participate in free activities through its Child and Family Learning Centres and its Parenting and Family Literacy Centres. The programs available through these centres are designed so children and their caregivers can learn together. The Ontario Early Years Program is a province-wide initiative that supports parents or caregivers and young children from birth to 6 years of age. At school site D, programs were offered by the Child and Family Early Learning Centre in collaboration with the Ontario Early Years Program. These programs included early learning and literacy programs for parents and children, programs to help parents and caregivers in all aspects of early child development, programs on pregnancy and parenting, and links to other early years programs in the community.
ent (i.e., 19 out of 24 interviews); however, three interviews were conducted with both the mother and father and one interview was conducted with the mother and the maternal grandmother. While efforts were made to recruit more fathers, more mothers than fathers were available and willing to participate in the study. The majority of the participants were married and had completed a college degree. The participants’ language status and country of birth were reflective of the ethnic and cultural diversity that exists among the immigrant family population in the Peel region. Fourteen parents were born outside of Canada; these parents came from Asia, Africa, Europe, South America and the Caribbean. Eleven parents were English Language Learners.

With respect to family characteristics, 17 participants reported being part of a nuclear family household (i.e., couple with child/ren). Six parents reported being part of an extended family household and one parent reported being the head of a single parent household. Many families reported having multiple children in their household; only two households reported having a single child. The reported characteristics of the kindergarten child suggested a fairly even sampling of male and female children, first-born and later born children, and children enrolled in JK and SK. Two households reportedly had two children in FDELK, which allowed them to speak about their relatively recent experience of having the older child enrolled in half-day kindergarten (JK) during the previous year and both children enrolled in full-day kindergarten (JK & SK) during the current year.

Parents reported a variety of work and/or schooling characteristics. For the three families where both the mother and father participated in the interview, the mother’s status is reported when status varied across the two individuals. Twelve participants reported working full-time and four participants reported working part-time outside of the home. Four parents
reported being stay-at-home parents. Four parents reported taking part in some form of schooling; three of these parents reported that they are foreign-trained medical doctors who are in the process of completing licensing requirements. The location of work was variable as well; while seven parents reported working within their local community, seven parents reported working well outside of their community requiring a lengthy daily commute (i.e., most commonly in downtown Toronto) and four parents reported working in a nearby community. Scheduling flexibility was reported as ‘limited flexibility’ or ‘some flexibility by the majority of parents. Limited flexibility meant that parents worked the same schedule on a daily basis without the option of making adjustments. Some flexibility meant that parents had some leeway to adjust their schedule according to personal or family needs. Very flexible meant that parents were able to create their schedule and take time off for family reasons. One parent who reported having a ‘Very Flexible’ schedule worked for a relative; the other parent worked shifts and was able to choose the frequency and timing of the shifts.

Table 2

Participant, Family and Work Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>All Schools (n = 24)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Participant(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother only</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father only</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother &amp; Father</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother &amp; Grandparent</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced/Separated</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Status*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English As First Language (EL1)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner (ELL)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Birth*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>(10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>(14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caribbean &amp; South America</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristic</td>
<td>All Schools (n = 24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Graduate/Professional Degree</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Undergraduate Degree</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed Community/Technical College</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed High School or Less</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Composition</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple with child/ren</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single parent (mother head)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of children in household</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender of KG child/ren</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male &amp; Male (multiple children in KG)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Birth order of KG child/ren</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-born</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Later-born</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KG Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JK</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JK &amp; SK (multiple children in KG)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Work/Schooling Characteristics**

| Parent Employment/Schooling Status**    |        |
| Working Full-Time                       | 12     |
| Working Part-Time                       | 4      |
| Stay-at-Home                            | 4      |
| Studying Full-Time                      | 2      |
| Studying and Working Part- or Full-Time | 2      |

| Location of Work**                      |        |
| Within Community                        | 7      |
| Within Nearby Community                 | 4      |
| Outside of Community                    | 7      |
| Not Applicable                          | 6      |

| Scheduling Flexibility**                |        |
| Limited Flexibility                     | 9      |
| Some Flexibility                        | 7      |
| Very Flexible                           | 2      |
| Not Applicable                          | 6      |

*Note: When reporting parent’s language status and country of birth, numbers represent the status for both mother and father when more than one parent participated in the interview as each parent’s status did not differ within the household. **When reporting parent’s education and employment/school characteristics, the mother’s status is reported when more than one parent participated in the interview as status varied within the household.*
Data Collection

Data Sources.

The primary data sources for this study were the parent interviews, which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Supplemental data sources were researcher-generated notes that were written on the parent interview protocol and forms (see Appendix B) during the interview process and memos written throughout the data collection and analysis stages of the study (e.g., during and following the interview and during transcription or review of the transcript). Contextual data sources included information obtained from school websites about school-based programs and services, school-level data collected as part of the Peel study, relevant research papers on the Peel Study and Ontario FDELK study, and materials disseminated on the Ontario Ministry of Education FDELK website. These documents and materials were not analyzed or used to generate data, but rather provided background information on research findings, which are later examined in the discussion chapter.

Parent Interviews.

Parent interviews were conducted face-to-face toward the end of the 2010/11 school year and into the summer months when families had participated in FDELK for at least 8 months of the school year. I conducted each parent interview at a location that was most convenient for the parent. The majority of parents elected to complete the interview in their home or at the child’s school. At the start, the purpose of the interview was reviewed and parents were asked if they had any questions or concerns about the nature of the interview or the implications of their participation in the study. They were reminded that they could refuse to answer any question or terminate their participation at any point in the interview. Written consent was obtained from each parent to participate in the interview (see Appendix C) in
addition to the written consent obtained as part of the larger Peel study. Verbal consent was sought to audio record the interview for the purpose of transcribing for later analysis. The majority of parents consented to this request; when consent was declined, typically due to the parent’s perceived lack of comfort with the English language, detailed notes were written on the protocol. This occurred for three interviews. As a small token of appreciation, a donation of $10.00 was made on behalf of each parent to the child’s classroom library.

A semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B) was designed to gather information on the core components (i.e., inputs, processes, and outcomes) that were necessary to develop the theory of change model for FDELK. The interview protocol contained four sections: (1) Section A: Background, (2) Section B: Use of Early Childhood Programs, (3) Section C: Availability of Social Support, and (4) Section D: Other Contextual Factors.

In Section A, parents were asked questions about their background (e.g., child and parent characteristics, family composition, work status and schedule, and home language) to confirm their demographic information collected from the parent survey in the Peel study.

In Section B, parents were asked to generate a list of early childhood programs that they were currently using and had used in the past. Parents were encouraged to generate a list of all programs in which they had participated, regardless of whether it was used for the kindergarten child. While not every program on the list was further discussed in detail, having this comprehensive information provided an historical context for the types of programming that were accessed for the entire family. Once the list was generated, open ended questions were used to gather further information about parents’ perspective on programs that were being used by the kindergarten child or parents at the time. When time allowed, past programs, especially child care programs, were discussed in addition to current programs. Specifically,
parents were asked: (1) how the program was used, (2) what benefits and challenges they had observed since participating in the program, and (3) how specific aspects of the program or salient aspects of parents’ experience of the program had led to identified benefits and challenges. While many parents were able to candidly articulate benefits and challenges associated with the program, some struggled to articulate how these outcomes stemmed from their participation in the program. For example, during the first several interviews, it was noted that parents seemed to benefit from articulating information related to outcomes prior to talking about process oriented experiences. Therefore, for the remaining interviews, parents were encouraged to first talk about outcomes and then discuss how the program contributed to the identified outcomes.

In Section C, parents were asked questions pertaining to their social support network (e.g., whom they rely on for parenting related support? What type of support do they access? What salient characteristics are associated with individuals in their network?).

Finally, in Section D, parents were asked questions about potential stresses in their lives that may influence their parenting experiences: (1) concerns about child’s health or development, (2) parents’ own health concerns, and (3) major life events. This information helped to create a contextualized narrative of family’s daily life.

Although all components of the interview were completed with each parent, the specific sequence of the questions varied across interviews and the provision of specific follow-up probes were dependent on the need to clarify or elicit further details from parents. Parents were encouraged to use their own words to describe their experiences. Interview techniques such as paraphrasing and summarizing were used to enhance the accuracy of my interpretations of parents’ narratives in the moment. I recall that parents were not hesitant to correct
me and, in fact, seemed to appreciate that I checked-in with them periodically to ensure that I was hearing their stories as accurately as possible. In addition, specific examples were often elicited from parents when general or vague statements were provided. This served to bring the story to life in many cases.

The parent interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Interviews with both the mother and father as participants tended to last longer. During the interview, I wrote notes on the interview protocol and on the forms that were created to facilitate note taking. Following each interview, detailed memos were written to capture my general observations and impressions of the interview. Notes and memos were more detailed when the parent declined to be audio recorded. As expected, the notes and memos captured the essence of the interview but failed to capture the rich, detailed narrative. The audio-recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim by me or by a research assistant.

**Data Analysis**

The goal of this study was to use parents’ voices to generate a theory of change for Ontario’s FDELK program. To this end, qualitative textual data from parent interviews were explored for emerging themes, coded according to the generated themes, and thematically organized and analyzed according to the general structure of the conceptual framework (i.e., inputs, processes, and outcomes). To guide this analytic process, *template analysis* (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; King, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994) was chosen as the approach for thematically organizing and analyzing textual data.

**Template Analysis.**

Template analysis is a form of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which has
been applied in a broad range of research areas in the social sciences (see Brooks & King, 2014 or Brooks, McCluskey, Turley & King, 2015 for case studies of research projects that used template analysis). It is not well known to qualitative psychologists, as it has been primarily used in organizational and management research, as well as in other disciplines. As an approach, template analysis has been championed by Nigel King and colleagues at the University of Huddersfield in the UK (Waring & Wainwright, 2008).

There are several features that distinguish template analysis from other forms of qualitative analysis. First, central to template analysis is the development of a coding template, which summarizes themes identified by the researcher as important in a data set, and organizes them in a hierarchical manner. The template can be constructed a priori, based on prior research and/or theoretical perspectives or created on preliminary scanning of the text. A common intermediate approach is when some initial codes are developed a priori and then later refined and modified as the researcher reads, re-reads and interprets the text an inductive process. As an organizing strategy, the template is typically organized in a way which represents the relationships between themes, as defined by the researcher, most commonly involving a hierarchical structure with groups of similar codes clustered together to produce more general high-order codes (King, 2012).

Second, template analysis has been described as highly flexible approach given that it is not inextricably bound to any one epistemological or methodological position. For instance, template analysis can be used in research taking a ‘realist’ position, which is concerned with discovering the underlying causes of human action and particular human phenomena; researchers taking this position would likely be concerned with researcher objectivity and coding reliability. In contrast, it can also be used in research taking a social construc-
tivist position, which assumes that there are multiple interpretations to be made of any phenomenon, and that these depend upon the position of the researcher and the specific social context of the research. Researchers taking this position would likely be more focused on researcher reflexivity, acknowledgement of multiple potential perspectives and concerned with the generation of rich description.

Taken together, template analysis is characterized as a flexible, user-friendly approach that incorporates both theory-driven deductive and data-driven inductive coding processes. As such, template analysis differs from other qualitative approaches such as grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) that require researchers to be committed to a specific methodology and its philosophical assumptions and focus solely on inductive methods to generate knowledge.

Template analysis was particularly useful for the current study as it permitted the development of a template based on existing research knowledge and theoretical considerations (as represented in the conceptual framework) to organize the generated themes. As shown in Appendix D, the initial template contained a priori themes that were meant to capture the core components needed to develop a theory of change framework (i.e., inputs, processes, and outcomes). The three broad process themes specified in the initial template (i.e., children’s early learning experiences, parents’ relationship building experiences, and children and parents’ daily life experiences) were selected based on an extensive review of the literature. By having an explicit organizing framework in mind, it was then feasible to focus on coding only relevant aspects of the text. At the same time, the data-driven inducting coding process allowed for the discovery of unanticipated insights, which was crucial given the ex-
Data Analysis Procedures.

Figure 3 illustrates the overall data analysis process for the study. Data analysis was conducted in the following major steps: (1) organizing and preparing data for analysis, (2) preliminary reading of all transcripts, (3) developing a coding template, (4) coding segmented text simultaneously as input, process and outcome themes in NVivo to capture causal attributions, (5) revising template, (6) analysis of input, outcome, and process themes, (7) analysis of linkages between input, process and outcome themes, (8) articulating theory, and (9) relating generated theory to literature. Each of these steps is further elaborated below.

In step 1, audio-recorded parent interviews were transcribed, and other raw data including interview protocols and memos were organized into case files. Handwritten notes were keyboarded and demographic information for each case was entered into NVivo.

In step 2, all parent interview transcripts were read to obtain a general sense of the data. During this process, obvious typos were corrected, and when there was a question of the accuracy of the transcription, audio files were reviewed. Headings were added to the transcript to segment the text according to the major components of the interview to make the coding process easier in step 4. Additionally, half of the transcripts were read for the purpose of generating a coding template. Relevant texts were highlighted and the accompanying codes were noted in the margin of the word document.
Figure 3. Overview of the data analysis process.

In step 3, a coding template was generated to inform the organization of the codes that were subsequently identified from a thorough review of each transcript. As a starting point, the conceptual framework was used to create a skeletal coding template in NVivo consisting of three major nodes (i.e., inputs, processes, and outcomes). Sub-nodes were created to further organize codes under each major node. For example, under the outcome node, two sub-nodes (i.e., benefits and challenges) were created. Using the initial codes generated in step 2, additional codes were added to the template. The initial template, as well as subsequent versions of the template (midway and final), appear in Appendix D.
In step 4, textual data from the parent interviews were coded for input, process, and outcome themes in NVivo. ‘Input’ themes included codes that captured program type (e.g., FDELK, off-site centre-based child care, and recreation), salient FDELK features, and contextual factors (e.g., family, work or study, and social support network). Process themes included any aspect of children’s or parents’ program experiences that parents reported as having contributed to identified outcomes. As informed by previous research on program stakeholder theories and local service integration initiatives, I expected parents’ reported program processes to fall into one of three broad categories of processes: (1) children’s early learning experiences, (2) parents’ relationship building experiences, and (3) children and parents’ daily life experiences. Finally, outcome themes captured parents’ reported benefits and challenges of participating in a program. I organized the benefits and challenges at three levels: (1) child-level, (2) parent-level, and family-level. Although the main goal was to capture the inputs, processes and outcomes associated with the FDELK program, I also coded text that pertained to other programs if the parent had described them.

Given that the goal was to not simply code the input, process, outcome themes in isolation, but rather to capture parents’ causal attributions (i.e., how parents linked aspects of the FDELK program to their program experiences and identified outcomes), I needed to code the association between the three types of themes. I achieved this by simultaneously coding segmented text as an input, process, and outcome theme to capture parents’ causal attributions (i.e., input > process > outcome). This allowed me to later examine the pattern in which these themes co-occurred in the textual data. Here are two hypothetical examples to illustrate this coding strategy and the accompanying decision making process:
Example 1

Mother: My son’s vocabulary has grown so much over the course of the year! I really think he has improved so much because of the full day that he spends at school. It’s nice to be in a full-day program. Compared to the half-day schedule, he has so much more opportunity to practice talking to his classmates and listening to other kids and teachers talking.

Example 2

Mother: I feel so much better about going to work now that I know that my daughter loves being at school. I know she is safe there. I was really unsure about how she was doing at some of the home-care places that I used to leave her...they were the only flexible options that we had at the time.

Interviewer: So what I am hearing is that you feel better about leaving your daughter and feel more supported in your work role? The FDELK program helps you as a working parent? Is that right?

Mother: Yes, absolutely!

Interviewer: So what exactly about the FDELK program supports you as a working parent and helps you feel better emotionally as a parent?

Mother: Well, the full-day schedule means that I don’t have to rely on child care as much, less hours needed for child care. And as I said before, I know she is well looked after there. So that makes me feel better emotionally.

In example 1, the coding decisions are fairly straightforward. In terms of input themes, the entire text would be coded as ‘FDELK program’ as the program type and ‘full-day program’ as the salient FDELK program feature. As well, the same text would also be coded as ‘full day of social interactions’ as a process code and finally coded as ‘enhanced speech and language skills’ under the enhanced child development outcome theme. In essence the following linkages would be represented by the overlap of codes: FDELK: Full-day schedule > full-day of social interaction > enhanced child speech-language skills.

In example 2, coding decisions are a bit more complicated. Firstly, the parent mentions two inter-related outcomes: ‘enhanced capacity to work/study’ and ‘enhanced parent well-being’. A reflection was used in the interview to clarify that she was indeed talking about the two separate but related outcomes. Because the parent did not explicitly describe a
program process associated with these outcomes, a follow-up question was used to elicit this information. In response to the follow-up, the parent identifies a feature of FDELK – full-day schedule, which is associated with two program processes: (1) ‘ensuring the well-being of child, and (2) reducing child care hours. Therefore, the text is coded in three different ways to represent the following linkages: FDELK: Full-day schedule > ensuring the well-being of child + reducing child care hours > enhanced capacity to work/study + enhanced parent well-being.

The main criterion for linking input, process, and outcome themes into a causal chain was that the parent had to explicitly make those connections him/herself. If the parent mentioned an outcome earlier in the interview and I had failed to follow-up with additional questions to elicit the associated process theme, the outcome was coded ‘as is’ without any linkages to a process theme.

Step 5 represents the continual revision of template. Through the data-driven inductive coding process, the original template was modified and added to on a continual basis. When emerging themes did not conceptually fit into the hierarchical organization of the template, they were coded separately outside of the template. Approximately half-way through the coding process, the template was reviewed. Similar codes were collapsed and when appropriate, codes were reorganized to enhance the conceptual organization of the template.

In step 6, I examined input, process and outcome themes in NVivo. I generated tables to show the number of cases (i.e., families) that reported each theme. I also examined coded texts for each theme to check for coding accuracy.

After examining the frequency of themes reported across all cases, I examined the frequency of reported themes for two sub-groups, immigrant families and non-immigrant
families, to explore whether certain themes may be more or less salient for these groups of families.

In steps 7 and 8, I examined the pattern of linkages between FDELK inputs, process, and outcome themes to understand parents’ causal attributions. I generated cross-tabulation tables in NVivo to examine patterns of co-occurring themes. The primary analysis was to examine the patterns in which process and outcome themes co-occurred. For example, I examined the number of cases in which the process theme ‘enhanced quality of the early learning program’ co-occurred with the outcome theme ‘enhanced child development.’

In step 9, the generated theory was compared to other existing stakeholder theories and program theories in the literature.

Validation

Perspectives

Within the qualitative research community, many perspectives exist regarding the appropriateness of validation as a concept in qualitative inquiry, how it is defined, as well as how it is established (e.g., Angen, 2000; Creswell & Miller, 2000; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wolcott, 1990). Regardless of how validation is conceptualized and operationalized, there is general consensus that qualitative inquirers should demonstrate that their studies are credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility as a construct has developed and continues to evolve in support of the epistemology underlying qualitative approaches. This perspective varies considerably from the traditions of quantitative research where the goal is to demonstrate that the research has reached ‘objective’ conclusions via reliable and valid methods.

Historically, earlier conceptualizations of validity were directly applied from stand-
ards of quantitative research based on a positivistic philosophy (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). However, the traditional definitions of validity (and reliability) were felt to be incompatible with the underlying assumptions and tenants of qualitative research. This led to the translation of terms to be more aligned with the interpretive perspective. In their seminal work, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed terms such as credibility, authenticity, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as equivalents for internal validation, external validation, reliability, and objectivity. They contended that these terms adhere more to naturalistic research. To operationalize these terms, they proposed strategies such as prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data sources, methods, and investigators to establish credibility. The inclusion of thick description was proposed to ensure that the findings are transferable between the researcher and those being studied. Both dependability and confirmability are described as being achieved through an auditing of the research process.

More recently, Creswell and colleagues (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell, 2013) have identified common procedures for establishing validity in qualitative research. Creswell’s approach to validation stems from a framework of postpositivist philosophy that values the use of rigorous methods and systematic strategies. He encourages qualitative researchers to employ validation strategies to document the “accuracy” of their studies. Creswell and Miller (2000) described nine validation strategies: (1) triangulation; (2) disconfirming evidence; (3) researcher reflexivity; (4) member checking; (5) prolonged engagement in the field; (6) collaboration; (7) the audit trail; (8) thick, rich description; and (9) peer debriefing. They further suggested that the choice of validity strategies is governed by the lens researchers choose to validate their studies (i.e., lens of the researcher, participants, or people external to the study) and researchers’ paradigm or philosophical assumptions. Creswell
(2013) recommended the use of at least two of these strategies regardless of type of qualitative approach.

**Validation Strategies in the Current Study**

In the current study, I employed the following validation strategies: (1) triangulation, (2) researcher reflexivity, (3) audit trail, (4) thick, rich description, and (5) peer debriefing. *Triangulation* was achieved internally by the convergence of findings from multiple parent interviews, as well as by the convergence of findings from this study and others, including findings from local studies such as those from the TFD project, Peel Best Start, Peel study and the provincial FDELK study. Researcher reflexivity was attempted throughout the inquiry process by clarifying my motivations and beliefs from the outset of the study and continuously reflecting on them as I engaged in data collection and analysis. *An audit trail* is established when the researcher documents her process throughout the study. I used memoing throughout the inquiry process to document my in-the-moment reflections and impressions, as well as my thought processes as I engaged in interpretive analyses. Earlier in this chapter, I also provided a thorough account of the data analysis procedures. I also describe the participants and the settings in *rich, thick detail* so that readers are able to make decisions regarding transferability of this study. In the results chapter, I provide detailed examples to support the interpretations of the study. Finally, *peer debriefing* is a process where the researcher collaborates with peers who are familiar with her research and reviews the findings. With the use of peer debriefing, peers can validate findings, play devil’s advocate and help the researcher clarify her points, and continually support the researcher by asking questions about the appropriateness of methods and interpretations of the findings. I was fortunate to have the on-going support of my colleague who connected with me on a weekly basis. She was also in
the process of analyzing data for her dissertation, so we took turns debriefing each other on our weekly progress and provided critical feedback throughout the analysis and writing stages. I also consulted with other colleagues from the TFD research community who kindly reviewed the manuscript at various stages.

While member checking in the traditional sense was not possible due to logistical constraints, interview techniques such as paraphrasing and summarizing was used to check for the accuracy of my interpretations during the interview. Parents then had the opportunity to correct, clarify or elaborate on their earlier comments, which served to enhance the accuracy of the interpretations.
Chapter 5: Results

As described in Chapter 4, extensive interviews were conducted with parents, resulting in rich, detailed accounts of parents’ daily experiences of using FDELK and other programs to meet their family and work/study demands. The interviews were transcribed as part of the analysis process. The emphasis of the analysis was on generating a theory of change framework by analyzing across cases to find patterns of associations between input, process and outcome themes. To this end, segmented texts were simultaneously coded to input, process, and outcome themes to capture parents’ causal attributions. At the onset of coding, I used the conceptual framework to construct a very basic template structure, which served as a good starting point. This initial template was constantly revised throughout the coding process. While all 21 transcripts were fully analyzed, new themes did not emerge after coding 18 interviews.

In this chapter, I first discuss key issues pertaining to the analysis and reporting of themes as a precursor to presenting the findings. I then present findings from template analysis that addressed the following five research questions, which were further refined from the initial stages of the study:

RQ1: How did families differ with respect to their parent, family, work/study, and social support characteristics?  (*Inputs: Family, Work/Study, and Social Support Contexts*)

RQ2: How did parents react to FDELK? What were the most salient features of FDELK for parents? What types of early childhood programs were parents using in addition to FDELK? What types of care arrangements were reported for families with child care needs?  (*Inputs: Program Use*)
RQ3: What benefits and challenges did families experience as a result of participating in FDELK? (Outcomes: Benefits and Challenges of FDELK)

RQ4: What FDELK program participation processes or experiences were thought to contribute to the outcomes reported by parents? (Processes)

RQ5: What theory of change emerged from parents’ own program theories? What similarities or differences emerged across cases based on key contextual factors? (Causal Links Between Inputs, Processes, and Outcomes)

**Key Issues in Interpreting and Reporting Themes**

**Integrity of the Parent Interview Process**

In order to achieve rigor in qualitative research, each stage of the inquiry must be carefully planned and intentionally executed. The quality of the interpretation is inevitably dependent on the quality of the data collected to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In order to obtain rich, detailed accounts from parents, a face-to-face interview was chosen as the data collection method. The quality of the information obtained from interviews can vary considerably depending on the nature of the engagement between the interviewer and interviewee. Throughout the data collection process, I was pleasantly surprised to observe how candid and open parents were in describing their personal experiences. Certainly, establishing rapport was foundational to the interviewing process. In most cases, rapport was established quickly with the parent when I emphasized our mutual goals (improving programs to support families in raising healthy and well-adjusted children) and my beliefs on the importance of hearing parents’ voices. Parents were generous in sharing their personal life stories, which richly contextualized their current perspectives and experiences. Although the struggles and family circumstances varied from parent to parent or from family...
to family, there was a consistent sense of optimism for the future, which appeared to be deeply rooted in their desire to provide the best possible start for their child/ren. Throughout the interviewing process, I was struck by the resiliency of the parents. Their stories were often tales of survival in a less-than perfect society that does not always consider the best interest of its young citizens and their families. At the same time, their positive outlook did not prevent them from being critical about the challenges they faced in accessing and using various programs for their family. Parents did not hesitate to share their concerns, and for some, this included less than ideal interactions with program staff or other participants. They were also quick to clarify their points, which greatly aided the accuracy of my interpretations. Overall, the integrity of the data collection process was maintained by parents’ active participation and engagement in the interview process. I found each parent to be uniquely insightful and honest about his/her experiences.

Selective Coding & Interpretation of Themes

In my analysis of the findings, I did not attempt to examine and interpret every code to an equal degree of depth. Instead I endeavoured to highlight themes, which were of most central relevance to the task at hand – of building a coherent understanding of how FDELK works for families (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Patton, 1990). As a general rule, I stayed within the parameters of the research questions and the conceptual framework although other interesting issues or ideas emerged from the interviews.

Engagement with the Literature

Throughout the coding and analytic process, I used my understanding of the literature to actively guide my interpretation of data. For instance, my understanding of the construct, process quality, in the program quality literature prompted me to label and organize parents’
description of children’s classroom relationship processes under the theme that captured quality features of the early learning program. In this way, the theoretical and knowledge frameworks that I brought with me as a researcher allowed me to ‘see’ particular things in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

**Levels of Themes**

In template analysis themes are organized hierarchically, and the coding template typically contains multiple levels of themes (King, 2012). In this study, I developed themes at three levels: (1) overarching themes, (2) themes, and (2) sub-themes. **Overarching themes** organize and structure the analysis; they tend to not contain data, but instead simply structure an idea encapsulated in a number of themes. **Themes** capture distinctive concepts or issues and need to make sense on their own. Finally, **sub-themes** capture and develop specific aspects of the central organising concept of a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The following excerpt from the final coding template illustrates the three levels of themes and the hierarchical relationship between the themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child-Level Benefits (overarching theme)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Child Well-Being (theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Safety and Security (sub-theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of Daily Stress (sub-theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Child Learning &amp; School Engagement (theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Motivation to Learn (sub-theme)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reporting Prevalence

Some qualitative researchers suggest the use of numbers in reporting patterns as it contributes to the internal generalizability of findings within the sample of participants, establishing that themes are in fact characteristic of this set of individuals as a whole (e.g., Maxwell, 2010). In general, however, the use of frequency counts to report the reoccurrence of themes is not common and even discouraged by many authorities in qualitative research because reoccurrence does not indicate ‘value’ as clearly as in quantitative research; value in this case refers to whether the theme is important for elucidating the research questions and advancing our understanding of the issue at hand (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Wainwright, 1997). For instance, in the current study, data were collected in an interactive manner via interviews that allowed for flexible questioning and probing. As a result, it was not the case that every participant in the study discussed the same issues. If a participant did not elaborate on a particular issue, I had no way of knowing what her perspective was: Did she agree but merely did not discuss her perspective? Therefore, compared to a survey study that required participants to answer the same set of questions from a number of options, it was less appropriate to use frequency counts to make judgements about prevalence.

Buetow (2010) has addressed this quandary by identifying two concepts, recurrence and value, that must not be conflated. Accordingly, reoccurrence does not necessarily indicate the value of a theme and reoccurrence is not required for a theme to be deemed valuable. He advocated for the emphasis of both reoccurrence and value in his approach to conducting thematic analysis.

In line with Buetow’s (2010) position, I chose to emphasize themes that reoccurred across cases (to show which program processes and outcomes were more consistently expe-
rienced by families in the sample), as well as themes that did not reoccur but were of high importance. Thus, the goal was to demonstrate breadth and diversity of patterns in the data, as well as capture common perspectives and experiences across cases of families. As a general rule for reporting themes, I chose to report themes that were supported by at least three families. However, at times, I chose to highlight themes that were supported by fewer than three families if they represented important gaps in the implementation of the FDELK program or important concepts identified in the literature. I provide frequency counts to show the relative saliency of themes for the group of parents that I sampled.

**RQ1: Inputs: Family, Work/Study, and Social Support Contexts**

In this section, I examine parent, child, family, work/study and social support characteristics to explore whether there were key differences that distinguished groups of families in the sample. I focus on key demographic factors that are known to influence families’ access and use of early childhood services, as well as those that may moderate the influence of program effects.

As previously reported in Chapter 4 the majority of the parent participants were female, married or in a common-law relationship, and reported being a part of a nuclear family (i.e., fell into the category of “couple with children”). Therefore, these characteristics were representative of parents who participated in the study and agreed to have their interview audio recorded and transcribed for detailed analysis. Other characteristics, such as parent’s immigration status, country of birth, and language status varied within this sample. A participant was coded as an “immigrant” if s/he was born outside of Canada and subsequently landed in Canada to reside here on a permanent basis and as a “non-immigrant” if s/he was a Canadian citizen by birth (Statistics Canada, 2009). An exception was made for one partici-
parent who was a Canadian citizen by birth but had spent most of her childhood and young adulthood outside of Canada. This parent spoke Spanish as her primary language, received her post-secondary education outside of Canada, and was married to a spouse who was born outside of Canada. Given that her profile closely resembled other immigrant participants and she faced many challenges associated with immigration and acculturation, she was coded as “immigrant” rather than “non-immigrant.”

When parent immigration status was used to group families, a cohesive profile emerged for immigrant and non-immigrant families. The following section describes profiles of immigrant and non-immigrant families, highlighting similarities within and differences across these two groups of families.

**Immigrant Families (n = 12)**

**Parent Characteristics.**

When parent’s immigration status was examined in relation to their arrival to Canada, many families fell within the ‘new’ and ‘recent’ immigrant categories. Therefore, it was reasonable to consider that these families were still very much in the process of transitioning and undergoing change as result of immigrating to Canada.

As noted above, immigrant families consisted of a parent who was born outside of Canada (with the exception of the parent noted in the previous section who had been born in Canada and had subsequently moved). As expected, the majority of these parents identified themselves as English Language Learners (ELL), with the exception of two parents whose home country’s official language was English. All parents in this group were married or in a

---

24 Those that arrived less than 5 years ago were considered to be “new immigrants, those that arrived between 5 to 10 years ago were considered to be “recent immigrants, and those that arrived more than 10 years ago were considered to be “established immigrants” (Statistics Canada, 2009).
common-law relationship with a spouse or partner who was also born and raised outside of Canada. The majority of parents in this group had completed a college degree or higher. Notably, this group contained two International Medical Graduates (IMGs) who were practising physicians in their home country, and one parent who had almost completed her medical degree prior to relocating to Canada. These three parents were identified as “students” as they were undergoing certification in order to practise medicine in Ontario. All three parents spoke about the significant challenges associated with the certification process:

**MOTHER:** After [name of child] was born, which was my third, I was doing my exams and was very stressed. I guess the stress of the pregnancy and the exams, I got sick...I learnt that I just have to, you know, step down and not be so stressed (Transcript PI310).

**MOTHER:** You have to apply and if you have luck you might get a residency. It is very unpredictable. We moved to Canada actually because of my children. Because you know everybody says that Canada is the best place for children. It’s not for us. We were happy there because we had a good income. We were satisfied with our jobs but I know that there are a lot of challenges after coming here. Actually, I did not know that it was so difficult... to get the work (Transcript PI320).

**MOTHER:** I was working at a hospital as a resident medical officer then, but now I have to get my licence exam before starting even the minutest job here, medical related.
**INTERVIEWER:** Does it feel like you are starting all over again?
**MOTHER:** Yes, from scratch. Like with children, it takes time. Life is not easy. It never is I guess. This would be the second time I’m starting my life all over again. I would say after marriage once and then this time coming to Canada (Transcript PI321).

One parent in this group was married to a spouse who was also an IMG, which meant that both parents in this household were students undergoing the certification process; this family experienced a significant decline in income as a result of immigrating to Canada.

Of the parents who were not identified as “students,” five reported working full-time, one reported working part-time and three identified themselves as stay-at-home parents. Of the six parents who were working outside of the home, only one parent reported having a
fixed regular daytime work day (i.e., fixed schedule, regular daytime hours); majority of parents worked either fixed day or night shifts (i.e., fixed schedule, day/evening shifts) or variable rotating shifts (i.e., variable schedule, rotating shifts). Many of these parents spoke of the challenges associated with working shifts as opposed to a regular work day. For example, a parent spoke about the incompatibility of shift work hours and before-school care and the challenges she faced in getting her youngest child ready for school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOTHER:</th>
<th>Work starts at 7...a lot of factory warehouse or something, they start at 7. The shift is always 7 to 3 and 3 to 11.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEWER:</td>
<td>Plus you have to drive to work. That takes time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTHER:</td>
<td>Yes, you have to leave at like 6 o’clock. But daycare, sometimes they start at 6 [am], like in Montreal, but not many here. [Name of extended-day program] at school doesn’t start early enough...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERVIEWER:</td>
<td>That’s right. I believe they open at 7:30AM?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOTHER:</td>
<td>So we rely on a private babysitter in the morning. I bring [name of Kindergarten child] there at 6 o’clock. My son...used to give him to her too. It’s just you have to pay her money. But she doesn’t want to give receipts, which I understand, but like I said, it’s a lot of money. If I give both of my children to her, it’s going to be a lot of money. So it’s like half of my salary...or more than half of my salary...So I said, I’m not going back to work if that’s going to happen. It’s hard, you wake them up at 5:30 [am] to get them ready to go to the babysitter and then you are not getting a receipt so that you can declare it for the expenses...I am lucky that my cousin works in the evening. She takes my son during the day. But this coming September, I wanna look for even half day daycare...my cousin is still willing to help me, but I don’t want my son crying when he starts school. We may have to change our routine...like if I go in the morning shift, my husband goes in the night shift. It’s hard ’cuz you don’t have the family time, but this way, if the school calls during the day, my husband will be home (Transcript PI308).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of the employment status of spouses (or fathers in most cases), with the exception of two households, all spouses were working full-time. The most commonly reported work schedule was fixed schedule, regular daytime hours ($n = 5$). However, several spouses worked fixed day shifts ($n = 3$) and one spouse had a variable schedule consisting of rotating shifts that took him away from the home for extended periods of time. His work schedule appeared to disrupt the family routine and was a source of stress for the participant:
**INTERVIEWER:** Any stressors in your life?

**MOTHER:** Well just my husband’s job...He is not home for two weeks at a time. That’s not nice [laughs]. He is going to try to do something more local, more regional...you know. So that he is home a little bit more...it’s hard on the kids and hard on me sometimes. And then he comes back and my schedule goes everywhere! Because the kids, because his bedtime stories...they start off with music and noises and then you have them around the house and you’re like, it’s 10 [pm]! You know they are wide awake. That’s not working, but you know, he’s like I haven’t seen them in two weeks or so (Transcript PI310).

**Family Composition & Social Support.**

Most immigrant parents reported being a part of a nuclear family. Parents reported having two to three children in their household; children’s age ranged from 2 to 12 years. In one family, two of the three children in the household were enrolled in FDELK. Only two parents reported living with extended family members. Several parents reported that they have plans to bring relatives (most often grandparents) over to Canada to live in their household. For this sub-sample of families, if a relative was not living in the household, it often meant that there was no extended family member living nearby (i.e., within driving distance or even within the province) to offer tangible assistance to the family. Many parents spoke about the loss of support from family and friends in their home country when they relocated to Canada:

---

**INTERVIEWER:** So some parents might lean on their family members, friends or neighbours to help them in their parenting role...the type of support you might receive might include sharing information, babysitting, etc. Who do you rely on for support?

**FATHER:** I have no support. If you count it that way, I have no support in here, because I have no family here. And that’s the main challenge, which I am facing. But life is tough! Welcome to earth! What are you going to do? You can’t change the earth, but the thing is, you know, I have no family here. You can’t leave the kids with a friend...I have some friends and I still won’t. I trust them, but still I won’t leave my kids with them because they have their own business too. You can’t leave your kids with people and ask them to change the diaper, you know. I don’t have any relatives here, so I don’t get any support. No Support! (Transcript PI319).
Live-in relatives are often thought of as ideal sources of support for parents with young children, and this was the case for one family as the grandmother cared for the toddler throughout the day and picked up and dropped off the school-aged children at school. In the other household (with two live-in grandparents), the circumstances were quite different. That is, the grandmother worked shifts that took her away from the home for extended periods and the grandfather was diagnosed with a major illness that affected his ability to support his daughter’s parenting responsibilities. Needless to say, the parent reported limited availability of parenting support from her parents.

**Child Characteristics.**

Many kindergarten children of immigrant parents spoke a language other than English at home, particularly those who had no preschool or child care experience in Canada entered kindergarten with limited English language proficiency. As reported later in this chapter, many immigrant parents emphasized the importance of their child acquiring English language skills at school and attributed improvements that they observed to the FDELK as the program provided the child with greater time and learning opportunity to catch up to their Canadian peers. There was approximately an even number of female and male, JK and SK, firstborn and laterborn children in this sub-sample. While no child in this group had been given a formal diagnosis of a developmental disorder, learning disability or major health condition, one child was born prematurely and his parent expressed concerns about his current activity level and learning progress. Several other parents expressed minor concerns about the child’s speech and language development and noted that the child was being monitored over time by the teaching team. One family in this sub-sample was rearing a child (sibling of kindergarten child) with special needs.
Non-Immigrant Families (n = 9)

Parent Characteristics.

Parent participants who were Canadian citizens by birth made up this group of families. These parents were born and raised in Canada and spoke English as their primary language. Many parents in this group had completed a college or university degree; none had completed advanced degrees. Unlike immigrant parents, the majority of non-immigrant mothers and fathers worked outside of their home on a full-time basis and reported having a fixed schedule consisting of regular daytime hours. Only one parent reported to be a stay-at-home parent and she noted that this was intended to be temporary. Many parents reported working outside of their local community, which often included a lengthy commute to downtown Toronto using GO Transit. This work arrangement appeared to be feasible when there was another parent who worked closer to home or a relative living nearby who could respond to calls from the school during the day that required immediate attention. Even with such supports in place, one parent expressed the desire to work closer to home in order to give their children more opportunity to engage in activities of their choice:

**MOTHER:** My biggest concern, which I am struggling and struggling to try to figure out, is how I’m going to get [name of kindergarten child] into gymnastics...because I really want her to do it and she really wants to do it. She just loves it and cartwheels everywhere! My biggest concern is like how am I going to get her there? That’s why I don’t want to be downtown for work (Transcript PI322).

Family Composition and Social Support.

Many non-immigrant parents were married or in a common-law relationship and reported being a part of a nuclear family. Notably, extended family situations were more common among non-immigrant families than immigrant families. Three parents were separated or divorced and two of these parents had relatives residing in their home. All non-immigrant
parents had at least one relative residing near their home. Non-immigrant families had fewer children in the household than immigrant families; most commonly, parents reported having two children. The age range of children in the home varied from 1 to 17 years. Four out of nine families had a child in the household with special needs.

**Child Characteristics.**

As expected, all children from non-immigrant families spoke English at home. As with children from immigrant families, there was approximately even representation of female and male, firstborn and laterborn, and JK and SK children. Parents identified a range of developmental and health concerns for their kindergarten child. One child was diagnosed with a developmental disorder and was identified as a student with exceptional learning needs. Other parent concerns included: speech and language issues including hearing impairment; separation anxiety, food allergies, night terrors, circulation issues, and digestive issues.

**RQ2: Inputs – Program Use**

In this section, I examine parents’ perspectives regarding their use of FDELK and other early childhood programs. Specifically, the following research questions are addressed:

1. How did parents react to FDELK?
2. What were the most salient features of FDELK for parents?
3. What types of early childhood programs were parents using in addition to FDELK?
4. What types of care arrangements were reported for families with child care needs?

**Parents’ Initial Reactions to FDELK**

As a precursor to understanding their experiences of participating in FDELK, parents
were asked how they initially felt about the program. While some parents had already adjusted to having their young child in full-time child care, the concept of public schools offering a full-day early learning program to 4- and 5-year-olds was new to all families. Parental beliefs about the developmental appropriateness and/or usefulness of FDELK were important to consider as they likely influenced the ways in which they families interacted with and experienced the program. When asked to recall their initial reactions, parents reported a range of perspectives.

For parents who had a child who was already in full-day child care, the transition to a full-day program at school was perceived to be a welcome change. These parents predicted a positive adjustment for the child given previous care experiences and identified benefits of child care savings and increased learning opportunities for the child:

**MOTHER:** Well, I thought it was a really good idea, because it saves me money! I’m not going to lie about that. He was already going somewhere full-day so he could go play somewhere or he could go learn somewhere, you know what I mean? Like for us, it wasn’t like he was at home, so it wasn’t a huge transition for me because he was away from me no matter where he was (Transcript PI313).

For parents of a child without preschool/child care experiences or with limited English language skills, FDELK was perceived to be an opportunity for the child to catch up to peers:

**MOTHER:** I was happy because he’s in that program. He’s [in] full-day and I’m happy with that because my son, he didn’t know anything before he goes to [school]. (Transcript PI319).

Some parents emphasized the connection between the child’s age and the developmental appropriateness of full-day kindergarten:

**MOTHER:** I was happy, definitely. Because already, like [name of child] was five years old when he started. No not five, let me think, almost five.

**INTERVIEWER:** Almost five?
**MOTHER:** Yeah, almost five because it was last September he started right? So he was five, he turned five in January. So he was almost five and he really needed some place, some outlet because this age children are very energetic, they can’t stay at home throughout the day (Transcript PI321).

**MOTHER:** I was lucky when she started JK that she was already 4 and a half. ’Cuz I know some kids start at 3, which is probably much tougher.

**INTERVIEWER:** So the age of the child is important?

**MOTHER:** Yes, so she was already over 4.

**INTERVIEWER:** Over 4, so would you say that that made her transition easier than some of the younger kids, because she was older?

**MOTHER:** Yes and also because she’d been in a centre daycare. I didn’t honestly notice a difference besides the not napping. She was starting to get out of napping anyways (Transcript PI322).

One parent reported initial concerns about the FDELK program but her concerns were tempered given that her child was going into SK rather than JK:

**FATHER:** She [referring to mother] did not like it but I loved it!

**MOTHER:** But because it was the second year I wasn’t so much against it. But where it was the junior year, it was kind of iffy, so you know. But, totally fine now.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so you had some initial concerns [addressing the mother], and the fact that your child was going into SK made it easier for you? And you [addressing the father] were okay with it from the start?

**FATHER:** Yeah, well I notice what they do in other parts of the world. That’s the way it starts right? It doesn’t start half a day (Transcript PI312).

Another parent reported concerns about the challenges of arranging child care for her child as the onsite centre-based child care program was not going to offer a full extended-day program for 4- and 5-year-olds due to low enrolment. For this family, the previous year’s child care arrangement was perceived to be more convenient.

Overall, many parents recalled a positive reaction to hearing about FDELK. These parents looked forward to both the practical and developmental benefits of the FDELK. A few parents recalled having some initial concerns. The child’s age and his/her prior experience with full-day care appeared to have influenced how parents perceived the FDELK program.
Parents’ Experience with Core Components of the FDELK Model

Parents were asked to describe various features of the FDELK program that were most helpful and/or positive for the family. Table 3 shows the themes that emerged and the number of families that endorsed each theme.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Salient Features of FDELK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Themes/Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Day Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Staff Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play-Based Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended-Day Program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *This frequency reflects the perspectives of two Best Start families in addition to one FDELK family which was using the extended-day program. The perspectives of two Best Start families were examined to supplement the limited sampling of FDELK families who were using the extended-day program.

**Full-Day Early Learning Program.**

One of the most frequently described features of FDELK was related to the length of the program. Many parents noted that their children were present at school and engaged in school-based activities for the full-day, rather than the traditional half-day schedule. To parents, the extension of the schedule from half-day to full-day also meant that children had greater opportunities to learn, establish relationships, practice and build social skills, and practice self-care activities such as eating lunch and using the toilet, which would not have been part of their routine in a half-day program. These enhanced learning and development opportunities were attributed to the increase in time children spent in the early learning program:

**INTERVIEWER**: ...in your opinion, what features of full-day kindergarten are most helpful to you as a family? What’s most positive for you?

**MOTHER**: Definitely the schedule because she is there all day long...The exposure to different learning aspects that she wouldn’t get in a half-day kindergarten...they
get to go out and have recess and do the stuff that they don’t, they won’t get to do if they were only there for the half-day (Transcript PI302).

**Integrated Staff Team.**

Parents also noted the change in the staffing model for the FDELK program. The most commonly reported characteristic of the staffing model was that children now had two adults in the classroom:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOTHER: I love the idea of two teachers because one person cannot handle thirty kids or twenty six or twenty eight, it’s a lot of kids (Transcript PI315).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MOTHER: And I don’t think that one can do all that with 26 kids. I don’t think that one can do all of them and have them all pay attention and stuff. And sometimes the teacher is busy just dealing with one issue with one and as a parent I feel more comfortable having another teacher there (Transcript PI310).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some parents also noted the presence of the ECE teacher; these parents felt that the ECE teacher brought unique expertise to the teaching team and a sense of continuity from what the children were used to in the child care setting:

| MOTHER: …I think having the ECE person there, which is what she had in day care is perfect.  
INTERVIEWER: mm-hmm. Okay. So why is it helpful to have the ECE teacher there?  
MOTHER: I think she is nurturing and provides comfort to the kids (Transcript PI322). |

Beyond these concrete characteristics, very few parents had a working knowledge of how the integrated staff team were expected to worked together to deliver the FDELK program. One parent felt that the teachers worked in partnership based on the interactions that she had with the teachers and the nature of the relationship that her child had with the teachers:

| MOTHER: I like the concept. I think that they balance each other out, from the experiences that I’ve had with it, and I don’t find that, I know that when I spoke with the teacher she said that she deals a good portion of the day with the SKs, whereas the |
ECE teacher deals with the JKS, but I find that my daughter has a bond with both of them equally. So that worked out well…. Um, they have a good partnership between them so it’s collaborative, so when you go in there, you are actually talking to both (Transcript PI305).

Play-Based Curriculum.

With respect to the play-based curriculum, parents’ perspectives were divided between parents who were thrilled about how the play-based curriculum promoted children’s enjoyment of school and others who felt that the curriculum needed to be more academically oriented:

**MOTHER**: They don’t get bored.
**INTERVIEWER**: No?
**MOTHER**: They don’t cry and want to go home. I don’t think so. Because they have dolls and they play! The program is play-based.
**INTERVIEWER**: They’re happy to be there because they get to play?
**MOTHER**: [laughs] they have little trucks, they have buses…
**INTERVIEWER**: Lots of playing materials!
**MOTHER**: Yes, yes, it doesn’t look like a school…and they’re happy to be there, but when you are in grade one, grade two, or grade six you don’t want homework anymore, but at this stage, they want homework.
**INTERVIEWER**: mmm…
**MOTHER**: ‘Why don’t I have homework?’ And now she has a small paper to bring home and didn’t finish, ‘I have homework today, I have to do it now.’
**INTERVIEWER**: Oh, so she’s happy to do it?
**MOTHER**: She is…She is happy (Transcript PI308).

**MOTHER**: Yeah, this activity oriented thing which I think is a little, I mean, she’s too old for that because she’s already 6. Because since she’s a January born, that’s a disadvantage for her I think.
**INTERVIEWER**: Okay. So she’s older than her classmates?
**MOTHER**: Yeah, that’s right because she was youngest in [parent’s home country] for her class but she’s the oldest, maybe the oldest in terms of here in Canada. So that concerns me.
**INTERVIEWER**: Okay, so your daughter is one of the oldest kids in her class and the program is play-based. You are concerned that she should be engaged in more formal academic tasks at this stage?
**MOTHER**: Yeah.
**INTERVIEWER**: What does the program look like for 6-year-olds in [parent’s home country]?
**MOTHER**: Well, this activity based it was introduced in [parent’s home country] as well.
**INTERVIEWER:** Oh it was?

**MOTHER:** Yes, it is but in Grade 1 it is only just the first term only because you know they make play houses and put everything in you know, what for girls, cooking all these things, those are done only in the first term but second and third term it’s mainly reading, writing. That is why they progress so well by the end of the third team (Transcript PI320).

**Extended-Day Program.**

Given that only one family in the FDELK sample was using the extended-day program, I also examined the perspectives of two other families who were using the onsite Best Start Child Care program. Although the length of the early learning and care components differed between the seamless FDELK and extended-day program (i.e., full-day early learning + onsite before- and after-school care) and the seamless Best Start program (i.e., half-day early learning + onsite care for remaining hours of day), children in both arrangements experienced a seamless early learning and care program that stretched beyond school hours:

**FATHER:** Yeah [name of kindergarten child] is doing the half-day kindergarten in the mornings and in his school there is an integrated Best Start child-care, PLASP. So you know we drop him off at PLASP before school and they take him to kindergarten, pick him up after. He has lunch, his nap, and his afternoon snack at PLASP and I usually pick him up from there. My daughter is doing the same thing. Actually my daughter is in a before and after school program. She’s in Grade 1 right now.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, and the same kind of hours for her as well?

**FATHER:** Yeah, we drop them off, and pick them up at the same time. Both kids are in one location for the entire day. That’s a great aspect of PLASP – it’s located in the school (Transcript PI316).

**Summary.**

Across the four themes that emerged as salient features of FDELK, parents more commonly referenced the concrete characteristics such as length of the program and the make-up of the integrated staff team. In contrast, more process oriented features such as how the integrated staff team worked together to deliver the early learning program were not as salient to parents. This may reflect the limited opportunity that parents had to observe the in-
ner workings of the early learning team. Furthermore, the extended-day program was likely the least developed feature of the FDELK across the school sites sampled for this study. Out of 21 families, only one family had the option and the means to access this program.

**How Did Parents Use FDELK and Other Programs to Meet Their Needs?**

Families piece together a variety of programs and services to support their family and work demands. Schools alone are often not adequate to meet the varied needs of families. Indeed, in addition to the FDELK program, parents reported using a variety of programs and resources. While the focus of the study was to understand parents’ perspectives about how FDELK has worked for their family, it was essential to understand how this program was used in conjunction with other programs. Therefore, parents were asked to list and describe programs that they were currently using, as well as those that they had used in the past that focused on meeting the needs of young children and/or their families.

As shown in Table 4, parents reported using a wide range of programs. These programs can be grouped into three categories. *Child-focused programs* like FDELK, child care and after-school programs may involve parents at one point or another, but they typically focus on delivering the program to young children. In order to simplify, for child-focused programs, only those that were used for the kindergarten child are reported. *Parent-focused programs* like prenatal classes, home visiting, and language classes focus on meeting the needs of parents. *Family-focused programs* like family drop-in programs involve the entire family, including siblings (typically until children reach school age), non-parental caregivers, and relatives. Finally, some parents reported using specialized services to address various child-related concerns. Programs such as Occupational Health and Speech-Language Pathology address specific concerns and not all families seek to access them.
Table 4  

*Program Use*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>No. Families (n = 21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child-Focused Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDELK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JK</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SK</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onsite Centre-Based</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offsite Centre-Based</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offsite Home-Based</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offsite Kin-Based</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal (Baby sitting)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After-School Activity-Based Program</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Based Readiness Programs</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camps</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent-Focused Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Parent Group</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Classes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prenatal Classes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home visiting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family-Focused Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid Sign-Up Family Programs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free Drop-In Family Programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OYEYC</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Based (e.g., Hub)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Library Programs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specialized Services</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) Services</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Therapy (OT) Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physiotherapy (PT) Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paediatric Health Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Assessment Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioural Treatment Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Based Multidisciplinary Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Frequencies reflect reported current and past program use.*

Parents commonly reported using more than one child-focused program for their kin-
garten child. Recreation programs were most popular among families. Fourteen families reported using at least one activity although it was quite common for each child to be involved in several activities within each year, one after another. For families that required child care, a range of programs were accessed: onsite and offsite centre-based child care, offsite home-based care, offsite kin-based care, and informal child care (babysitting). Offsite centre-based child care, home-based child care, and kin-based care arrangements were commonly used. While four parents reported using onsite centre-based child care at one time or another, only one family in the sample was currently using the extended-day program (i.e., onsite centre-based child care) for her kindergarten child. Notably, one parent reported using an after-school activity-based program rather than a child care program. Both children (ages 5 and 10 years) were transported from the school to the activity site every day. In addition to dedicated time for the activity, their routine included snack time and homework time for older children. This parent emphasized the importance of nurturing her children’s interests and chose to embed an extra-curricular activity within her children’s day, which opened up time on evenings and weekends. Other less commonly used child-focused programs included school-based readiness programs, tutoring, and camps. School-based readiness programs varied in length (1 week to 8 weeks) and intensity (weekly to daily), but they all focused on familiarizing the child to the school routine, and offered socialization and early learning opportunities.

Parent-focused programs were less commonly used by families. One parent reported being a part of a “mommies group” during her maternity leave. While it may not have been a formal program, the group met on a regular basis and members provided both tangible and emotional support to one another. Shared goals were set, such as engaging in physical activi-
ties, and members worked together to reach goals. One parent reported using language classes, which were offered free of charge at the child’s school. This parent emphasized the importance of improving her English language skills in order to support her child’s learning. Free child-minding services enabled this parent to use this program. Another parent emphasized the significance of accessing fitness classes for herself to address chronic health concerns. Lastly, two parents reported using a home visiting program following childbirth. A public health nurse visited the home and provided breastfeeding support and educational materials.

Many families participated in family-focused programs. Free drop-in programs offered at schools and in the community were more commonly used compared to paid sign-up programs. Two schools (i.e., site B and D) offered drop-in programs onsite. At school site B, the drop-in program was delivered by the Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, which operated daily between the hours of 9:30 AM to 1:30 PM. Parents, caregivers and children from birth to age 6 years participated in a range of activities and were able to access information on community resources. Similarly, at school site D, the drop-in program was delivered by the Child and Family Learning Centre, which offered daily morning (i.e., 8:30AM to 12:15PM) and afternoon (i.e., 12:15PM to 2:45PM) sessions in collaboration with the Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC). This centre was known to the community as the “hub.” Programming for families included daily family time sessions consisting of indoor and outdoor play, circle time, music and reading activities, as well as monthly fieldtrips. Families also participated in OEYC drop-in programs located in the community. Children up to the age of six and their parents and caregivers are able to take part in programs and activities together, and families are able to access information on community resources and child development.
In addition to family drop-in programs, many families took advantage of programs offered at the public library.

A small group of families reported using specialized services for their kindergarten child. The most common developmental concern that parents reported was speech and language issues. As such, four families reported using Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) services. One family accessed private SLP services, while the other three accessed school-based SLP services. Many of the remaining specialized services were accessed by one family raising a child with developmental concerns (i.e., Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Pediatric Health, Developmental Assessment, Autism Services, and Behavioural Treatment Services). One parent reported that her child presented with severe separation anxiety during her transition to school. As such, this family accessed support from the school-based multidisciplinary team, who consulted with the teaching staff and administration and provided education and support to the parent.

In summary, child-focused programs were most commonly used by families to meet child care needs and to provide extra-curricular learning opportunities. Many families took advantage of school- and community-based family drop-in programs that offered learning and support to both children and parents. In contrast, parent-focused programs were less frequently used. This is not uncommon as parents often say that their children’s needs have higher priority than their own as one parent noted:

**INTERVIEWER:** In addition to programs that support your child care needs, do you access any other programs that support your own needs? Like your well-being and health?

**MOTHER:** You don’t get to have a well-being when you are a mom. No you don’t...she is the be-all and end-all of everything. Do you know what I mean?

**INTERVIEWER:** So she comes first?

**MOTHER:** She comes first all of the time (Transcript PI305).
**What Type(s) of Care Arrangements Were Families Using?**

While it can be useful to examine the frequency with which families reported using each type of program, this does not capture the holistic nature in which parents accessed multiple programs. In particular, the ways in which families piece together resources to meet their child care needs was of particular importance to this study as integrated early childhood programs, such as FDELK, aim to simplify and consolidate the often messy arrangements that parents rely on to meet their child care requirements.

Among immigrant families, paid non-parental child care programs were not frequently used. Most often, children attended FDELK and remained in the care of their mother during before- and after-school hours. Stay-at-home parents reported that they could not afford the costs of child care for multiple children. Parents who were IMGs studied at home while children were at school and did not access child care programs due to financial limitations. Only three of the six parents that worked outside of the home reported using paid child care programs. When child care programs were accessed, the kindergarten child received both before- and after-school care. Only one child had a seamless day (via extended-day program) where she remained under one roof throughout the entire duration of the day.\(^\text{25}\) As an alternative to paying for child care, two parents scheduled their work hours (e.g., evenings and weekends) so that at least one parent was home to look after the children, and one parent relied on a live-in relative for child care.

The use of non-parental child care services was more common among non-immigrant families. There was an interesting mix of arrangements reported by families that included a combination of home-based care, kin-based care, and after-school activity-based program.

\(^{25}\) Although this child remained under one roof throughout the day, continuity was limited given the lack of staffing overlap between the FDELK and extended-day programs.
Out of nine parents, seven worked outside of the home. Of these seven parents, two parents relied on paid child care programs only, two parents used kin-based care only, one parent reported using a combination of kin-based and home-based care, and another parent used a combination of home-based care and an after-school activity to meet their work demands. While all families reported that child care arrangements had been stable for the school year, throughout the day, kindergarten children were cared by at least two to three groups of caregivers, and as such experienced two or three early learning environments. The simplest arrangement included attendance of FDELK and before- and after-care provided by the same caregiver. Kindergarten children from immigrant households were more likely to have the same caregiver for before- and after-school care primarily because the mother was the caregiver. Whereas children from non-immigrant households were more likely to have different caregivers for before- and after-school care; most commonly, these children received either kin-based or parental care in the morning and were enrolled in paid, non-parental child care in the afternoon. When the care arrangements were examined for the entire sample, 13 families reported using two separate groups of caregivers, 7 reported using three, and one family reported using 4 groups of caregivers.

**RQ3: Outcomes – Benefits and Challenges of FDELK**

In this section, I examine parents’ perspectives on the benefits and challenges of participating in the FDELK program for children, parents, and families.

**Benefits**

Parents reported a wide range of benefits at the child-, parent-, family, and program-levels. Table 5 shows the range of themes and more specific sub-themes that emerged from

---

26 Caregivers included parents and FDELK teachers.
parents’ own experiences with the FDELK program. The frequencies represent the number of families that reported the benefit.

Table 5

Benefits of Participating in FDELK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit Themes/Codes</th>
<th>No. of Families (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child-Level Benefits</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Child Daily Life</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Child Well-being</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Security and Safety</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturance</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of Daily Stress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Child Development</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptive Skills</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech and Language Skills</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Child Learning &amp; School Engagement</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to Learn</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated Learning Rate</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Literacy &amp; Numeracy Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Proficiency</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Knowledge and Awareness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful Transition to School</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Child Readiness For Grade 1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent-Level Benefits</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Parent Capacity to Work or Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Parent Daily Life</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefit Themes/Codes</td>
<td>No. of Families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Parent Well-Being</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Program-Family Relationship</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Parent-Child Interactions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Parent Social Support</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Parent Knowledge</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Parenting Capacity</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Parent Involvement</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family-Level Benefits</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Quality of Family Daily Life</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of Family Daily Stress</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of Family Financial Stress</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Access to Higher Quality Child Care</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Sense of Belonging</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Access to Resources</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in above, many of the themes representing child- and program-level benefits were further broken down into more specific sub-themes so that the essence of the outcome would not be lost by merging them under a broader theme. On the other hand, parent- and family-level outcomes tended to fit well within each theme. The frequencies for benefit themes ranged from one family to 15 families, suggesting that some benefits are more commonly experienced across families, whereas others may be specific to families depending on their contexts.

**Child-Level Benefits**

In general, parents had little difficulty identifying child-level benefits compared to benefits that they themselves experienced, which further supports that parents are oriented toward meeting their child needs but not necessarily their own needs. During the interview,
child-level benefits were often the first set of outcomes reported and parents provided rich
descriptive narrative with ample examples to support their beliefs. Five themes emerged and
they captured children’s learning/school engagement and development, as well as their daily
life and social-emotional well-being.

**Enhanced Child Daily Life.**

Parents reported that the FDELK schedule streamlined the child care arrangement for
the family, which, in turn, improved the child’s daily routine:

```
MOTHER: We have come across the problem of having to use two different providers.
FATHER: We have had to do that having the older one with one provider and the
younger ones with another provider...
MOTHER: The kids didn’t like that arrangement because they wanted to be together.
We had that arrangement for one year.
FATHER: We had to head off into two different directions...my car would go one
way, and [my wife] would go the other way. And then we tried to line up everything
again.
MOTHER: It was stressful on everyone. So full-day kindergarten has definitely re-
duced the stress that is caused from a hectic and complicated routine. Their daily
routine is much more simple now (Transcript PI306).
```

Parents also reported that their child’s daily routine was enhanced because the s/he attended
the FDELK program for the full day, which was developmentally appropriate with respect to
his/her activity level:

```
MOTHER: Um, well she’s a very energetic child. Before when she was napping I
had a lot of trouble getting her to go to sleep at night. Since she started full time kin-
dergarten, she’s wiped at 8 o’clock. [laughs](Transcript PI322).

MOTHER: She basically, she’s a lot more tired so at the end of the day. Actually if I
say it’s bed time there’s no arguments. She used to have a lot more energy before. I
mean before when we had the half days she would be home with someone else and
then that person would um like, be, they wouldn’t do much with her and then by the
time I get home I would have to do this, this and this and then prepare dinner
and then it’s like they still have the energy, like uh it’s time for bed! You know that
kind of thing (Transcript PI301).
```

Another way in which FDELK contributed to the child’s daily life was by increasing conti-
nuity throughout the child’s day by requiring children to follow behavioural expectations and a structured routine:

**FATHER:** I think we are repeating ourselves, but it is also helpful to have the consistent discipline across the home and the school. At school, kids have to ask for things before they grab it. At daycare, not all providers are consistent in their approach for managing behaviours and teaching good manners. So what we are finding is that there is more structure at school, which is what we try to do at home (Transcript PI306).

**Enhanced Child Well-Being.**

Parents reported several benefits that related to child’s well-being from a social-emotional perspective including, enhanced sense of security and safety and reduction of daily stress. In addition, several parents viewed the ECE teacher as someone who provides nurturance and comfort in an environment that is traditionally more academically oriented:

**MOTHER:** …As far as they are concerned, they know that they are both teachers. But I think from the ECE the kids are getting more nurturance.

**FATHER:** So even though the kids are in school, they still get the nurturance and comfort from the ECE teacher. That’s definitely good for the program (Transcript PI306).

**Enhanced Child Development.**

Not surprisingly, many parents reported positive child development outcomes for their kindergarten child in various domains of development. For example, they noted the increased opportunity for children to practice adaptive or independence skills throughout the day:

**MOTHER:** I can compare him more from last year [JK] to this year [SK]…he is more independent, because before they didn’t even use the washroom at school for two and a half hours, you know? So now he is more independent and putting on boots and putting on the jackets and growing independent in that way (Transcript PI310).

**MOTHER:** All of the skills that she needed to develop and work on and I could not replicate them at home. She was exposed to great environment and all day. The lunch, like the eating and drinking on her own. Taking care of her belongings. Making friends and being away from home and coping on her own (Transcript PI332).
MOTHER: But comparing to [older sibling], he can do his zipper, he can do his button, he can do those things that his brother might not have done when he was four. It was like, we were at home and it would be like okay, hurry up, I’ll do it for you. You do that. You know, even if you don’t want to. It’s sometimes hard to stand at the door and look at them and wait. You end up doing it. And then the tidying up after...all the tidying up and all that. That’s been great. I can’t complain and then they have their problems with friends and then it’s great because they have to learn how to resolve those things on their own, right? (Transcript PI310).

Many parents also reported the benefits of the program on their child’s social skills:

MOTHER: But when he got to school, he started playing with kids his own age and that helped a lot with his social skills. And in the beginning, he needed help but the teachers helped him to play with the kids (Transcript PI303).

FATHER: He is more sociable.
MOTHER: Yeah, he’s more....
FATHER: Sociable, he talks more (Transcript PI312).

MOTHER: She is more social...That was the biggest aspect for us, the social part...She is more outgoing than she was. She’s not, she’s not always looking to be stuck to me. Like once she gets to school, she’s like “Okay, see ya!” (Transcript PI305).

One parent in particular shared a specific example that highlighted her daughter’s growth in her cognitive skills:

MOTHER: Yeah. This year she is really a cool little kid with like her own thoughts and ideas, and we can sit and we can discuss her day and what goes on. And you know, you really kind of see the intellect and see her thinking and starting to process things. The Crayola colour bubbles is a really good example. So we’re seeing these commercials for the Crayola colour bubbles and a friend of mine bought them for her kids for Easter and they stained the clothes, they don’t come out of the clothes. So, she’s seen the commercial for them and she is like, ‘Mommy, I’d really like those, those look really really neat.’ And I explained to her that, ‘No we are not going to get those. Mommy’s friend bought them and they stained the clothes and we’re not going to get them.’ So she thought about it and then the next day she came back to me and she says, ‘Mommy, I don’t understand why in the commercial, it shows the clothes, the clothes come clean on the commercial, why are you saying that the clothes don’t come clean?’ So, we had another discussion about it and you know again I explained, ‘They don’t come out of the clothes, I really don’t want to take the chance of ruining your clothes, it’s not something we’re going to buy.’ Well this commercial is on every day. So, the next day, so this is day three, and she says, ‘Mommy, I’ve been thinking, I
Think what we’re going to do is, we’re going to buy the Crayola colour bubbles and I’m only going to wear my painting clothes. Or my black clothes because then if the colour bubbles get on my black clothes, you’re not going to see them so you are not going to be able to tell that my clothes are stained.’ And she says, ‘what do you think?’

INTERVIEWER: Wow! So, as a parent, it must have been a delight to see her go through this process all on her own!
MOTHER: Absolutely! Even her teacher says, ‘it’s not common in most five year olds’. It’s not common in most five years old and it’s really been something that we’ve been able to see develop the more time she spends in school and the more that she learns and the more that she’s exposed to. So I really think that is that ability to really kind of like, really bring her intellect along is really something that full-day kindergarten has kind of done for her (Transcript PI302).

Enhanced Child Learning & School Engagement.

This theme was perhaps the most comprehensive with eight sub-themes that ranged from children’s successful transition to school, to motivation to learn, to multicultural knowledge and awareness. One of the most common outcomes that related to the child’s attitude toward learning was motivation to learn. Many parents felt that their child developed a sense of joy and curiosity toward learning and going to school:

MOTHER: ...before he went to a school I tried to put things in front of him. I tried to teach him with the TV cartoon, with the play, ABCD, but he never sit down. He didn’t want to learn. But since he went to school I see he loves. It’s different when you force somebody. At school, he learn because lots of fun. He is curious now. He ask lots of questions (Transcript PI319).

MOTHER: He is the first one to get up. He is already all done. He is excited in the morning. He wanna go to school. Sometimes I say to him, I said to him, ‘Oh you are staying home today.’ He gets upset and mad. At the beginning he didn’t have to go every day. I had to tell him that, ‘You know that this thing is just starting.’ He just loves going to school. I can see that. He is excited to learn (Transcript PI314).

Also, many parents compared their child’s learning progress to their older siblings who attended the traditional half-day kindergarten program. While acknowledging that every child progresses at his/her own rate, parents reported that they observed an accelerated learning curve for their kindergarten child and attributed this to the FDELK program:
**FATHER:** I know that each child is different in how they progress across the ages, but I do find that the two younger ones pick up on stuff a lot faster.

**MOTHER:** Well, our child in SK is reading better than what our oldest child could read in Grade 2. Like his reading is phenomenal! He just started to read this year. When he started, he couldn’t even read his name! Now he can read and he can write! So I am quite impressed with him! (Transcript PI306).

For families whose first language was not English, parents noted that FDELK provided an opportunity for their child to improve his/her English language skills:

**MOTHER:** I’m saying that even though English is not his mother language, he’s been speaking and communicating very well in English. He is better than [name of older sibling]. He caught up faster than [name of older sibling] because of full day (Transcript PI321).

**MOTHER:**...in the home I can’t speak in English. Okay, second, I take her to the school and correct English okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** So she’s learning English at school? At home it’s hard to teach your children English because it’s not your first language?

**MOTHER:** Yes. English is much better now (Transcript PI331).

**Enhanced Child Readiness for Grade 1.**

Finally, several parents spoke about the role FDELK is playing in getting their child ready for grade 1. Acquiring the experience of remaining in school for the full day, learning the routine, and developing the ability to follow instructions were noted:

**MOTHER:** I think that, she’s the type of kid that if she had gone in grade one without the full-day kindergarten, she would have had more challenges in grade 1. So I think that now she’s a lot more used to it and now she is used to being at school all day and having the two work periods with the free time in between. So she’s more used to the schedule so the next year when she goes, and it’s pretty much all work, I think it’s going to be less of a culture shock (Transcript PI302).

**Parent-Level Benefits**

The themes that emerged representing parent-level benefits suggest that according to parents, FDELK may have a wider impact than previously captured in the literature. That is, parents reported that they not only became more involved in their children’s learning, but felt more supported in their role as a working parent and/or a student, more confident in their ca-
pacity to support their child’s learning and healthy development, and experienced lower stress. Below, I highlight several of these benefits:

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. And for you as a parent, how has full-day kindergarten benefited you?
**MOTHER:** I had a lot of time to myself for studying and doing my chores.
**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.
**MOTHER:** The time that mothers usually need desperately!
**INTERVIEWER:** Um, so let’s say that you didn’t have full-day kindergarten, if it was a half day, how would you make time for you to study?
**MOTHER:** It would have been difficult.
**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, it would have been difficult, so this program has enabled you to study and then in the future continue to work?
**MOTHER:** Yes! (Transcript PI321).

**INTERVIEWER:** What are the most important or best benefits of the full-day kindergarten program for you as a parent?
**MOTHER:** The best? I find that I can go to work...I mean the fee, the cost of child care is too much for me to work with half-day (Transcript PI315).

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, what about for yourself as a mom? Any positive changes as a result of participating in the full-day kindergarten program?
**MOTHER:** As a mom? Like I said, I learn how to teach. Now I can teach my younger son how to start reading, like, all of a sudden I heard her sounding words when we read books together from school (Transcript PI308).

**FATHER:** Because we have done the home daycare we have had some bad examples. Basically, all of our kids, we know from the time they get onto the bus they are in the school system. It’s less time with the home care provider. We worry less because we know that they are safe and sound (Transcript PI306).

In addition, several parents noted positive changes in their interaction with their child:

**MOTHER:** [Name of KG child] is now really outspoken now. His speech is very strong. When he is communicating with me and his dad, he knows the appropriate words to use. A couple of examples...if we say things that is not correct, he will say, ‘Mommy this is not the way. You say this way!’ He is more communicating now. And he is using his words right. He also has the praise words. He says, ‘mommy I love you.’ Before full day, he had short sentences. Now, he says, ‘Mommy I love you so much. Tell me what to do...I can help you!’ He is independent now.
**INTERVIEWER:** So it sounds like the quality of your interaction with [name of kindergarten child] is more rich. He is telling you, ‘Mommy I love you, I want to help you!'
MOTHER: Yes! We are, communication wise, we are more open now, we are communicating more due to the full-day kindergarten. He is learning more words. He struggled before, but right now he is learning more words. My relationship with him is much stronger (Transcript PI314).

INTERVIEWER: Anything else? You talked about, you know, having more time for you at home? Does that allow you to focus on other things with that time? MOTHER: Because when they come home, I already have things more organized. When they come home from school, I have more time in the afternoons to be with them. We spend time together. I can focus on them (Transcript PI304).

One parent spoke about the opportunity the FDELK gave her to address some of her ongoing health concerns, suggesting that parental health and well-being can be impacted by how early childhood education and care programs are delivered to families:

INTERVIEWER: So you mentioned before that you now have the time to go the gym? MOTHER: Yeah, so I got up, I have to do something! Um, because I have high blood pressure now (Transcript PI314).

Overall, the implications of these parent-level benefits are significant, and suggest that these outcomes should not be ignored. By paying attention to how programs impact parents’ own well-being in addition to children’s outcomes, we can begin to capture a more complete picture of program effects observed across the interrelated ecology of the child’s environment.

Family-Level Benefits

At the family-level, parents most commonly reported the role that FDELK has played in enhancing the overall quality of family daily life, reducing the family’s overall experience of daily stress, and eliminating or reducing the financial burden of child care costs:

MOTHER: The fact that this year, we can drop her off and pick her up at the end of the day... it just made everybody’s life so much easier and smoother.
INTERVIEWER: Stress levels are lower? FATHER: Much lower! (Transcript PI302)
**INTERVIEWER:** How did full-day kindergarten make your life as a parent easier? Earlier you talked about how the savings in child care cost is huge.

**MOTHER:** mm-hmm.

**INTERVIEWER:** ...because day-care is very costly.

**MOTHER:** Huge. Yeah, and being a single mother, I was worried about how I was going to make ends meet (Transcript PI322).

Another FDELK benefit that is related to accessing child care services is the ability to choose from a larger pool of potential caregivers because the mid-day pickup was eliminated for children enrolled in the full day program. One family spoke about their ability to choose higher quality caregivers given that they have more options to choose from:

**FATHER:** I think I should mention this too...The kids were for a while watched for by my mother, which was wonderful because at one point we lost faith in home daycares and the other options were too expensive or didn’t meet our timeline. My mother developed terminal cancer, this was past November, and so it’s been a rough time. And basically she got too sick to take care of children. She has trouble even walking.

**MOTHER:** She also developed a brain tumour, which affected her memory and cognitive skills.

**INTERVIEWER:** How long did she care for your kids?

**FATHER:** For a few months. And she loved it! And the kids of course loved it! But my mother got ill and so we approached the current home care provider that had watched our kids during the summer months.

**INTERVIEWER:** So your family already knew her?

**MOTHER:** Yes!

**FATHER:** We went to her and said, “I know we said that we only wanted you for the summer but please take us.”

**MOTHER:** And so we were very lucky that she took us.

**FATHER:** And had it been half-day kindergarten, she probably wouldn’t have taken us because she is big on the child-adult ratio. So because of the full-day kindergarten, she was able to take on my kids. You are so limited with the home care providers who are willing to accommodate the schedule for half-day kindergarten. We can tell you some horror stories! And it’s like so this one has opened our door for choosing. You can be more picky and choosy (Transcript PI306).

**Challenges**

In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of parents’ experiences with the FDELK program, it was critical to understand aspects of their experiences that were challenging or concerning for them. Given that FDELK was in its initial year of implementation, the chal-
Challenges encountered by families may point to gaps in the implementation of the envisioned FDELK model, including the extent to which children experienced a seamless day across their early learning and care components of their day and the extent to which the FDELK teams worked with extended day teams worked together to plan and deliver a common program.

As shown in Table 6, overall, parents reported fewer challenges compared to benefits of FDELK. However, some of the reported challenges appeared to have a ripple effect, in that the entire family system was affected, and other challenges appeared to be related to important aspects of the FDELK design and implementation. Therefore, the level of impact and/or significance of these challenges must be considered in addition to how often they occurred across families. Generally, child-level challenges stemmed from aspects of children’s daily life, whereas parent-level challenges were more varied and encompassed not only practical aspects of parents’ daily lives, but also the challenges associated with getting involved in children’s learning, interactions with the school, and specific characteristics of the FDELK program. Family-level challenges appeared to originate from child-level challenges.

Table 6

Challenges of Participating in FDELK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes/Codes</th>
<th>No. of Families (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child-Level Challenges</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Care Skills</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napping</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toileting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Progress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Transition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent-Level Challenges</strong></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes/Codes</td>
<td>No. of Families (n=21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parenting Stress</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-Family Relationship</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Satisfaction with Child’s Progress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family-Level Challenges</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaotic Family Life</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Child-Level Challenges**

Child-level challenges mirrored the normative challenges that are often associated with the mastery of key developmental tasks specific to the preschool period. Challenges associated with eating, napping, and toileting were commonly reported by parents. In particular, several parents expressed serious concern about the way in which naps were removed from children’s routine at school, and the impact that this had on the child’s routine at home:

**MOTHER:** Well at first they allowed kids to nap...the kids were used to their blankets and pillows then they said, they can’t have their blankets anymore...no more security items. That was hard for them. And then eventually they said, “No more naps!” Like the older one was already not napping. But [name of JK child] loves his nap time! **INTERVIEWER:** So what happens at school when he is tired? Have you heard from the teachers about this? **MOTHER:** Well I know for a fact that [name of JK child] has fallen asleep in class more than once. The teachers wake him up so then he is cranky. **FATHER:** For example, they did a field trip to the community centre to watch a charity hockey game and [name of JK child] passed out on the teacher’s lap. They think it’s the most adorable thing right? But it shows you that he is tired (Transcript PI306).

Additionally, a few parents described their child’s initial transition to school as very challenging. Characteristics of the child, including anxious temperament and limited preschool experience, were thought to have contributed to the difficult transition:

**INTERVIEWER:** Ok. So she didn’t eat? **MOTHER:** And she wouldn’t use the bathroom unless I was there. She wouldn’t let anyone take her. We had to cut back to half day for a while. But I felt that a full day was important. So we still did cut back but...I didn’t let it go. I talked to the principal
again. I had to go...they offer a multidisciplinary team that rotates across the Early Years Centres. They have a social worker. They have someone from Peel Children’s Mental Health. They have a speech-language pathologist. They have a social worker at the school so that was my first step, speaking with the social worker. Um, social worker and we tried all kinds of things. She suggested we go there and I went there. I spoke to many people. It was hard for me. I didn’t know how much of this was anxiety and what was behavioural...what was “I want to stay home” or “I am not ready for this”(Transcript PI332).

**INTERVIEWER:** So what was full-day kindergarten like at the start?
**MOTHER:** Uh, first month, uh, too much problem. Too much crying.
**INTERVIEWER:** Oh dear...
**MOTHER:** Not eating. September and October, never eating. Don’t touch lunch box.
**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.
**MOTHER:** Yeah sometime too much crying, sometime the teacher call me peeppe.
**INTERVIEWER:** Okay so she had accidents?
**MOTHER:** Sometime vomiting. Never eat.
**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.
**MOTHER:** After three month in full day different. Not stay home, go to the school. After two months.
**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, after three months.
**MOTHER:** I think three or four months, yeah, her teacher very nice. Teacher very nice. After two months, sometimes sick, she says “Stay home?” “No, no, no, I want to go to school, I want to go to school.”
**INTERVIEWER:** OK so the beginning was tough but it got easier. Why was it so tough at the start?
**MOTHER:** Yeah, beginning was tough. Beginning too much problem because she didn’t know how to be away. She didn’t do daycare before (Transcript PI334).

**Parent-Level Challenges**

**Parent Involvement.**

Parent involvement was on the minds of many parents. Parents expressed a strong desire to have more involvement in their child’s schooling in a variety of ways, and their struggles to do so was a cause of serious concern for them. More specifically, parents reported that they wished that they could take part in school activities, volunteer for the school council, and provide opportunities for the child to socialize with their peers. One parent described how her parent involvement challenges negatively impacted her family’s ability to be active members of the school community:
**MOTHER:** Before [name of kindergarten child]’s first teacher left for maternity leave I was trying my best to go there just to, at least be there for that one day. And it just so happened that she had the baby earlier so by the time I had that one day off, it was too late. I had to wait to take the day off until I felt that it wouldn’t impact that kids I was responsible for in my work. It kind of made me wish I was able to go more, you know, ‘cause you could see in the school like even the YMCA girl, she volunteers to do stuff in the school too. It’s an amazing school. Yeah so you have parents that are in the community that come, they are part of the parent council. Those one’s call me too and they’re like, okay can [name of kindergarten child] come for play date? But her schedule is so busy so it doesn’t really happen all the time. So just wishing to have more time to integrate with the school and participate (Transcript PI307).

Additionally, having regular, direct contact with teachers appeared to be an important aspect of parent involvement and one parent noted that this was more challenging in the school context compared to the daycare setting:

**MOTHER:** With the daycare, which was actually fabulous, literally I could call them and be able to speak to her. Which was like, that’s another piece. And I had direct contact with them all the time. But with the school not so much. I get that they need to be independent. But they make you feel like it’s intrusive. So I’ve never called to check in but at that age I think that they still need that, especially with us.

**INTERVIEWER:** What makes you refrain from calling the school?

**MOTHER:** I don’t know, you know the voicemail and “the who do you want to direct your call to” and how you have to wait for a response for them to call you at a time that is convenient for them.

**INTERVIEWER:** Right.

**MOTHER:** And with me, it’s not like I can drop in and say “hey” because of my work hours. So, unless I’m on the phone most of my messages are passed on by my husband, so he can go in and I say, “ask them this, ask them that.”

**INTERVIEWER:** So there are steps to get to the teacher, you can’t just call and reach the teachers directly?

**MOTHER:** No. (Transcript PI305).

Furthermore, parents reported that they wanted more contact with teachers in order to monitor their child’s progress:

**INTERVIEWER:** As a parent, how do you know what’s going on in the classroom?

**MOTHER:** I don’t. I’ve been to the parent interviews but we talk mostly about his behaviour, but it’s improved so I’m not worried about that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.

**MOTHER:** I really don’t. I mean I went through the day and you kind of see what they do and I thought that was really interesting, I think that’s a good idea.
INTERVIEWER: But you don’t have a sense of what he is learning on as time goes on?
MOTHER: They don’t send parents information. He gets those little books, you know what I mean, those little tiny books and I see a few colouring, like I really don’t see him learning how to print, like you know, structured pages. And that’s why I was saying, I really kind of question this play-based curriculum. Now I don’t know if it’s my kids the only one who is not coming home with these things. He could be doing it and just not bring it home. I don’t know. You know?
INTERVIEWER: Okay, so you are not sure if it’s being done in the classroom?
MOTHER: But then again, my son seems to be really responsible, so if he did something I think he would bring it home (Transcript PI313).

Parents also expressed the desire to take advantage of school programs and resources but felt that they struggled to access information in a timely manner:

INTERVIEWER: You mentioned earlier that because you didn’t know about [the drop-in program] earlier you didn’t attend with [your older children] ...
MOTHER: Yeah I could have come a year before...but I didn’t know about it.
INTERVIEWER: What would make it easier for parents to know about this program?
MOTHER: That’s the problem. That’s the problem. Today it’s everything with the internet right? And like me, I guess, a lot of people still don’t have internet, right?
INTERVIEWER: Right.
MOTHER: I have the computer and I could have the internet, but it’s something that I don’t do.
INTERVIEWER: You are not on the computer on a regular basis.
MOTHER: Yeah. So it’s something that I don’t have the patience just to sit there...and look for things.
INTERVIEWER: I understand.
MOTHER: So I guess, a lot of people, at least in this area are like me, so it’s hard for us to find out about certain stuff, right? (Transcript PI304).

Finally, parents whose first language was not English reported the challenges of participating in parent involvement activities due to the language barrier:

INTERVIEWER: Okay so before you were talking you were saying...because English is your second language sometimes you have trouble understanding at the meetings and things like that...
MOTHER: Yeah, then after, I ask another people, they are saying, yeah.
INTERVIEWER: Are there other parents that speak your language?
MOTHER: Yeah, language and sometimes if you speaking [referring to interviewer] I can understand. I can understand you. And in the meetings they are going fast right and I cannot understand. If I don’t understand, I can’t ask for you, right. And can’t in the school right meeting time, okay?
**Play-Based Curriculum.**

In addition to the challenges related to parent involvement, several parents raised concerns about the play-based curriculum. These parents reported that they expected to see more structured, formal literacy and numeracy tasks to be incorporated into the curriculum. This issue was quite salient for parents who had experienced very different schooling systems in their home country. For example, one parent felt that her child’s learning progress was impeded by her participation in FDELK:

---

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so when you compare your daughter to your son, you are finding that she is taking a little bit longer to learn academic skills?

**MOTHER:** That’s right, that’s what I’m saying but still she was progressing by the time she finished her Montessori [in the family’s home country] but then after coming here...

**INTERVIEWER:** So even though she was progressing slower than your son, she was making better progress in the Montessori setting compared to junior kindergarten here with the full-day program. So the junior kindergarten setting was disappointing for you?

**MOTHER:** Right, so I was worried about it (Transcript PI320).

---

**Parenting Stress.**

Finally, parents reported experiencing stress stemming from their daily parenting tasks and concerns about the child’s safety and well-being. For example, many parents re-

---
ported that they struggled to prepare lunches and snacks on a daily basis and worried about whether or not their child was eating enough at school:

**MOTHER:** The only difficulty I would say is waking up in the morning to get the lunch, breakfast, and everything prepared. Sometimes I prepare in the evening. But sometimes there is a food that you can’t prepare in the evening. Mornings are stressful. Preparing snack one, snack two and the lunch, everything together in the bag. Unlike before it was just grab cookie, grab juice, put it in the box and you’re off and now you have to think, “okay, what will he eat? What will he eat with this?” [laughs] (Transcript PI315).

**MOTHER:** Another part of the transition is that we have lunch issues…Yeah, she doesn’t eat; she generally brings her whole lunch home. Like at daycare, they were giving her stuff, and they were making sure that she would eat and give her something else to supplement it. But with school, we took snacks away, and she stills brings her lunch home every day. She’s starving when she gets home, she’s starving. [laughs] She’ll go to my mom’s and she’ll expect like a whole home cooked meal…Yeah, so I don’t know if it’s because she’s tired, or if it’s because she’s doing other things, and that was one of the issues that I discussed with the teachers right off the bat. And she said, ‘you can’t force her, you can’t’. But if she’s not eating, I mean that’s a big concern for us obviously. I worry about that a lot (Transcript PI305).

Parents also worried about the child’s safety to and from school:

**MOTHER:** I was concerned about her being so young and getting, getting on the bus and things like that. I had her father go there and make sure that, stand in the background and make sure that she got on the proper bus for the first week.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yes.

**MOTHER:** And I was worried about that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Of course...

**MOTHER:** In the morning I knew that the woman was going to walk her, from the house, 5 houses up to the school. I wasn’t concerned about that. Um, but my biggest fear was that she wasn’t going to get on the bus afterschool. And I was very fearful of that for a while. I still am kind of fearful of that and we did have an incident.

**INTERVIEWER:** An incident?

**MOTHER:** [laughs] Which I, I don’t want it to look bad on the program that she goes to after school. But I showed up to pick her up. Oh god it was winter and they went and got my son. He came to the door and I was waiting. And no[name of kindergarten child]. And so I said to the manager, um, ‘Where’s [name of kindergarten child]?’ ‘Oh, she didn’t come out?’ and then he went back again and I could hear him calling her. About the sixth time, and he’s walking around that I started panicking and I threw off my shoes and went back and just started you know, looking behind every door in the bathrooms and in the change rooms, and asking everyone, ‘Did you see [name of kindergarten child]?’ nobody had seen her. Kids couldn’t remember if they’d seen her or not. And [laughs] I was, like I was just in a state and that point
and other parents where you know were freaking out also. And um, I don’t know, I
don’t even know how long, how much time passed but it was a longest time of my life.
And my son couldn’t remember seeing her. And so then one kid said, ‘oh last time I
saw her was on the bus.’ So they went out and sure enough, she’d fallen asleep and
nobody looked back when they got out of the bus, and thank god she’d stayed asleep
but because this was like almost 6 o’clock when I got in and they’d pulled in at 3:30
or whatever.

INTERVIEWER: So she had slept for good three hours?
MOTHER: Mm-hmm. And thank god it wasn’t +40. Or +40. You know, like it was,
she had her winter coat on, it was winter, she had her winter coat on.

INTERVIEWER: Your heart must have stopped.
MOTHER: I’ve never been so scared in my life. But I mean and they were horrified.
The manager was horrified, the poor, the guy who was driving the bus, and they are
so good with the kids there, and you know, and he, he’s a twenty year old guy and he,
I mean he was just, he was shocked he was so horrified that he’d let that happen. And
you know, and my girlfriend said to me, ‘why don’t you take them out of there? Why
are they?’ But you know what, they changed a lot of things, they’d never had kids in
kindergarten before. They’ve never had kids under six, so after that happened they
changed a lot of their routines of when the kids come in from the buses and stuff like
that. So I trusted them well enough, to, that that type of thing wasn’t going to happen
again (Participant PI322).

Family-Level Challenges

Several parents reported struggling with disruptions to their family life. Some of these
challenges appeared to be an extension of child-level challenges that impacted the entire fam-
ily, such as the child not having an opportunity to nap at school, which, in turn, led to a cha-
otic family routine at home:

INTERVIEWER: So you were saying earlier that when he comes home feeling tired,
he puts himself to bed?
MOTHER: That’s the other thing! We have told him that he has to stay awake. But
that child when he is exhausted when you go look for him, he is sleeping in his bed.
FATHER: Sometimes he doesn’t eat dinner because he is sleeping. He will have a
snack in home care so he might not be that hungry when we get home. If he is not
starving he will choose sleep over food. So some days he will not eat dinner. So the bad thing about that
is at 9 o’clock when we are getting ready for bed, he gets up and wants us to play
with him.
MOTHER: So he’s got a 3-hour nap so he can’t understand why we are sleeping.
INTERVIEWER: So that really interrupts the routine for him and also for the fam-
ily!
FATHER: Our flow has been broken since that...(Transcript PI306).
Others were associated with complicated child care arrangements due to the lack of an extended-day program:

**MOTHER**: At school they have the afternoon program but they don’t have the morning program for kids in kindergarten. So it’s difficult for us to arrange care for her in the morning. She goes to my sister’s. Her in-laws take all three. I have nephews that go to the school as well. So they take all three kids or my husband is taking all three kids. So, mornings have been hectic for us because I have to be on the 8:13 train. So that was one of our issues. Our family routine is not so smooth this year...

**INTERVIEWER**: If there was before-school care available at school, you would utilize it?

**MOTHER**: Perfect. Yes, we would utilize it. Yeah, I must have called the class three or four times, and there is just no interest in it, there is no nothing, they have never had it for that age group (Transcript PI305).

**Summary**

A broad scope of child-, parent-, and family-level outcomes were captured from parents’ observations of their children and families as they participated in the FDELK program. In general, parents identified more benefits than challenges of participating in the early learning program. Child-level challenges appeared to reflect common normative adjustments that children experience as they transition to school; some of these challenges appeared to impact the entire family system. For parents, parent involvement barriers were a common challenge. The findings pertaining to benefits generally suggest that many important program effects may be missed if we continue to emphasize children’s academic achievement and parenting behaviour as key outcomes when investigating the effectiveness of early childhood interventions. According to parents, the FDELK program not only facilitates improvements in children’s development and learning, it also supports parents’ capacity to work or study and influences the well-being of the family system.
In this section, I examine parents’ perspectives regarding key program participation experiences that were thought to contribute to reported program benefits and challenges.

A myriad of themes emerged when parents were asked to attribute benefits and challenges that they experienced to specific FDELK program processes or features. This section of the template was the most difficult to code, organize and synthesize, as each code could be captured under multiple themes, and the emerging themes could be hierarchically organized in multiple ways. Therefore, this section of the template evolved continuously as codes were reworded, merged, and at times eliminated as new textual data were coded. Despite my own lived experience of what felt like a chaotic mess of codes and themes, the three overarching process themes that were present in the initial template remained in the final template with some changes to the naming of the themes (see Appendix D).

The first overarching process theme, *early learning environment*, captured aspects of children’s direct learning experiences in the FDELK program. The second overarching theme, *parent engagement and support*, expanded to capture a range of parents’ own experiences with the FDELK program and the broader school community. The third overarching process theme, *family life*, captured aspects of children’s, parents’, and families’ activities and routines that they engaged in on a regular, daily basis.

Together, these three overarching themes represent the main pathways through which participation in FDELK appeared to influence program outcomes reported by parents. Further descriptions of individual process themes are provided below.
Pathway 1 Process Themes Associated with Benefits

In pathway 1, program processes primarily operated through children’s experiences in the early learning environment. As shown in Table 7 and Figure 4, three process themes emerged for this pathway based on parents’ descriptions of children’s early learning experiences.

Table 7
Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment Process Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Themes/Codes (Associated with Benefits of FDELK Participation)</th>
<th>No. of Families (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing Length of Early Learning Program</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Day of School</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Day of Social Interactions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Day of Learning</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Day of Self-Care Activities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Quality of Early Learning Program</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Motivation for Learning Through Play</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Scope of Learning Activities With Two Teachers</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Individual Attention from Two Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Adults in Classroom to Manage Behaviour</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent &amp; Clear Behavioural Expectations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Two Teachers to Foster Positive Interactions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Positive Child-Teacher Relationships</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of ECE Teacher in Classroom to Provide Climate of Nurturance</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Continuity of Children's Early Learning Experiences</td>
<td>3*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinated Curriculum/Joint Activities</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Process Themes/Codes (Associated with Benefits of FDELK Participation) | No. of Families (n=21)
---|---
Co-Location | 3

*Note.* This frequency reflects the perspectives of two Best Start families in addition to one FDELK family which was using the extended-day program. The perspectives of two Best Start families were examined to supplement the limited sampling of FDELK families who were using the extended-day program.

**Figure 4.** Pathway 1: Early learning environment.

**Increasing Length of the Early Learning Program.**

The first theme, *increasing length of the early learning program*, pertained to the additional length of time that children spent in the kindergarten program as compared to the traditional half-day program. This change was an aspect of the early learning program that was most immediately apparent to many parents. Parents felt that as a result of extending the time that children spent in the early learning program, children had greater opportunities to engage in learning activities, social interactions with peers and teachers, and practice self-
care activities. By far, parents most frequently attributed outcomes to enhanced learning and socialization opportunities within the full-day schedule:

**MOTHER:** The other thing is that with the full-day kindergarten, there is more time for the teachers to explain the concepts to children, which is why I think they get things faster, because we have the half-day program to compare with from our oldest to these two. And actually the middle one was in the half-day last year (Transcript PI306).

**MOTHER:** I think they have a lot more time to do a lot of things. If it’s half days, I mean I work in a half day program and usually from what I see with the kindergarteners everything is like fast paced, they have to go, go go, do this and...yeah they never really get everything done that they’re supposed to even if it’s on the plan... I can see the results ’cause she comes and you know she’s able to read certain things. She tells me details of what she does (Transcript PI307).

**MOTHER:** The full day; he has more knowledge, you know from it. I help him at home. My son. And the school gives him more knowledge, there is more practice time with full-day (Transcript PI303).

*Enhancing Quality of Early Learning Program.*

In contrast, the second process theme, *enhancing quality of early learning program,* was not primarily associated with the length of the early learning program, but rather aspects of the program that enhanced the quality of children’s learning experiences. As shown in Figure 4, two core program components, integrated staff teams and play-based curriculum, were primarily associated with enhanced program quality. For instance, one of the most commonly reported early learning experience that appeared to be quite impactful for parents was related to how much children enjoyed participating in the FDELK program. Parents attributed to the use of play as an effective medium for engaging children’s interests and promoting their curiosity for learning:

**MOTHER:** I can tell at that at that school particularly it’s a good school, because she comes home, she’s very happy. She tells me certain things. She wants to get involved...she’s always reminding me, you know this is what we need to do, this is what needs to be brought in. If something’s not brought in on time she makes sure, somewhere along the line it works. I mean so it’s a good thing. I could tell she is loving it
and she’s loving [before and after-school care] because she doesn’t want me to pick her up earlier.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think she loves going to school and the before and after-school program so much?

MOTHER: I think it’s the way she is taught. They have a play-based curriculum and basically she learns by doing what loves the most…play! It’s very fun for her. She wants to learn more. I wish learning was this fun for everyone! (Transcript PI307).

Additionally, parents felt that having two adults in the classroom meant that the teaching team had better capacity to deliver the curriculum using a wide range of activities, monitor and respond to children’s behaviour, provide more individual attention to each child, and foster positive interactions in the classroom:

MOTHER: Yes. Well it’s not just more dedicated hours. It’s really the wide range of really engaging activities that kids do with the teachers. I mean they do so many things. They do experiments in class, they talk about plants and they have somebody that comes in and reads to them and then they have a book discussion afterwards about what they just read and they have somebody that comes in and does music with them. So there is so many…they are exposed to so many things.

FATHER: Exposure to even more activities...

MOTHER: I think that they probably, if they didn’t have the two teachers in there all the time, they probably wouldn’t have the opportunities to do the really cool things because they really need…they need two people in there to keep all eyes on them. The additional hours make it possible to fit in more activities, but time alone doesn’t guarantee that what kids do in the class is really engaging for them. It’s about the teachers who facilitate the learning and the positive interactions in the classroom! (Transcript PI302).

Furthermore, although parents noted that children did not perceive any differences between the two teachers, they felt that the presence of the ECE teacher in the kindergarten classroom enhanced the emotional climate of the classroom, as the ECE teacher was perceived to be particularly well trained to promote a nurturing environment for young children:

FATHER: Excellent! Very much needed for that age group. My kids don’t know the difference between the teachers. They say, “I have two teachers!” We found that they are really good. There are days when I get to pick up the kids from school because I am working in the area and it’s great because you have one teacher who is able to walk the bus kids and the other teacher stay with the other kids. I think that the kids like having two teachers – they have two sources to go to now.
MOTHER: Yeah, so I guess they got more attention from the teachers now. As far as they are concerned, they know that they are both teachers. But I think from the ECE the kids are getting more nurturance.

FATHER: So even though the kids are in school, they still get the nurturance and comfort from the ECE teacher. That’s definitely good for the program (Transcript PI306).

Enhancing Continuity of Children’s Early Learning Experiences.

The third theme, enhancing continuity of children’s early learning experiences, was not widely endorsed by all parents in the sample. This was primarily due to the very limited enrolment of children in the extended-day program even though many families required child care coverage for before- and after-school hours. Given that only one FDELK family was using the extended-day program, I used transcript data from two other families in the Best Start sample to generate codes pertaining to the processes associated with the onsite Best Start Child Care program. As noted earlier, the length of the early learning and care components differed between the seamless FDELK and extended-day program (i.e., full-day early learning + onsite before- and after-school care) and the seamless Best Start program (i.e., half-day early learning + onsite care for remaining hours of day); however, children in both arrangements experienced a seamless early learning and care program that stretched beyond school hours.

Across the early learning and child care programs, continuity was perceived to be enhanced due to two integration features. First, all three families noted some level of coordination between the two programs with respect to the delivery of the curriculum:

MOTHER: They have really good coordination. Even recently, the kindergarten classes had a spring concert and they always invite the Best Start program. So the smaller children take part – so there is a strong connection between the two programs. And I think that there have been other joint activities (Transcript PI323).

MOTHER: ...I noticed that they go with the theme of the school, so, whenever the curriculum says that this is what their learning about. Like if it’s about fishes, then
she tries activities that’s based around that. Like an aquarium, they get to play fishing, crafts. Lots of stuff (Transcript PI307).

Secondly, co-location of the early learning and child care programs was also mentioned as desirable by all three families to promote horizontal continuity for children throughout the day:

**INTERVIEWER:** What features of the Best Start child care were most important to you?

**MOTHER:** Really, location was a key factor and the fact that I knew that they are attached to the school. I really wanted to get her in there. And I knew it would make my life and [name of child’s] easier when she started kindergarten. So location was key...it’s terrible to say!!

**INTERVIEWER:** Well, I think that’s very common and a valid reason. Parents don’t want to complicate their day and the child’s day any more than they have to?

**MOTHER:** My other daughter has been in the after school program at PLASP, so I also didn’t want to pick my kids at two different locations.

**INTERVIEWER:** OK, so co-location also meant one drop-off and pick-up arrangement for both kids. And [name of kindergarten child] would remain at one location throughout the day. This was important to you (Transcript PI323).

In the case of two Best Start families, children were enrolled in the onsite child care program prior to entering kindergarten. This promoted vertical continuity for children as they transitioned to school:

**MOTHER:** I didn’t have any issues with [name of kindergarten child] – no separation anxiety and the transition to school was smooth. And she was already in the school building, which helped. She was familiar with the setting and the routine. And she wanted to go to kindergarten because it meant that she got to go the big girl classroom (Transcript PI323).

**INTERVIEWER:** How did he manage the transition to kindergarten?

**FATHER:** Actually he didn’t really have a separation issue. He transitioned into that very well. I think it had been because he had been in Best Start for you know at least a year before that and it’s something that [name of sibling] does. [Name of sibling] has been in school and he kind of sees her doing that same sort of thing too, so I think that it really wasn’t that big a deal for him, going to kindergarten, because just basically, instead of going to this room, we are going to walk over to this room and you know. He was already in the building because of the Best Start program, it is located at the school. In terms of separation anxiety from us, I think he had already gotten over that a long time ago (PI316).
Interestingly other integration features, such as seamless communication across staff teams and implementation of a common behavioural guideline were not consistently reported by parents. Outside of the FDELK and extended-day programs, several parents reported that having a consistent behaviour management approach between the home and child care settings was an important consideration for choosing child care providers in the community.

**Pathway 2 Process Themes Associated with Benefits**

Although the process themes in Pathway 1 reflected parents’ observation of children’s early learning experiences, Pathway 2 processes reflected parents’ own direct experiences with various aspects of the FDELK program. As shown in Table 8 and Figure 5 below, parents reported experiences a range of experiences that were perceived to be positive. Based on these reports, four process themes emerged.

Table 8

**Pathway 2: Parent Engagement and Support Process Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Themes/Codes (Associated with Benefits of FDELK Participation)</th>
<th>No. of Families (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 2: Parent Engagement and Support</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering Parent Engagement</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication about Child’s Progress &amp; Adjustment</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely &amp; Family Friendly Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Two Teachers to Communicate</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider Timeframe to Participate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invitation to Participate in PI Activities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Learning Activities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcoming School Environment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to Translation Services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Parents’ Well-Being</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring the Well-Being of Child/ren</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process Themes/Codes (Associated with Benefits of FDELK Participation)</td>
<td>No. of Families ($n=21$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observing Children's Development</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving &amp; Giving Social Support</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending to Self-Care Needs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting Parents' Parenting Role</strong></td>
<td><strong>9</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reducing Child Care Hours/Costs</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Trust in Program Staff</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending Quality Time with Child</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Options for Home-Based Care</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing Child Care Registry</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Fostering Parent Engagement.**

The first theme, *fostering parent engagement*, captured aspects of parents’ experiences and interactions that promoted their ability to be involved in children’s learning and more broadly to be engaged with the school community. Among these experiences, communication appeared to be an important aspect of parents’ interaction with the school community. For example, many parents reported that communication about the child’s progress and adjustment in the early learning program was both helpful from a parent involvement perspective, but also from the perspective of supporting parents’ well-being:

> **INTERVIEWER:** Is there anything that you would want to change or make better or easier for you as a family? If you had a magic wand, what would you wish for?
> **MOTHER:** Uh, there is nothing to change, like I don’t have any negative thing to say about the new problem. What was really helpful was, um, I learned from teachers that every child has their own stage in doing stuff, um, different things and it all comes which, when they are ready, even if they are not ready and you force them, then that’s not going to happen.
> **INTERVIEWER:** Okay.
> **MOTHER:** So they have taught me that.
> **INTERVIEWER:** Okay, how did they share this with you?
> **MOTHER:** Um, we were in, because they usually have parent teacher meetings so um, that’s one of the things that I’ve asked and that is what they told me.
> **INTERVIEWER:** Okay, that makes sense. Were you feeling anxious about getting her started on the academic stuff?
> **MOTHER:** Yeah. But I felt reassured after talking to the teachers that my child was on track and was making progress at school...I learned that she was coming along nicely in her own way at school (Transcript PI333).

Beyond the content of the communication, many parents emphasized characteristics that were described to be principles of effective communication. Specifically, parents emphasized that communication was most effective when it took place in a timely manner and
when the modality of communication was flexible, taking into consideration the communication preference of families:

**INTERVIEWER:** Can you tell me about your experience of communicating and keeping in touch with the teachers at the school?

**FATHER:** The note system works fine. They check the bags every day and if we have any concerns we can write a note. And they said that we are more than welcome to call them and they will call back. And to be honest, with the middle one, we think that he doesn’t feel pain very much. So he is a bit of a daredevil. So he will come into the classroom and his face is full of blood! And his teachers are like, “What happened!” She cleans him up and there is one cut here and one cut there...so she asks, “what happened?” “I ran into the brick wall!” “Well why didn’t you tell the teacher on duty outside?” “Why? I was fine!”

**MOTHER:** So that poor woman calls us from her home in the evening so tell us about any accidents that [name of child] may have had during the day and make sure that he is okay. They never wait too long to call. We get a lot of timely follow-up phone calls from the teachers, which is super helpful to us! (Transcript PI306).

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. Let me see if I can summarize what you have talked about so far...you like the longer school hours, the scheduling works better because it’s works with your son’s schedule, and there are two teachers, which you like because they engage the kids more. What other aspects of the full-day kindergarten program do you like?

**MOTHER:** Um, the other part is that, you get to know the teachers. The teachers will...she would not wait until the end of the term to let you know something. She’ll let you know if it happens right away and stuff like that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, the fact that the teachers communicate with you in a timely manner is helpful. How do they get in touch with you?

**MOTHER:** Um, there are different ways, like even at school they had sent out preferable way that you can get connected with them so either by e-mail, either by phone um, she sent a note, stuff like that.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. Okay, so they’ll work with what works best for the family?

**MOTHER:** Yeah, for the family.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so how does that help you as a parent when you have that information right away, as opposed to later on?

**MOTHER:** Like uh, when you have that information right away then you act on whatever the situation is right away instead of waiting for it, um, waiting a long time when you get that information to act on it. Then you can deal with whatever situation it is, you can try to manage it right away instead of waiting a long time to get that done. Probably it might escalate or whatever, or get out of control so it’s better to...

**INTERVIEWER:** Deal with it right away?

**MOTHER:** Yeah, rather than waiting and possibly getting worse.

**INTERVIEWER:** So the timing is very important.
Moreover, several parents attributed their positive communication experiences to specific features of the FDELK program. For example, parents felt that not only did children have two adults in the classroom to go to, but parents also had the option of communicating with either teacher, depending on who was available on the particular day:

MOTHER: I direct them both as teachers and you know that the kids have to respect both of them and listen to both of them and if I ever have to talk to teachers and one is not available, I talk to the other one. I see them like that. I know.
INTERVIEWER: So you feel comfortable talking to either teacher, depending on who is available?
MOTHER: Yes, yes.
INTERVIEWER: I guess that gives you another person to speak too?
MOTHER: Exactly.
INTERVIEWER: And do you find that the teachers are on the same page?
MOTHER: Yeah, pretty much. They work together and communicate with each all the time, I think (Transcript PI310).

Notably, only one parent reported that the increased length of the FDELK program provided a wider timeframe for parents to communicate with teachers:

INTERVIEWER: Are you able to stay in touch with the teachers?
MOTHER: Yeah there’s communication, I’m always involved ‘cause I mean it gives us a lot more time to communicate with the teachers because they’re there all day with the kids.
INTERVIEWER: Okay, so because it’s a full-day program, you have a wider timeframe to communicate and participate?
MOTHER: Yeah (Transcript PI307).

Other aspects of parents’ experiences that were linked to benefits included partaking in family literacy activities and participating in school-based parent involvement activities:

MOTHER: It’s nice to see that she can, and she’s trying, like you know when they eh, sound the words? [laughs] I never heard that one but like.
INTERVIEWER: Oh?
MOTHER: Like, when they’re like, um, like they read the um, what they do? Like they read agree, they sound a first, ‘aaa’ ‘ggg’ ’rrrr’.
INTERVIEWER: Then you put it all together!
MOTHER: And then you make it fast and it’s “agree.” Like it’s the first time I heard it.
Finally, one family reported that a welcoming school environment enhanced their level of comfort and willingness to engage with the school community:

**INTERVIEWER:** It really sounds like you are really comfortable with the school staff. Do you feel welcomed when you go into the school?

**FATHER:** Oh yeah, absolutely, the staff is great, like [name of school secretary] is the secretary and you know she’s very helpful like any time, any issues. She is always cheerful and helpful. If we brought the kids late, or if there’s something we have for-
Supporting Parents’ Well-Being.

Several aspects of parents experience with the school community appeared to support parents’ own well-being. In particular, the role that FDELK played in ensuring children’s well-being was particularly helpful to parents:

MOTHER: She would cry a lot at daycare. With drop offs, if her dad dropped her off she was okay. If I dropped her off she would cry. Like right to the bitter end when we left.

INTERVIEWER: So it’s surprising to hear that her transition to kindergarten was so smooth...

MOTHER: It totally rocked me. I couldn’t understand at all. I dropped her off at 8:40 or whatever it was and she was crying, and I was incredibly upset. I would pick her up and she wasn’t upset and she would say “Okay, see you Monday.” It was the strangest thing. I actually took her to a psychologist at one point when she was in daycare, it was that bad.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so it was really hard for her to separate from you...

MOTHER: She was having anxiety over it. Like we prepaid the daycare, we kept her enrolled and I said, “you know what, let me see what it’s all about, let’s give it a try, let’s see what they have to offer.” So I took her to the [kindergarten] orientation and she was like “yeah, I’m staying here.”

INTERVIEWER: There was something about kindergarten that captured her?

MOTHER: It was the openness and the brightness and just being able to like, “wow look at all these new things”.

INTERVIEWER: New things to play with?

MOTHER: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: That’s so interesting.

MOTHER: Yeah it was interesting.

INTERVIEWER: When you had her in daycare it must have been so hard for you to leave her.

MOTHER: It was. I would sit there for 10 minutes and I would have to say, “okay, my bus is leaving, my bus is leaving” and they would have to take her away, hold her while I ran out.

INTERVIEWER: And you would be on the train worrying about her?

MOTHER: Yeah. I had such a heavy heart going to work. Now, the guilt of leaving her…it’s dissipated. I feel like a different parent. I know she is well-cared for at school. I know she has fun there (Transcript PI305).

INTERVIEWER: So if I were to ask you...what’s the most important part of full-day kindergarten for you...what would you say?
MOTHER: Wow, that’s hard. [laughs] Well I don’t know, I think the most important part, I know this sounds a little lame…but to know that they are in a safe environment and having fun. For me at that age that is what I love and look for, far more than academically. They are babies, they’ll learn it. But for me it’s that you know, they are in a place where there is discipline but it’s also fun and they are safe. I consider that they are safe here at school.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, so when you are home, you know that your kids well care for? You don’t have to worry about their well-being?

MOTHER: That’s right. That makes a big difference for me as a mom (Transcript PI310).

MOTHER: When she goes to her, hugging, that time I’m happy. She’s never crying, no, she’s happy.

INTERVIEWER: She hugs her teachers and that makes you happy…to know that she is happy?

MOTHER: Yeah...But lots of girls are crying like that...she’s going happy.

INTERVIEWER: I bet! Lots of children have difficulty saying good bye to their moms and dads. But your daughter, you know that when she’s at school she’s having fun.

MOTHER: Fun and happy, the teachers um, very, very good teachers (Transcript PI331).

Similarly, parents described the joy and sense of fulfillment that they felt as they watched their child grow and develop throughout the year:

INTERVIEWER: So that’s good, so lots of benefits for her. What about for you two as parents? It sounds like it’s made your life easier? You mentioned not having to do the mid-day pick up and arrange for care in the afternoon?

MOTHER: I think that, I mean well it is easier to drop her off in one place, definitely the schedule is a bonus, but also for us, as I mentioned, we’ve seen a lot of positive changes in her.

INTERVIEWER: mm-hmm. So it sounds like it’s very important for you two as parents to know that [name of kindergarten child] is really developing and growing rapidly in the full day program. The convenience of the drop off and pick up is secondary?

MOTHER: I guess it’s just a delight to see her mature and develop into a person. A bit more of her personality coming out and she is getting more mature... Yeah. This year she is really a cool little kid with like her own thoughts and ideas, and we can sit and we can discuss her day and what goes on. And you know, you really kind of see the intellect and see her thinking and starting to process things (Transcript PI302).

Notably, only one parent reported that she benefited from the social support that she received from the FDELK program. Parents generally reported receiving and giving social
support in the context of other programs, such as family-based drop-in programs. Moreover, only one parent reported that had the ability to attend to her own needs as a result of the FDELK program. For this particular parent, the ability to take time for herself to manage her health issues was quite impactful and meaningful for her:

**MOTHER:** For me, I have time for myself now. Unlike before, I barely had time. Now I could schedule myself for something. Back then, at 11:30 the bus is right back! So I can’t even dash and go and walk. I was actually living for [name of kindergarten child] then. With the full-day, I have time. I have time to sit down and relax and do things on my own. I can hang around with my friends! Before, I never hang around with friends. I was living for my kids. Sometimes, you feel sad...is this how life is? With full-day, I have time for myself. I am able to schedule things that make me happy. After getting proper nutrition and medication, you know what, I have to be more active. So I go to the gym now because I have high blood pressure and my parents died too young. I would be able to control my health issues. So that is why I am doing. What I am doing now, so I can be there for them (Transcript PI314).

Supporting Parents’ Parenting Role.

Parents also reported aspects of their experiences with the FDELK that supporting their parenting responsibilities. By far, the most common element of support was reduction in child care hours stemming from the full-day schedule. The full-day schedule also opened up child care options. One family noted that because they no longer required their caregiver to offer the mid-day pick-up, they could select the caregiver from a wider pool of caregivers:

**MOTHER:** Some babysitters are happy to pick up kindergarten children mid-day at school and bring them back to their home but most are not.
**FATHER:** So it’s now easier to find a high quality home-care provider.
**INTERVIEWER:** So with the full-day schedule, your family is able to have a smoother routine and have a home care provider that you trust and is of a higher quality?
**FATHER:** Yes! Because you are so limited with the home care providers who are willing to accommodate the schedule for half-day kindergarten. We can tell you some horror stories! And so the full-day program has opened up our options for caregivers. You can be more picky and choosey (Transcript PI306).
Other aspects of support stemmed from the quality of the relationship between the family and
the school community. Parents reported that felt supported by the school because they could
trust the school staff to care for their children outside of the family context:

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. Any benefits for yourself as a parent? Aside from meeting
your scheduling needs?
**MOTHER:** Having someone else um, stimulate her, nurture her, while I am at work!
(Transcript PI305).

**FATHER:** And we love the teachers. We trust them with the kids completely, abso-
lutely no worries or concerns with them. So essentially we feel very secure that our
kids are basically in great hands all day. We have total trust in all the teachers,
they’re such good caregivers.
**FATHER:** It’s so nice to know that your kids are being looked after by people who,
like we feel deep down that they genuinely love our kids and genuinely, like you know
it’s not just a job. It’s almost like you know we’re dropping them off with family in a
way. They’re actually better than family (Transcript PI306).

**Pathway 3 Process Themes Associated with Benefits**

Pathway 3 captured aspects of children and parents’ daily life that were influenced by
the FDELK program (see Table 9 and Figure 6).
### Table 9

**Pathway 3: Family Life Process Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Themes/Codes (Associated with Benefits of FDELK Participation)</th>
<th>No. of Families ((n=21))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 3: Family Life Process Themes</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Simplifying Child's Daily Life</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimination of Mid-Day Transition</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same Schedule as Siblings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children Transition Together Throughout Day</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning Routine in Home-Like Setting</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less Time Spent in Child Care</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Discipline Throughout Day</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alleviating Parenting Daily Hassles</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freeing Up Time</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Pick-Up &amp; Drop Off Arrangement</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidating the Family Routine</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 6.** Pathway 3: Family life.
Children’s Routine & Daily Life.

Parents felt that the full-day schedule significantly improved children’s daily life as children no longer experienced the mid-day transition, which was perceived to be stressful for them:

**INTERVIEWER:** Can I get you to describe a little bit about how you were managing junior kindergarten with the half-day schedule? Because it sounds like it was quite the struggle.

**MOTHER:** Well she went to my in-laws in the morning.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.

**MOTHER:** And they drove her to school; we were able to get, what’s the word, an empty seat policy on the bus, because we don’t quite live far enough away.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. What does that mean?

**MOTHER:** So they would, she would take the bus home at lunch time and my in-laws would meet her at the bus stop and then my husband would come home at lunch time and pick her up and drive her to her daycare providers.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.

**MOTHER:** And then she would be there until after work and then he would pick her up at 5:30 and then come home.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay.

**MOTHER:** Because there is only three daycare centres in [this area] and they have their own kindergarten programs so they don’t have very many part-time spots because they want to push their own program because it’s more profitable for them.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. So, it’s really hard for families needing part-time care.

**MOTHER:** It is, and unfortunately for us, fortunately, unfortunately the home-care provider we managed to find lives on the other side of town. We think she’s wonderful and [name of kindergarten child] has food allergies and she knows all about her food allergies and she is quite experienced in them so we didn’t really want to kind of try and find somebody just for convenience sake, closer to the school?

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. Yeah, you were looking for the quality of care.

**MOTHER:** Exactly. Exactly!

**INTERVIEWER:** So, that was a lot of juggling throughout the day and lots of transitions for her.

**MOTHER:** Yeah. It was a lot and it was a very long year! My mother-in-law was diagnosed with cancer and she was going through chemotherapy. My dad lives in [city within driving distance] so the weeks where my mother-in-law was getting chemo, my dad would come down and he would stay with us and he would go and pick [name of kindergarten child] up and he would drive her to the babysitter. The fact that this year, we can drop her off and pick her up at the end of the day... it just made everybody’s life so much easier and smoother. It was stressful for [name of kindergarten child] I could see that...(Transcript PI302).
In two families, the alignment of children’s school schedule meant that all children within the household could transition together:

**MOTHER:** And before I thought that they would be like tired or something because it’s a whole day program. At the beginning it’s a little, but then they get used to it. Also, I guess when he comes with his brother and sister come and go home at the same time, he likes it. It makes him feel good, feel proud like he’s a big kid.

**INTERVIEWER:** OK. So he gets go to school with his big sister and brother. He feels proud of himself? This is possible because all of your kids have the same schedule?

**MOTHER:** Yeah. So that’s important too (Transcript PI304).

**Parents’ Routine & Daily Life.**

The full-day schedule also alleviated the parenting daily hassles of a hectic pick-up and drop-off arrangements and created more time for parents and caregivers:

**INTERVIEWER:** You mentioned that family life is smoother now. So how has full-day kindergarten made your family life easier?

**MOTHER:** It’s made it very much easier because my mom, she don’t have to...before she would have to drop them off and go pick them back up and then she’ll have to go back and get my son, my daughter on the other side...so she only makes two trips now [laughs].

**INTERVIEWER:** So once in the morning and then in the afternoon?

**MOTHER:** Yeah. And then there is a long period too, it’s not like okay, I just drop her off and then I have to go get her out in two hours or something or pick them up in two hours or something.

**INTERVIEWER:** So the pick-up and drop off arrangement is much easier now. It gives your mom a longer period at home before she is back at the school again. And it’s the same schedule for your son and your daughter...one pick up and drop off schedule for all of your kids. Okay.

**MOTHER:** Because if it had continued then my son, he’s in full-day, he goes to school full day and she would have to drop them off in the morning. Then she’ll have to go back at 12 or whatever to pick her up and then she’d have to go back in the afternoon. So it’s a lot easier.

**INTERVIEWER:** Yeah, it doesn’t break up her day, right? So do you think that she’s able to do more things for herself or do more things around the house?

**MOTHER:** Yeah, exactly.

**INTERVIEWER:** Rather than having to go back and forth?

**MOTHER:** Yeah. (Transcript PI333).

**MOTHER:** And for some parents, I guess they’re not happy [with full-day kindergarten]. But for me, I think it’s an amazing thing.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. How so?
**MOTHER:** Because it can help you a lot with more free time. Because before used to get [name of kindergarten child] at 11 o’clock, get [name of daughter] at 11:30 for lunch because she wouldn’t eat anything at school, bring her back for 12:30, and then pick her at 3:00. So I would be going back and forth all day to school.

**INTERVIEWER:** That was your day... going back and forth from home to school?

**MOTHER:** It’s crazy, it’s chaos. But, I had to do it, because she’s a very picky eater.

**MOTHER:** So now I’ll just have to cook and bring lunch to school for my kids.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. So you are at school three times a day rather than five times?

**MOTHER:** Yeah, I just come back at 11:30 and that’s it. I just bring lunch and then go back home (Transcript PI304).

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay so in the previous school it was the half day kindergarten. So you experienced that first and then the full day. What were your thoughts about the full day kindergarten when you heard about it?

**MOTHER:** Oh, I was overjoyed.

**INTERVIEWER:** You were happy, why’s that?

**MOTHER:** Because I know currently both of us are studying and my son finishes at 3:15 so that one [referring to kindergarten child] finishes at 11:30 and there is hardly any time to concentrate on our studies and because we have two exams separately so I very much like this program.

**INTERVIEWER:** Because you drop her off in the morning and then shortly after you had to pick her up again. Then later you had to pick up your son. Three times you were at the school?

**MOTHER:** Yes. Hardly any time and I have to come back again (Transcript PI320).

**Coherent Family Routine.**

As children’s and parents’ daily routines were simplified and became aligned with another, families experienced a more coherent family life:

**FATHER:** There is a routine to half-day kindergarten, but with the full-day kindergarten, all of our children have the same routine. And this routine flows better with our work routine. It’s like a symbiotic relationship between all of us. It’s got to flow well for the entire family.

**INTERVIEWER:** So if one thing is out of synch, it throws all of you off the routine?

**FATHER:** Yeah (Transcript PI306).

**Pathway 1 Process Themes Associated with Challenges**

Table 10 shows process themes concerning challenges related to the early learning environment.
Table 10

Pathway 1 Process Themes Associated with Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Themes/Codes</th>
<th>No. of Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment</strong></td>
<td><strong>3 (n=21)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play-Based Curriculum</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Not Enough Emphasis on Academics</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Day Program</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– High Cost</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Low Enrolment of KG Peers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– No Coverage for Preschoolers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two parents reported concerns regarding the play-based curriculum. Both expressed the desire for their child to be exposed to more structured, teacher-directed activities focused on developing academic skills. One parent in particular felt that her child was lagging behind compared to other children in her home country. For this parent, the child’s characteristics (i.e., age and developmental progress relative to siblings) and her experience with the educational curriculum in her home country appeared to influence her beliefs pertaining to appropriate educational practices for her child:

**INTERVIEWER:** Since starting full-day kindergarten, what have you noticed with your daughter in terms of her progress and development?

**MOTHER:** Hmm, that is hard to tell actually because I think she’s a slow learner, you know? She came [to Canada] when she was 5 years and she actually was in Grade 1 in my former country. She went to one...

**INTERVIEWER:** Oh, does school start earlier?

**MOTHER:** Yeah, at 5 years because she was born in January. So January students turn five so she went one term in Grade 1. After coming here she was put to junior kindergarten which I did not like at all. It’s like you know, going like regression.

**INTERVIEWER:** Going backwards?

**MOTHER:** Yeah, so I didn’t like it at all but I could not change the rules here you know, so I think she was a little regressed after that. She likes to behave like a small child, like you know, doing small things, colouring, painting, which I don’t like, because she was learning a bit, like the letters and all then suddenly when she was put to the junior kindergarten. They never did that...they are against poems and colouring. I think it was just regression. In grade 1 they can write a whole you know essay by the end of Grade 1. We have three terms, by the end of the third term they can write a whole big essay of course in our native language but English also they do.
INTERVIEWER: Okay. So I want to understand more about your experience with junior kindergarten, which was full-day. What are your thoughts around the kinds of activities that are done in the full day kindergarten this year? Have you had a chance to get familiar with the curriculum and program here?

MOTHER: I met the teachers once, yeah once only. She told us like it’s mostly activity oriented and sort of things but yeah.

INTERVIEWER: So what does that mean for you? Activity oriented program?

MOTHER: Yeah, this activity oriented thing which I think is a little, I mean, she’s too old for that because she’s already 6. Because since she’s a January born, that’s a disadvantage for her I think.

INTERVIEWER: She’s older than her classmates...

MOTHER: Yeah, that’s right because she was youngest in her class in my former country but she’s the oldest, maybe the oldest in terms of here in Canada. So that concerns me.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, okay so it is activity based. The program is a play-based curriculum, which I imagine is very different from how things are taught in [parent’s home country] at this stage?

MOTHER: Well, this activity based it was introduced in [parent’s home country] as well.

INTERVIEWER: Oh it was?

MOTHER: Yes, it is but in Grade 1 it is only just the first term only because you know they make play houses and put everything in you know, what for girls, cooking all these things, those are done only in the first term but second and third term it’s mainly reading, writing. That is why they progress so well by the end of the third term (Transcript PI320).

The second challenging process theme captured aspects of the extended-day program. While this family experienced benefits from the extended-day program, challenges were also reported. Some of these challenges stemmed from the early implementation stage of the program, such as limited enrolment of kindergarten children, but others related to the affordability of the program and the limited offering of services for preschool-aged children:

INTERVIEWER: So what are your thoughts about the extended-day program now that it is available? Do you find that it’s an affordable option for your family?

MOTHER: No. Like I just found that at the beginning I was a little shocked at the prices because compared to a regular daycare that my son was going to, like the prices for like full day. It was before and after school for a couple of hours but for full day prices. I was just like, but, you guys are dealing with older kids and fewer hours here but they said it was compared to like a daycare with a younger child at that age, that’s the reason that they did it that way. The price was a little off for me but some parents right now don’t have that option so therefore it’s difficult for them. So if you have that option there then you can use it and for us I mean we just had to work
around our financial calendar just to see exactly where we could fit that in, that’s how we did it (Transcript PI307).

INTERVIEWER: Does the extended-day program offer care for younger kids?
MOTHER: No, that was the problem.
INTERVIEWER: You were hoping for both of your kids to be at the same daycare?
MOTHER: Well that’s what I was thinking but my son’s daycare didn’t offer before and after-school care for kindergarten children and extended-day didn’t offer preschool for my son... so it’s two separate daycares for us...
INTERVIEWER: So you still had to use two separate arrangements for your family...two drop-offs and pick-ups. Would it be ideal if extended day program was more comprehensive in offering care for younger age groups?
MOTHER: Yes! So that’s a disadvantage for how they do extended-day now (Transcript PI307).

Pathway 2 Process Themes Associated with Challenges

As Table 11 shows, the most commonly reported challenging process theme captured parent involvement barriers.

Table 11
Pathway 2 Process Themes Associated with Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Themes/Codes</th>
<th>No. of Families (n=21)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 2: Parent Engagement &amp; Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers for Parental Involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Constraints</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Info about Child's Progress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Access to Resources</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Gaps</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited English Language Proficiency</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Direct Contact</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Program</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Notice for Participation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racism</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child Care Challenges</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hassles of Arranging Part-Time Care</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Affordable Child Care</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents reported a variety of barriers ranging from time constraints, lack of information about child’s progress to acculturation related processes (i.e., limited English language proficiency,
cross-cultural differences in parents’ role construction for involvement, and experience of racism):

MOTHER: ...the only thing is I just wish for me being a parent I was more available...I know the opportunities are there because they’re always asking for volunteers and stuff like that...but I wish I had more time to do those things because I know there’s a lot going on and I just always want to be in the loop of things but I can’t always be in the loop of things so that’s the only thing that becomes my major concern (Transcript PI320).

INTERVIEWER: As a parent, how do you know what’s going on in terms of your child’s progress at school?
MOTHER: I don’t. I’ve been to the parent interviews but we talk mostly about his behaviour, but it’s improved so I’m not worried about that. Also, I visited the classroom once and you kind of see what they do and I thought that was really interesting, I think that’s a good idea.
INTERVIEWER: But you don’t have a sense of what he is working on as time goes on?
MOTHER: Their not really sending me home information, you know. He gets those little books, you know what I mean, those little tiny books and I see a few colouring, like I really don’t see, him learning how to print, like you know, structured pages. It’s hard to know what to work on at home with him, what he is supposed to be learning at this point (Transcript 313).

FATHER: I had a very bad experience at the beginning. Very bad, awful experience. I didn’t like the teachers...they ignored us, only talked to white families. But they changed it, my son’s classroom, and it was fine. I talked to principal and superintendent, and the then the MP. Since they changed the teachers, it’s been good. I talk to them and communicate, but if they didn’t change the classroom, I don’t know what would happen with us...with my son, with our family.
INTERVIEWER: Do you feel comfortable talking about this experience?
FATHER: Well I, it’s my side you know. You can’t just listen to my side you know but it just made me, me, but if you like to, I have no problem talking but if you like to. Well at the beginning of school, as I explained, my wife doesn’t work and life in Canada, especially in Toronto, it’s quite a bit high, high expense wise, so I’m working to make my family a bit comfortable. Well, I have to go to work, but that day, first day, before even the school opening they invite the parents to come to see them. They see parents, parents see the school, everything, especially for people like immigrants to this country, because they haven’t been brought up in this country. They haven’t you know, went to school, high school, whatever in this country. They’re not familiar with the system, okay. My wife says you better go in there because two days later you’re going to pick the kids up and they’re going to say, who the heck are you? They’re not going to give the kids to you, I said, that’s right, okay, you know. So I went to the classroom with my son, he was too excited, he start to running around, playing with stuff. Then I was standing. I was there maybe there for half an hour and the teacher
never approached me and nobody approached me and I was just pay attention, what’s going on? Then I pay attention, whoever comes through that door if they’re white, they would get involved with that conversation very quick, but if it’s different story, if they’re not white, different story and I could see there was another couple, East Indian, Pakistani, I don’t know, they were also at that other corner of the classroom. As soon as I saw that I said I don’t like that. I went direct to the principal office, I said, I want to see principal (Transcript PI319).

What was also evident in parents’ narrative was that although FDELK reduced the number of child care hours for families requiring non-parental care, it did not completely eliminate child care challenges for many families. Arranging for part-time care was complicated by the lack of availability of the extended-day program at some of the school sites, and even when it was available, some parents felt that the fees were not affordable for them:

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay, so let’s talk about your experience with the full-day kindergarten. So what was your initial reaction to hearing that it was going to be offered at your child’s school?

**MOTHER:** Um, I wanted her in daycare because it was more convenient for us, because there is no early learning daycare, like there is no early daycare for kids.

**INTERVIEWER:** You are talking about the extended-day program, which is the on-site before and after-school program?

**MOTHER:** Right, they have the afternoon program but they don’t have the morning program. So it’s difficult for us to arrange...

**INTERVIEWER:** The morning portion?

**MOTHER:** Big time, so she goes to my sister’s. Her in-laws take all three. I have nephews that go to the school as well. So they take all three kids or my husband is taking all three kids. So, mornings have been hectic for us because I have to be on the 8:13 train. So that was one of our issues (Transcript PI305).

**INTERVIEWER:** So I am hearing that full-day kindergarten makes your life easier as a stay-at-home mom, but it hasn’t enable you to work at this point? Because you would still have to pay for daycare for the before and after-school hours?

**MOTHER:** That’s the thing. I’ll tell you because if only had one child, I can pay for daycare at the school and I can work, right? But with the three of them, even like, if I have to work until let’s say 5, or until 5:30 and I have to pay for three kids! So it’s that’s my problem right now. I want to work but it’s not worthwhile if I have to pay for daycare for three kids. The [extended-day] program seems like an amazing program. It’s just that when I think about paying for the three of them...it doesn’t work for us now (Transcript PI304).
Pathway 3 Process Themes Associated with Challenges

Although parents reported many positive experiences associated with FDELK participation, they also reported some challenging aspects of the program that negatively impacted children and parents’ daily life (see Table 12).

Table 12
Pathway 3 Process Themes Associated with Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Themes/Codes</th>
<th>No. of Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 3: Family Life</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusting to FDELK Routine</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Day Without Naps</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating Lunch</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toileting</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking the Bus</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Parenting Daily Hassles</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packing Snacks &amp; Lunches For Full Day</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Child’s Toileting Challenges</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Child’s Anxiety</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing Child’s Fatigue at End of Day</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worrying about Child’s Eating at School</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several children experienced difficulty adjusting to some aspects of the FDELK routine including, a full-day schedule without naps, eating lunch with limited adult supervision, managing the toileting routine with minimal adult assistance, and taking the bus to and from school. As one might expect, the challenges that children experienced in their day clearly spilled over into parents’ daily life. That is, parents’ daily hassles clearly reflected the challenges that children experienced in their day:

**MOTHER**: For me it was extremely, extremely stressful! Knowing that she was shy it was heart breaking to see at the beginning of the year sitting by herself. She kept falling asleep in class. She wouldn’t eat. And she wouldn’t use the bathroom unless I was there. She wouldn’t let anyone take her (Transcript PI332).
MOTHER: SK doesn’t have um, nap time, at first they have nap time and then later on, I don’t know what month they do, they change.
INTERVIEWER: They took it away right?
MOTHER: Yes, yes. Which is, I think it’s good so that they can be ready in grade one.
But [name of kindergarten child] gets up at 6am because I need to get to work...that’s a long day for her and she get tired. When I get home, I can tell she is tired. When she doesn’t get something that she wants, then she’ll just like, just sit down in one corner and fall asleep fast. Also after evening supper if she, if she goes to the bathroom, it’s funny, she go the bathroom, and sit down on the toilet and she’ll fall asleep!
INTERVIEWER: Oh dear! She is clearly tired at that point! Does this make it harder for you to manage her behaviour after school?
MOTHER: Yes, sometimes. She is more fussy and get upset more easy. It’s more work for me! But I know why so I try to be gentle with her (Transcript PI308).

Summary

Three broad program pathways emerged from parents’ causal inferences about the how outcomes in the form of benefits and challenges emerged as a result of participating in the FDELK program. Figure 7 summarizes the process themes associated with benefits and challenges for each pathway.

Pathway 1 represents the intersection of children experiences with the early learning environment. In this case, the early learning environment included salient experiences with both the FDELK and extended-day classrooms. Two of the three process themes associated with benefits, increasing the length of the early learning program and enhancing the quality of the early learning program, were well supported by parents’ regardless of their unique contextual circumstances. Notably, parents associated enhanced quality of the early learning program with both the integrated staff team and the play-based curriculum. The third process theme, enhancing the continuity of children’s early learning experiences, were supported by only three families who had experience with onsite, before- and after-school program with some level of coordination between the early learning and care staff teams. While clearly fur-
Further research is needed to strengthen the evidence base for this program process, it is noteworthy that all three families experienced some level of enhanced continuity as a result of accessing seamless early education and care services. The process themes associated with challenges were associated with concerns about the play-based curriculum and the extended-day program. For some families, concerns about the limited curricular emphasis on academic learning appeared to be associated with the lack of information about the pedagogy of play-based learning and the child’s learning expectations and progress, as well as culturally influenced beliefs about appropriate educational practices for young children.

Pathway 2 represents parents’ interactions with the school’s early learning community. Based on the three process themes that emerged from parents’ reports, it appears that program participation facilitated further engagement and support for parents by mobilizing their ability to attend to their well-being and supporting their role as parents. While many parents felt that their overall engagement with children’s learning was facilitated by various program processes, some also experienced significant barriers that were not addressed by the school community. Finally, parents reported experiencing ongoing child care challenges despite benefiting from the FDELK schedule. Arranging for before- and after-school care remained a big hassle for families partly due to the limited availability and/or affordability of the extended-day program.
Figure 7. Summary of FDELK program processes.
Finally, pathway 3 represents as aspect of children and parents’ experiences that is typically neglected in both process and outcome research: the daily life of children, parents, and families. The three process themes that emerged for this pathway suggests that when families participate in FDELK, children experience a more streamlined daily routine, parents experience fewer daily hassles, and families as unit experience a more consolidated routine. The process themes associated with challenges pertained to aspects of children’s challenging experiences adjusting to the FDELK routine and parents’ corresponding challenges in managing and responding to children’s less than smooth adjustment in a new early learning environment.

**RQ5: Generating Program Theory for FDELK - Linking Inputs, Processes and Outcomes**

In this section, I bring together the components of the conceptual framework (i.e., inputs > processes > outcomes) to present a coherent theory of change model that explains how FDELK was working for families in year 1. First, I examine the key causal pathways that link program participation experiences to child-, parent-, and family-level outcomes. Specifically, based on the findings of cross-theme analysis that examined the pattern of co-occurring process and outcome themes, I provide a coherent thematic narrative that describes how program participation experiences for children and their parents were linked to a broad set of outcomes. Given that my primary focus was to explain how program participation contributes to desired outcomes for families, here I focus solely on pathways that were associated with benefits. The program processes associated with challenges were discussed in the previous section and I present the full models linking processes to challenging outcomes in Appendix E. Second, I explore whether there were differences across immigrant and non-immigrant families with respect to their reporting of program outcomes and processes. Final-
ly, at the end of this section, I present a visual model that summarizes the findings from the thematic analysis of inputs, processes, and outcomes themes.

**FDELK Pathways Associated with Child Outcomes**

Table 13 shows the patterns of association between program process themes and child outcomes. The columns contain child outcome themes and the rows contain the process themes for pathway 1, 2 and 3. The table shows the number of families that reported each causal association or link between a process and an outcome. For example, out of 15 families that reported experiencing the benefit of enhanced child learning and school engagement, 5 attributed this outcome to the improvements in the quality of the early learning program. As expected, the majority of the child outcomes were attributed to pathway 1 program processes and some outcomes such as enhanced child daily life and well-being were attributed to improvements in the daily routine for the child and the family. Additionally, some child learning and readiness outcomes were attributed to program processes that involved fostering parent engagement and support parents’ parenting role.

Table 13

**Process Themes Associated with with Child Outcome Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Themes</th>
<th>Child-Level Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhanced Child Daily Life (n=4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing Length of Early Learning Program</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Quality of Early Learning Program</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Continuity of Children's Early Learning Experiences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Child-Level Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Themes</th>
<th>Enhanced Child Daily Life (n=4)</th>
<th>Enhanced Child Well-being (n=3)</th>
<th>Enhanced Child Development (n=14)</th>
<th>Enhanced Child Learning &amp; School Engagement (n=15)</th>
<th>Enhanced Child Readiness for Grade 1 (n=4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 2: Parent Support &amp; Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering Parent Engagement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Parents’ Well-Being</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Parents’ Parenting Role</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Access to Programs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 3: Family Life</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplifying Child’s Daily Life</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleviating Parenting Daily Hassles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidating the Family Routine</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8. FDELK pathways associated with child outcomes.*

*Note. Pathway 1 (Early Learning Environment) program processes are represented in green boxes, Pathway 2 (Parent Engagement & Support) program processes in blue, and Pathway 3 (Family Life) in orange. Pathways that were reported by at least five families are represented by thick arrows.*
Figure 8 illustrates the key pathways that link the FDELK program process to outcomes. While all three pathways appeared to influence child outcomes, pathway 1 program processes (shown in green boxes) were most frequently reported across families (see thick arrows linking program processes to outcomes). Not only were pathway 1 processes frequently reported by families, they appeared to influence a large number of child outcomes. For example, *enhancing the quality of the early learning program* was reported to influence four out of the five child outcomes.

**FDELK Pathways Associated with Parent Outcomes**

Table 15 shows patterns of association between program process themes and parent outcomes. As with the previous table, the columns contain parent outcome themes and the rows contain process themes. The frequencies represent the number of families that reported the various combinations of process-outcome relationships. At a first glance, parent outcomes appear to have been influenced by program processes within each of the three pathways. Among pathway 1 program processes, it is noteworthy that parent outcomes emerged from both the structural and process oriented features of FDELK: the increased length and enhanced quality of the early learning program. This finding is noteworthy in light of the child care literature where is an underlying assumption that parents who chose practical features of care over quality features are somehow inferior or less capable compared to parents who are able to choose quality over practical elements of care. The findings here suggest that both practical and quality oriented features of the early learning environment contribute to important outcomes that have long-standing implications for child development and adult health and wellness. Additionally, it is notable that parental well-being was influenced by program
quality features of FDELK. This suggests that parental well-being is intricately influenced by the quality of care that children experience in their early learning environments. Among pathway 2 program processes, experiences that fostered parent engagement contributed to enhanced family-school relationships, parent involvement, and parent knowledge. Furthermore, program processes that supported parents’ well-being, including ensuring the well-being of children and opportunity to observe and witness children’s developmental progress, were linked to enhanced parent well-being. Among pathway 3 program processes, all three process themes were associated with improvements in parents’ daily life. Simplifying children’s daily life was also associated with enhanced parent well-being. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that FDELK participation had relatively little impact on enhancing parents’ social support.

Table 14

Process Themes Associated With Parent Outcome Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pathway 1: Early Learning Environ.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increasing Length of Early Learning Program</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Quality of Early Learning Program</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhancing Continuity of Children’s Early Learning Experiences</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathway 2: Parent Support &amp; Engagement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering Parent Engagement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Parent-Level Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Parents' Well-Being</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Parents' Parenting Role</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 3: Family Life</strong></td>
<td><strong>2</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>3</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>0</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplifying Child’s Daily Life</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleviating Parenting Daily Hassles</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidating the Family Routine</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 9.** FDELK pathways associated with parent outcomes.

*Note.* Pathway 1 (Early Learning Environment) program processes are represented in green boxes, Pathway 2 (Parent Engagement & Support) program processes in blue, and Pathway 3 (Family Life) in orange. Pathways that were reported by at least five families are represented by thick arrows.

Figure 9 above illustrates the key causal process and parent outcome relationships in graphic form. The most frequently reported causal relationships are depicted by the thick ar-
rows linking pathway 1 (i.e., increasing length of early learning program and enhancing quality of early learning program) and pathway 2 (i.e., fostering parent engagement and supporting parents’ well-being) program processes to outcomes. As with the pathways associated with child outcomes, changes to the length of the early learning program had multiple effects on parent outcomes (i.e., four out of eight outcomes were influenced by this program process). Additionally, process processes that fostered parent engagement also influenced a relatively large number of parent outcomes (i.e., three out of eight outcomes were influenced by this program process).

**FDELK Pathways Associated with Family Outcomes**

Table 16 shows patterns of association between program process themes and family-level outcomes. As with the previous tables, the columns contain family outcome themes and the rows contain process themes. The frequencies represent the number of families that reported the various combinations of process-outcome relationships. Compared to child and parent outcomes, relatively fewer pathways were observed for family outcomes. Perhaps the most commonly experienced family outcome was reduction of family financial stress; eight families reported this outcome as a result of participating in FDELK. The FDELK program’s schedule and role in providing early learning and care for children appears to have led to reduction of financial stress for the family. The other notable family-level outcome that parents reported was enhanced quality of family daily life. This outcome was primarily achieved via pathway 3 program processes, which were made possible by changes to the length of the early learning program. Finally, while only two families reported this particular outcome, it is worthwhile to briefly acknowledge that program processes that focused parent engagement brought about improvements in parents’ perceived sense of belonging to the school commu-
nity. This outcome is particularly significant given that school readiness researchers have identified sense of belonging as a key outcome for successful transition strategies.

Table 15

*Process Themes Associated with Family Outcome Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Themes</th>
<th>Family-Level Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enhanced Quality of Family Daily Life (n=7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Length of Early Learning Program</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Quality of Early Learning Program</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhanced Continuity of Children's Early Learning Experiences</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 2: Parent Support &amp; Engagement</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fostering Parent Engagement</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Parents’ Well-Being</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Parents’ Parenting Role</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pathway 3: Family Life</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplifying Child's Daily Life</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleviating Parenting Daily Hassles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidating the Family Routine</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 10. FDELK pathways associated with family outcomes.

Note. Pathway 1 (Early Learning Environment) program processes are represented in green boxes, Pathway 2 (Parent Engagement & Support) program processes in blue, and Pathway 3 (Family Life) in orange. Pathways that were reported by at least five families are represented by thick arrows.

Figure 10 above visually illustrates the pathways associated with family outcomes. From this visual model, it becomes clearer that multiple program processes from pathway 1, 2, and 3 influenced improvements in the quality of family life. Further research is needed to explore what range of progress processes can support more families to experience an enhanced sense of belonging to the school community.

Variations Between Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Families

Thus far, for the sake of simplicity and theory building, research questions pertaining to outcomes, processes, and the cumulative theory of change model have been addressed without consideration of variations among families based on key contextual factors. In this final section, I attempt to bring to light whether there was evidence to suggest that families’ differed in their experience of program processes based on key contextual factors. In particular, I was interested in examining whether differences would emerge if parents were grouped based on their immigrant status; the two profiles of families that emerged based on immigra-
tion status varied considerably along parent characteristics, social support factors, and program use. In order to examine whether parents reported experiences of program processes differed across immigrant and non-immigrant families, I compared the frequency of reported process themes for each pathway. In order to compare the reported frequency of process themes, I adjusted the frequencies so that the sample size for each group was 10. Specifically, each frequency was divided by the group sample size and multiplied by 10.

**Pathway 1 Process Themes.**

Figure 11 shows the frequency of reported pathway 1 process themes with adjusted group size ($n=10$). It shows that for pathway 1 process themes, the frequency of each program process was similar across immigrant and non-immigrant families. This suggests that regardless of the parents’ immigrant status, more families attributed the length and quality of the early learning program as sources of positive outcomes than program processes that contributed to enhanced continuity of children’s early learning experiences.

![Pathway 1 Process Themes](image)

**Figure 11.** Frequency of reported pathway 1 process themes by parent immigration status.

*Note.* In order to compare the reported frequency of process themes, frequencies were adjusted so that the sample size for each group was 10. Specifically, each frequency was divided by the group sample size and multiplied by 10.
**Pathway 2 Process Themes.**

Figure 12 shows the frequency of reported pathway 2 program processes with adjusted group size (n=10). Interestingly, there appeared to be a notable difference in the prevalence of reported experience with program processes relating to parenting support. Specifically, compared to three immigrant families, seven non-immigrant families attributed program processes related to supporting parents’ parenting role as sources of positive outcomes.

![Pathway 2 Process Themes](image)

*Figure 12. Frequency of reported pathway 2 process themes by parent immigration status.*

*Note. In order to compare the reported frequency of process themes, frequencies were adjusted so that the sample size for each group was 10. Specifically, each frequency was divided by the group sample size and multiplied by 10.*

**Pathway 3 Process Themes.**

Figure 13 shows the frequency of reported pathway 3 program processes with adjusted group size (n=10). Similar to pathway 1 program processes, the frequency of each program process was similar across immigrant and non-immigrant families.
Figure 13. Frequency of reported pathway 3 themes by parent immigrant status.

Note. In order to compare the reported frequency of process themes, frequencies were adjusted so that the sample size for each group was 10. Specifically, each frequency was divided by the group sample size and multiplied by 10.

**Frequency Differences for Process Themes.**

In order to illustrate the magnitude of frequency differences between immigrant and non-immigrant families for reported program process, I computed a frequency difference score by subtracting the reported frequency for non-immigrant group from the frequency for immigrant group. Figure 14 plots the computed frequency difference score for each program theme. Pathway 1 process themes are represented in green bars, pathway 2 process themes in blue, and pathway 3 process themes in orange. From top to bottom in the figure, the process theme are organized in the same order as depicted in the previous graphs and tables. While there are clear limitations for how this finding can be interpreted given the sample size and the recruitment strategies employed, what this figure suggests is that more often than not, a higher number of immigrant families reported experiencing each program process than non-immigrant families. The two exceptions are: supporting parents’ parenting role and simplifying child’s daily life. In particular, the magnitude of the difference for supporting parents’
parenting role is striking. A closer look at the various codes relating to this theme revealed that more immigrant families reported that FDELK alleviated child care costs than non-immigrant families. This was likely because more non-immigrant families were using paid child care services compared to immigrant families. In other words, given that many immigrant families were not using paid child care due to financial limitations in the first place, FDELK did not alleviate their child care costs.

Figure 14. Frequency differences between groups for process themes.

*Child-Level Benefits.*

Given the subtle group differences that emerged for process themes, I was also curious to examine whether group differences would emerge based on parent immigration status for the reported frequency of child-, parent-, and family-level benefits. Figure 15 shows the frequency of reported child-level benefits using adjusted group size (n=10). Across almost all child-level benefits, similar frequencies were reported between immigrant and non-immigrant families. The exception was that none of the immigrant families reported that their
kindergarten child experienced enhanced child well-being as a report of participation in FDELK.

![Figure 15. Frequency of reported child-level benefit themes by parent immigration status.](image)

*Figure 15. Frequency of reported child-level benefit themes by parent immigration status.*

*Note.* In order to compare the reported frequency of process themes, frequencies were adjusted so that the sample size for each group was 10. Specifically, each frequency was divided by the group sample size and multiplied by 10.

**Parent-Level Benefits.**

Figure 16 shows the frequency of reported parent-level benefit themes by parent immigrant immigration status. Generally, with the exception of one theme, more immigrant families reported experiencing each positive outcome than non-immigrant families. Some notable differences were observed favouring immigrant families for the following benefits: (1) enhanced parent capacity to work or study, (2) enhanced parent daily life, (3) enhanced parent well-being, (4) enhanced parent involvement, and (5) enhanced parent-child interactions.
Figure 16. Frequency of parent-level benefit themes by parent immigration status.

Note. In order to compare the reported frequency of process themes, frequencies were adjusted so that the sample size for each group was 10. Specifically, each frequency was divided by the group sample size and multiplied by 10.

Family-Level Benefits.

Figure 17 shows the frequency of reported family-level benefits for immigrant and non-immigrant families. Notably, compared to non-immigrant families, fewer immigrant families reported experiencing reduction of family financial stress as a result of participating in FDELK. This finding is consistent with previously described group difference in frequency of families experiencing reduction of child care costs as a result of FDELK. Presumably, because immigrant families were not using paid child care arrangements largely due to financial limitations, FDELK was not associated with reduction of child care costs and an overall alleviation of family financial stress.
**Figure 17.** Frequency of family-level benefit themes by parent immigration status.

*Note.* In order to compare the reported frequency of process themes, frequencies were adjusted so that the sample size for each group was 10. Specifically, each frequency was divided by the group sample size and multiplied by 10. Because immigrant families were not using paid child care arrangements largely due to financial limitations, FDELK was not associated with reduction of child care costs and an overall alleviation of family financial stress.

**Frequency Differences for Benefit Themes.**

In order to illustrate the magnitude of frequency differences between immigrant and non-immigrant families for reported benefits, I computed a frequency difference score by subtracting the reported frequency for non-immigrant group from the frequency for immigrant group. Figure 18 plots the computed frequency difference score for each benefit theme. Child-level benefit themes are represented in green bars, parent-level benefit themes in blue, and family-level benefit themes in orange. From top to bottom, the benefit themes are organized in the same order as depicted in the previous graphs and tables.

Overall, it appears that more immigrant families experienced parent-level benefits compared to non-immigrant families. For child-level and family-level benefits, there appears to have been a more similar reporting of benefits across the two groups. The magnitude of
the frequency difference for some of the benefits (i.e., enhanced parent capacity to work or study and reduction of family financial stress) is striking. Taken together, while more immigrant families reported having benefited from the FDELK in terms of enhanced capacity to work or study, this outcome did not appear to be associated with lower financial stress for these families.

![Figure 18. Frequency differences between groups for benefit themes.](image)

**Role of Parental Beliefs: Case Example**

While the immigrant and non-immigrant grouping provided a useful contextual background to examine parents’ reported program experiences and benefits the reality is that many other factors were likely moderating and/or mediating how families participated in the FDELK program and experienced program outcomes. In particular, there was evidence to
suggest that parents’ beliefs relating to child rearing and parenting were influencing how they accessed supports across multiple contexts:

**INTERVIEWER:** So how satisfied are you with your support system?
**MOTHER:** Very satisfied, because overall we know that we have somebody to turn to.
**FATHER:** You know you can make the school the best that it can be, but if you don’t have things outside of the school like the family and community, then you don’t have the full picture. We are not the biggest church-goers, but we teach faith-based principles at home. It’s about getting a good balance in each circle – home, school and community.

**MOTHER:** The school is part of our support system as well. A lot of parents think that my child is at school, they are your responsibility. But I feel that parents need to work with the school. I feel that our children are getting a better education because the teachers have insight into how our children’s minds work, because, obviously they don’t see the same things that we do.

**INTERVIEWER:** So your philosophy of raising healthy children is to ensure that there are supports across key contexts including the family, school and community settings? You feel that working with the school is important because as parents you have a role to play in providing insights about your children – their strengths and weaknesses? You are experts of your own children?

**MOTHER:** That is absolutely right! (PI306).

This is a quote taken from a parent interview conducted with both the mother and father of three male children, two of whom were enrolled in the FDELK program (i.e., JK and SK). Both parents worked outside the home on a full-time basis and the family relied on a home-based child care provider for before- and after-school care. What is striking about this quote is that both the mother and father appeared to be articulating a systems theory for child development and parenting. When these parenting beliefs were examined in relation to their reported program theory for FDELK, it became clear that their beliefs about the importance of connections and support across key contexts likely influenced the wide breadth of program processes and outcomes that this family experienced.
FDELK Theory of Change Model

A three-pathway model, linking program participation to a wide range of child-, parent-, and family-level outcomes, emerged from parents’ own perspectives about how FDELK worked for their family. Specifically, pathway 1 (early learning environment) captured program processes that operated through children’s experiences in the early learning environment. Pathway 2 (parent engagement and support) captured program processes that operated through parents’ own direct program participation experiences. Finally, pathway 3 (family life) captured aspects of children and parents’ daily life that were influenced by the FDELK program. This model grew out of systematic thematic coding of parents’ narratives about their experiences with a new program in its first year of implementation. Using research and theory as a starting point and a guide throughout the coding and analytic process, each component of the model was shaped through a complex balance of both inductive and deductive knowledge generation processes.

Figure 19 illustrates the FDELK theory of change model in its most comprehensive form. The core program components that were identified as salient features of FDELK are depicted in the left side of the model linking to the three broad categories of program processes that were reported to influence program outcomes. The program processes then link to the outcomes depicted in the right side of the model. Pathway 1 is depicted at the centre of the model to acknowledge its salient influence on outcomes for many FDELK families sampled in the study.

The outcomes in this model do not focus solely on child outcomes. When parents were prompted to identify positive changes that they felt stemmed from their participation in FDELK, they readily identified benefits observed at the level of the kindergarten child. With
further discussion, parents also identified a range of benefits that they themselves experienced, as well as benefits that impacted the entire family system. Finally, the model acknowledges the role that the ecology of the family played in influencing each family’s participation throughout the change process.
Figure 19. FDELK theory of change model.
Chapter 6: Discussion

The current study aimed to deepen our understanding of how integrated early learning and care programs work for families based on parents’ own perspectives and program participation experiences. Decades of research has shown that the influence of the family far exceeds the influence of any early education and care (e.g., Lamb & Ahnert, 2006; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2001; Vandell & Wolfe, 2000), and long-term outcomes of early childhood interventions stem not only from enriched early learning experiences, but also from changes in parental capacity to foster a safe and nurturing home environment and to actively engage in children’s learning and development (Reynolds, Magnuson et al., 2010). This study showed that it is not only feasible to involve parents in a complex theory-building process, it is essential to include their voices if we hope to capture the multiple pathways through which programs influence key outcomes for children, parents, and families. The findings further build on existing theory of change models by: (1) articulating specific causal processes that operate within two broad hypothesized pathways (i.e., early learning environment and parent support and outreach); (2) expanding the framework to include a third pathway that captures program participation experiences that impacted children and parents’ daily life; and (3) linking these three broad pathways to a more comprehensive set of outcomes not only for children, but also for parents and families.

In this final chapter, I first present a discussion of how parents were using early childhood programs including parents’ perspectives on the salient features of FDELK and reported concurrent use of other early childhood programs. Given the interwoven nature of the research questions pertaining to the outcomes, processes and the overall theory of change for FDELK, I then present an integrated discussion focusing on the three broad pathways of
change that emerged from parents’ perspectives and program experiences. Based on these key findings, I then provide a broader discussion on the successes and challenges of FDELK as an school-based, integrated early learning and care initiative and the importance of advancing new or alternative methodologies to strengthen our understanding of how and why programs work. I conclude with a discussion on the limitations of the study and present implications for future research, practice and policy.

**How were Parents Using FDELK and Other Early Childhood Programs?**

**Salient Features of FDELK**

The innovation behind the design of the FDELK model is grounded firmly in the local, national and international evidence base of integrated early childhood initiatives. The four core design principles of FDELK (i.e., full-day schedule, integrated staff team, play-based early learning curriculum, and extended-day program) distinguish this program from other FDK programs such as those implemented in the US. These innovations were not only intended to enhance the quality of children’s early learning experiences, but to also support parents’ need for child care services (Pelletier, 2012a).

In light of these unique design features and the intended benefits associated with them, parents were asked to describe the most important features of FDELK based on their own experiences with the program. Overall, parents’ responses suggested that concrete characteristics such as the full-day schedule and the presence of two teachers in the classroom were identified by most families as valuable, while other more process oriented features appeared to be less salient. For instance, beyond the presence of an additional teacher in the classroom, very few parents had a working knowledge of how the kindergarten and ECE teachers were expected to complement each other’s expertise and to share the delivery of the
curriculum. Similarly, parents appeared to have a limited understanding of the principles behind the play-based learning approach, beyond their observation that the program was highly engaging for their child. Parents’ knowledge of the extended-day program was even more limited given the early stage of implementation in year 1.

These findings suggest that at the time of the parent interviews, many parents had yet to be exposed to some of the more nuanced, process oriented features of FDELK. This is not surprising given that parents were interviewed during the initial stages of implementation when educators themselves were making sense of the new program. Educator perspectives documented during year 1 of FDELK implementation certainly reflected the challenges they faced in working with a new early learning partner and delivering a new curriculum in the context of limited professional development opportunities and lack of dedicated joint planning time (Goulden, 2012; Pelletier, 2012b; Tozer, 2012; Vanderlee et al., 2012). Although administrators and educators believed that it was important for parents to be informed about the new program, often they did not have enough information or understand the program well enough to relay necessary information. Like the FDELK parents in this study, parents who participated in the provincial FDELK study also reported that they wanted to know how and what their children was learning (Vanderlee et al., 2012).

Another potential reason for parents’ limited exposure to the core design elements of FDELK may be the lack of explicit strategy for parent engagement and support. Unlike the TFD model that also brought together a variety of family support services in the integration mix, FDELK is limited to the delivery of early learning and care services. Some of the successes of the TFD project in engaging families appeared to have stemmed from the wider menu of services that included family-centered programming that brought parents in direct
contact with the child’s school community (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Patel & Corter, 2013). Without the offering of family support services and the family-friendly open door policy that flexibly welcomes parents into the classroom at any point during the day, parents likely had limited opportunity to observe the inner workings of the FDELK classroom.

Nevertheless, parents associated a myriad of program experiences with the features of FDELK. Across the three pathways, parents had greater clarity with respect to how the core features influenced children’s early learning environment and family life. Notably, many program processes related to parent engagement and support were not explicitly associated with the core features of the FDELK model.

**Reported Use of Early Childhood Programs**

It is well known that parents are known to piece together multiple services in order to meet the needs of the family (Cleveland et al., 2006). Given the limited availability and uptake of the extended-day program, many families were using other forms of non-parental care to meet their child care needs. The general finding was that the use of child-focused programs in the community far exceeded the use of parent-focused programs. This finding was clearly rooted within the reality of parents’ lives: Many parents described that their lives were centred on meeting the needs of their children, and at the end of the day, there were rarely any resources of time or energy left to address their own needs. These findings are not surprising: Previous studies have shown that parents prioritize the needs of their children over their own needs. For example, in the TFD study, when parents were asked questions about their goals for accessing early childhood services, goals for children outweighed the goals parents had for themselves (Patel et al., 2008).
Given parents’ prioritization of meeting children’s needs, family-focused programs that address both child- and parent-centred goals within a single program may enhance the likelihood of meeting parents’ own needs (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014). In the current study, more parents had accessed family drop-in programs that welcomed both young children and their caregivers than parent-focused programs. Parents described benefits of family drop-ins for their child as well as for themselves, including enhanced social support. For parents with infants and preschool-aged children, family drop-in programs offered a safe and hassle-free place where their preschool-aged child could play freely and parents could nurse and connect with other parents. Beyond child development and parent support outcomes, the school-based, family drop-in program at one school site offered explicit school readiness opportunities for families through linkages with the school and practical, family-centred services (such as English language classes with free child minding services and free dental services) that focused on meeting the diverse needs of families. These findings certainly support the importance of family-centered practices that emphasize comprehensive services for the entire family and attention to family preferences or needs in designing and delivering early childhood services (Brooks-Gunn, Berlin, & Fuligni, 2000; Carpenter, 2007; Friend, Summers, & Turnbull, 2009).

Despite the challenging reality of parents’ lives, there were some indications that FDELK may be assisting parents in shifting their attention to meeting their own needs. For example, one parent eloquently spoke about how FDELK had given her time to participate in fitness classes to begin addressing her chronic health issues. The implications of this shift are significant with respect to the long term health and well-being of the family (Armistead, Klein, & Forehand, 1995; Chen & Fish, 2013).
FDELK aims to simplify care arrangements and enhance continuity throughout the day as children transition from the home to early education and care settings. An examination of parents’ use of non-parental child care showed that while for some families FDELK promoted a more consolidated care arrangement for the household, others continued to access multiple care arrangements for their children. Even when extended-day programs were made available to families, the cost of enrolling multiple children in care prohibited parents from using paid child care services. This issue was particularly salient for immigrant families who were struggling to make ends meet. These families had very few relatives living nearby for informal child care support and, thus, were further limited in their employment choices due to child care challenges. Shift work was common among immigrant families, with mothers working the day shift and fathers working the night shift. While this arrangement met the child care needs of children, parents reported feeling stretched and their quality of family life was significantly compromised.

Taken together, these findings are consistent with previous research that has reported the higher likelihood of lower SES families working non-standard hours (Presser & Cox, 1997) and the use of maternal or paternal care among families with parents working non-standard hours (Han, 2004). The reasons for the heavy reliance on maternal or paternal care remain unclear. However, one can speculate that issues related to financial constraints, limited supply of centre-based care during non-standard hours, and families’ need for care during the night hours influence parents’ choice of care for their children. Given that high quality centre-based care has been shown to be positively associated with children’s later cognitive outcomes (e.g., NICHD Early Child Care Research, 2002b) and readiness for school (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004), children whose mothers work at non-
standard hours may be disadvantaged because they are missing the opportunity to benefit from such interventions. Moreover, there are important implications on parents’ own well-being. Parents’ reporting of compromised family life due to working shifts and having limited options for care are also consistent with a body of research that suggests that non-standard work hours are associated with increased levels of work-family conflict (e.g., Davis, Pirretti, & Almeida, 2008; Grosswald, 2003; Mills & Täht, 2010). Notably, a study distinguishing different types of non-standard work schedules revealed that shift workers who work night, rotating, and split shifts all have significantly higher levels of negative work-to-family spillover than those working day or flexible schedules even after controlling from socio-demographic characteristics (Grosswald, 2003).

**FDELK Theory of Change Model**

A theory of change was developed based on parents’ own experiences with a newly implemented full-day, early learning program in Ontario. Because the model emerged from both deductive and inductive knowledge generation processes, it is essentially a hybrid model reflecting the cumulative research experience of TFD and PBS stakeholders and the voices of FDELK families who were the active participants of the program. That is, the existing TFD and PBS program stakeholder theory of change was used as a starting point for generating the initial outline of the model and from there, through inductive coding processes, parents’ perspectives were used to build the model from the ground up. Given that previous studies have primarily relied on the perspectives of researchers, program staff and administrators for generating a theory of change, this study represents a novel approach to generating a theory of change as it is grounded in parents’ direct experiences with the program. As such, it emphasizes the association between proximal program participation experiences and im-
mediate or short-term outcomes for children, parents, and families. Compared to other more typical forms of theory of change models, it lacks the articulation of long-term outcomes and the intermediary preconditions needed for achieving these outcomes (Anderson, 2005; Taplin & Clark, 2012). Furthermore, the FDELK theory of change represents the experiences of parents who were participating in the program during year 1 of implementation. As such, it reflects the realities and challenges that FDELK teachers and school staff faced, as well as the specific circumstances of families that framed their participation in the program. Thus, the generated theory of change is not meant to be generalized to other programs or settings. However, the broad pathways that emerged may serve as a general framework for other researchers who are interested in applying a theory of change approach to evaluating similar early learning programs.

**Three Broad Pathways**

After a lengthy process of coding and analysis, three broad overarching themes were identified that represented three distinct pathways through which program participation was linked to observed outcomes. Pathways 1 and 2 are consistent with the program stakeholder theory of change for TFD and PBS, while pathway 3 is a new broad category that captures the intersection of program participation and the daily lives of children, parents, and families.

**Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment**

Pathway 1 captured program processes that operated through children’s experience of their early learning environment. Three themes emerged for this pathway, reflecting program features or processes related to the *length, quality, and continuity* of children’s early learning experiences.
Length of Early Learning Program.

Parents reported a wide range of benefits associated with the increased length of the early learning program from a half-day to a full-day schedule. This specific mechanism is common to other full-day early learning programs, including the FDK programs in the US, that attribute short-term gains in children’s academic development primarily to the doubling of time children spend in the kindergarten program (Hahn et al., 2014). This feature of the FDELK program was reported to influence not only child-level, but also parent- and family-level benefits.

The association between the full-day program and enhanced child learning and development outcomes is generally consistent with existing FDELK studies that have found that participation reduces developmental vulnerability as measured by the EDI (Janus et al., 2012), and enhances language development over time (Pelletier, 2014), as well as with the US FDK studies that have documented significant short-term benefits of FDK for children’s academic skills (Cooper et al., 2010).

With respect to parent-level benefits, many parents reported that FDELK enhanced their capacity to work or study. Notably, this benefit was more salient for immigrant parents than non-immigrant in large part because immigrant parents experienced more barriers to employment or education opportunities and had limited resources. The FDELK schedule enabled them to reallocate their time to their studies, which meant that they were closer to achieving financial stability for their household. When these findings are examined within the framework of resource allocation theory (Becker, 1991; Foster, 2002), they suggest that these parents chose to maximize family well-being by reallocating their time to further their career goals, which, in turn, was seen as a necessary step toward achieving family financial
stability. Thus, as a publicly funded early learning and care program, FDELK provided parents with an affordable, safe place to send their children while they engaged in their studies.

These finding supports the commonly held assumption (Cooper et al., 2010), but rarely studied outcome that FDK programs support parents’ employment and education goals. The recent renewed interest in two-generation early childhood programs has provided some impetus in examining key maternal outcomes (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014). For instance, Sabol and Chase-Lansdale (2015) recently examined the potential role that Head Start programs may play in supporting parents’ education and employment goals. Using data from the Head Start Impact Study, they found that compared to parents of children in the control group, parents of children who participated in Head Start for two years (i.e., from age 3 to 5 years) had significantly steeper increases in their own educational attainment by the time their child was 6 years old. Notably, researchers did not find evidence that Head Start helped parents enter or return to the workforce over time; the inadequacy of part-time child care offered by Head Start and the issue of finding child care for younger children in the family were thought to have prevented parents from staying or entering the workforce. These findings are consistent with the challenges reported by some FDELK parents in the study who had not been able to return to work due to limited options for affordable child care. That is, although the FDELK program generally supported their employment or schooling responsibilities, the challenges of finding affordable, flexible, and high quality before-and after-school care remained a concern for many working parents, and for stay-at home

27 Children in the control group were allowed to enrol in Head Start the follow year. Thus, the comparison is between parents of children who were allowed enrolment at age 3 and participated in the program for up to 2 years versus parents of children who were delayed enrolment until age 4 and participated in the program for up to 1 year.
parents, these barriers prevented them from entering the workforce. In particular, the cost of care for multiple children outweighed the benefits of employment for these parents.

At the family-level, many parents reported experiencing a reduction of financial stress for the family. It is noteworthy that this benefit was experienced predominantly by non-immigrant families who were using paid child care services. For these families, FDELK clearly reduced the number of paid child care hours, which alleviated their financial burden associated with child care. While more non-immigrant families reported that FDELK enhanced their capacity to work or study, this outcome was not associated with reduction in family financial stress for immigrant families as paid child care was not an option given their financial limitations. Therefore, these findings point to different primary benefits of lengthening the FDELK program for immigrant and non-immigrant parents. That is, for immigrant families who had greater financial barriers, FDELK program supported their work or study responsibilities but did not remove the barriers associated with accessing paid, non-parental care. For non-immigrant families who already had access to non-parental care, the FDELK program alleviated some of the burden associated with cost of care. This type of differential effect is commonly observed in universal early childhood policy initiatives (Ceci & Papierno, 2005). For example, research examining the impact of Quebec’s universal child care policy has found that although the use of regulated care increased for all families of various SES backgrounds, the greatest increase in use of care was for children from high-income families (Kohen, Dahinten, Khan, & Hertzman, 2008). Given the finding that FDELK participation may result in differential effects for families with varying SES backgrounds, further research is needed to determine what additional supports may be needed particularly for families experiencing greater barriers to accessing high-quality, non-parental care.
Quality of Early Learning Program.

A significant contribution of this study is that parents’ voices revealed other key program processes related to the early learning environment that are thought to influence important outcomes. Consistent with the sizeable literature on program quality and the accumulating research experience of TFD, PBS and FDELK, parents attributed many positive child and parent-level benefits to process quality features of the FDELK program.

Despite many parents not having an intimate understanding about the pedagogy behind play-based learning, it was quite clear to many parents that their child was developing a love for learning through play. Additionally, the integrated staff team was associated with several process quality features including enhanced capacity of teachers to: (1) deliver a wide range of learning experiences, (2) manage children’s behaviour, (3) foster positive interactions, (4) establish positive teacher-child relationships, and (5) provide individual attention to students. Moreover, the presence of the ECE teacher was thought to promote a climate of nurturance for children in the classroom. Thus, parent perspectives regarding the advantages of the integrated staff team are consistent with teacher perspectives as reported by Vanderlee et al. (2012) and Pelletier (2012b; 2012b; 2014a) and parent perspectives as reported by Vanderlee et al. (2012). Specifically, many FDELK parents in the provincial study also emphasized the benefits of having two adults in the classroom for improving the capacity of the teaching team to offer individual attention to students, foster positive experiences for children, and deliver more diverse learning experiences. Although parents in the current study did not associate any concerns with the integrated staff team, some parents in the provincial study expressed worries about the impact of negative partnerships on children’s classroom
experiences and the challenges that even two teachers may face in managing the high number of children enrolled in FDELK classrooms.

These process quality features were not only associated, in parents’ minds, with enhanced child development, they were also associated with enhancements in children’s motivation to learn. Many outcome studies in early childhood have measured the impact of interventions on children’s academic skills. Only a handful have examined whether program participation is associated with enhancements in children’s desire and motivation to learn despite the evidence from longitudinal studies suggesting that motivational factors matter for children’s academic attainment and school success (Reynolds, Englund et al., 2010; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). Wigfield and Eccles (2002) theorized that early in the child’s schooling career, young children are optimistic about learning and are highly motivated and positively perceive learning in school, relative to their later years. Hayakawa et al. (2013) found that in the Chicago CPC program, children’s motivation was enhanced through a complex pathway that started with improvements in early parent involvement, which, in turn, enhanced children’s achievement in kindergarten. Enhanced kindergarten achievement then influenced first grade student motivation. Based on the findings of the current study, children’s motivation during kindergarten was enhanced through their inquiry or play-based early learning experiences.

Finally, parents’ perceived quality of children’s early learning experiences were associated with their enhanced well-being. In particular, parents reported that they felt less guilty about being away from their children given that they are well looked after and fully engaged in their learning. This finding supports the available research on the impact of child care providers’ quality of caregiving interactions on the well-being of parents (Shinn, Phillips,
Howes, Galinsky, & Whitebrook, 1990; Phillips, 1992). In one study, when child care providers were perceived to be sensitive and responsive, mothers were more satisfied with the care children received, were more likely to believe that their children benefited from child care, and had fewer feelings of loneliness associated with missing their children. In the current study, FDELK parents also reported that their well-being was enhanced by the knowledge that their child was thriving in the early learning environment. Parental well-being is an important outcome in itself and with respect to its implications for parenting capacity (Brooks-Gunn et al., 2000; Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Newland, 2015). Findings suggest that parental well-being can be indirectly influenced via children’s adjustment and progress in the early learning program.

**Continuity of Children’s Early Learning Experiences.**

The third theme was related to aspects of the FDELK program that enhanced the continuity of children’s early learning experiences. This is a goal that is unique to initiatives with service integration design elements (Dockett & Perry, 2014; Corter et al., 2008; Pelletier & Corter, 2006).

Not surprisingly, only parents who had experienced seamless early learning and care situations reported program features that promoted continuity. While continuity can take shape in a variety of ways, these families reported only horizontal continuity primarily through their participation in onsite child care programs (i.e., extended-day program or Best Start child care). Varying levels of integration between the early learning and care programs were reported by families who were participating in FDELK plus the extended-day option and Best Start early learning and care, with stronger working relationships noted for the Best Start early learning team. Regardless, all three parents acknowledged the importance of coor-
ordinated approach to delivering the curriculum and the physical co-location of the programs to promote continuity across early learning environments for children throughout the day. These program processes were thought to have improved children’s daily life; no parent-level or family-level outcomes were associated with them.

Overall, these findings suggest that this specific mechanism was less salient for families compared to the other two early learning environment mechanisms. This may partly reflect the relative weakness in the implementation of the extended-day program as a strategy to enhance the continuity of children’s early learning experiences across the early education and care portions of children’s day. However, research evidence from the TFD project suggests that continuity is not only achieved through the integration of early learning and care programs; it can also be achieved through meaningful partnerships between families and schools (Arimura et al., 2011). That is, when families and early learning teams share common goals and strategies for supporting children’s growth and development, children’s experience a coherent early learning environment that stretches across both the school and family contexts. As emphasized in Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta’s (2000) conceptualization of transitions, it is the links among child, home, school, peer, and neighbourhood factors that create a dynamic network of relationships that eases or challenges children’s transition to school.

**Pathway 2: Parent Engagement & Support**

Pathway 2 captured program processes that operated through parents’ engagement with the school community and their perceived levels of support. A wide variety of sub-themes emerged which were included under three themes relating to program processes that fostered parent engagement, supported parents’ well-being, and supported parents’ parenting role. Compared to pathway 1 program processes, fewer parents reported each theme and
code, suggesting that experiences were more variable across families in this area. This likely reflects the limited explicit emphasis on parent participation and family support in the design and implementation of FDELK.

**Parent Engagement.**

In the area of parent engagement, communication was an essential aspect of parents’ engagement with the school community. In particular, parents emphasized the *content* (i.e., communication about the child’s progress and adjustment), *modality* (i.e., use of family’s preferred method of communication), and *timing* (i.e., sharing information in a timely manner) of communication with FDELK teachers. These findings are not surprising given that regular, two-way communication between families and school staff has been shown to benefit children by enhancing the quality of adult-child interactions across both the home and early learning environments (Owen, Ware & Barfoot, 2000) and fostering better knowledge of the child’s daily experiences, which, in turn, increases continuity and adjustment of demands and opportunities across settings (OECD, 2012). Notably, fewer parents reported program experiences that related to other categories of parent engagement such as parent involvement activities at school and family involvement at home (Fantuzzo et al., 2013). In particular, the challenges associated with participating in school-based activities were one of the most commonly reported types of parent involvement barrier among this group of FDELK parents.

Moreover, only two parents reported that communication was enhanced with the availability of two teachers; this finding is contrary to TFD research findings where many parents acknowledged the advantage of communicating with an early learning team (Arimura, 2008). Additionally, program processes related to parent involvement (i.e., wider timeframe to participate, family learning activities, and invitation to participate in parent in-
volvement activities) were reported by only one to two parents, which further supports the hypothesis that influence of pathway 2 program processes were relatively weaker than the influence of pathway 1 program processes.

Parent engagement program processes were associated with child, parent-, and family-level benefits. However, these processes were more commonly associated with enhanced parent involvement and parent knowledge outcomes, which are more commonly reported in the early childhood intervention literature (e.g., Reynolds, Englund et al., 2010). Notably, enhanced parent social support was not often reported among parent engagement program processes, which further delineates the limitations of the FDELK program in meeting parents’ need for support. Moreover, only two parents reported that their family experienced an enhanced sense of belonging to the school community, which is a key indicator of successful transition to school (Dockett, Petriskyj, & Perry, 2014). These finding are contrary to TFD findings that have shown that over the course of their participation, TFD parents came to view their children’s school community to be vital sources of social support (Arinura & Cor- ter, 2010). Similarly, other researchers have found evidence for the role that early education programs can play in providing parents access to a network of supportive peers who may facilitate parents’ motivation to advance their educational and career goals (Sommer, Chase- Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, Gardner, Raunder, & Freel, 2012).

Supporting Parents’ Well-Being & Parenting Role.

With respect to parent support program processes, the findings suggest that FDELK participation was associated with opportunities for parents to feel supported in their parenting role as well as in their ability to improve their well-being. The latter finding is unique to this study as parental well-being is rarely an explicit goal of early childhood programs. Participa-
tion in FDELK appeared to support parents’ psychological well-being by ensuring that children were safe and well and by providing parents with the opportunity to witness growth in their child’s development. Similar process findings were reported by Sommer et al. (2012) who found that observing one’s own child thrive and grow in an early education program and feeling secure about the child’s safety and well-being in the program appeared to be linked to parents’ optimism about their own educational prospects. Overall, consistent with ecological systems and transactional theories of development, these findings suggest that the mechanisms leading to parental well-being are intricately linked to children’s well-being and development. Notably, additional program experiences, which were missing from the current study, were reported by Sommer et al. (2012): growth of relational support from center staff and access to information and resources.

Furthermore, FDELK appeared to support parents’ parenting role primarily by reducing child care hours or eliminating the need for child care. This, in turn, was most commonly associated with reduced family financial stress. As noted previously, this outcome was reported predominantly by non-immigrant families.

In summary, given that other research have shown wider benefits of integrated early childhood programs on parent engagement and support (Arimura & Corter, 2010; Patel & Corter, 2013; Sabol & Chase-Lansdale, 2015; Sommer et al., 2012), these findings are somewhat disappointing. However, they are not entirely surprising in the context of available data from the indicators of change tool. As reported previously, across most school sites, ratings were higher for the dimension of Early Learning Environment, while ratings were relatively lower for the dimension of Parent Participation (Pelletier, 2012b). This suggests that in year 1, early learning teams were less successful in using an integrated approach to elicit in-
put from families, offer support and resources, and establish relationship with families. Taken together, these findings suggest that family-school relationships were at the early stages of development, which may explain the lack of relationship-building program processes in parents’ narratives.

Pathway 3: Family Life

In the current study, a third pathway captured program processes related to the daily life of children, parents, and families. As with pathway 2, fewer parents reported program processes related to family life compared to pathway 1, suggesting the relative weaker influence of these processes on outcomes. Nevertheless, pathway 3 represents an important mechanism of influence unique to early childhood initiatives with service integration design elements.

Overall, findings suggested that the children’s daily life was simplified (primarily as a result of eliminating the mid-day transition), parents experienced fewer parenting daily hassles (because the FDELK scheduled freed up time for them and consolidated the pick-up and drop-off arrangements for children), and families experienced a more consolidated family routine (as a result of greater alignment between children’s school schedule and parents’ work/study schedule). These program processes were, in turn, associated with enhanced quality of life and well-being at the level of the child, parents, and the family. In the previously conceptualized theory of change model for TFD/PBS, aspects of children and parents’ daily life were subsumed under pathway 1 and 2 (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Corter et al., 2012; Pelletier, 2012a). Compared to the program processes captured under pathways 1 and 2, pathway 3 program processes had the distinct quality of representing children and parents’ daily activities and routines, which, in turn, were associated with their quality of life. From a
theoretical perspective, it also made sense to highlight family life as a distinct pathway given that early childhood service integration initiatives explicitly aim to improve the day-to-day lives of children and families through the seamless delivery of early learning, care and family support services.

The key results pertaining to pathway 3 generally support the correlational findings reported by Arimura and Corter (2010) that linked integrated early childhood services with lower levels of parenting daily hassles and greater continuity in children’s day as reported by children themselves. Moreover, these findings are interesting in the context of other research that highlights the cumulative impact of daily experiences on children and parents’ well-being. For instance, there is evidence to suggest that parents’ perceived levels of daily hassles stemming from parenting responsibilities are more predictive of adjustment for both children and parents than major life events (Coplan, Bowker, & Cooper, 2003; Creasey & Reese, 1996; Crnic, Gaze, & Hoffman, 2005; Crnic & Low, 2002). For children, there is also a body of literature that examines the stability of care that children receive and the consequences of instability for children’s development. Generally studies have found that multiple non-parental care arrangements, particularly during infancy and toddlerhood, disrupt children’s emerging relationship with others and may impede their socio-emotional development (Bрастч-Нінс et al., 2015). Moreover, lower quality caregiving environments are associated with stressful experiences as measured by cortisol, children’s stress hormone levels. It is not known whether elevated cortisol levels at child care settings are an adaptive response to the stresses of group life or an enduring response that places children at risk for maladjustment later in their development; however, in general, chronic increases in stress hormones are considered harmful because it may undermine the immune system (Vermeer & van Ijzendoorn,
Thus, the nature of parents’ and children’s daily experiences and routines appear to have consequences for their well-being at least in the short-term and perhaps in the long run. This was certainly the case for FDELK parents who reported that daily stress associated with difficult transitions stemming from complex care arrangements and the half-day schedule can be reduced by lengthening the program so that all children in the household have the same school schedule. While, the current study provided preliminary evidence to suggest that FDELK promoted the well-being of children, parents, and families by facilitating key changes in their daily routine and experiences, clearly, further research is needed to examine the saliency of this pathway in the context of varying child care and family demographic characteristics.

According to Parents, How was FDELK Performing as a…?

Full-Day Early Learning Program with Service Integration Design Elements?

The FDELK program widened the timeframe for children’s learning and development and offered children high quality early learning experiences. These processes were, in turn, associated with important developmental and school engagement outcomes for children and enhanced work/study options and well-being outcomes for parents. For parents, the length of the early learning program facilitated their work/study responsibilities, whereas the perceived quality of children’s early learning experiences were thought to have enhanced their well-being. Notably, parents associated two key design elements of FDELK, integrated staff teams and the play-based early learning approach, to important quality-related program processes; concrete characteristics of the integrated staff team and the immediate engagement effects of the play-based approach on children were most visible to parents who generally had limited exposure to the inner workings of the FDELK classroom.
Early Learning Program with Parent Participation Goals?

Examination of program processes related to parent engagement and support revealed variable experiences across families. In general, parents who had existing ties to the school appeared to have had little difficulty communicating with teachers and continued to strengthen and benefit from their relationship with the school community. Others with no parent involvement experiences, pre-existing relationship with the school or who had language/cultural barriers experienced greater parent involvement challenges.

Furthermore, relationship-building program processes were missing largely from parents’ report of program participation experiences. Overall, FDELK families as a group appeared to have had weaker ties to the school community than groups of families sampled in the TFD and PBS studies. In particular, many FDELK parents had not yet come to view the school community as an important source of support. Notably, parents who were accessing family support services had stronger relationship ties with family support staff than FDELK teachers.

Early Learning Program with Extended-Day Options?

Although the length of the FDELK program alleviated to some degree the financial strain associated with the use of paid child care services for some families and provided a group of parents engaged in schooling a safe and stimulating place to send their children while they engaged in their studies, the extended-day program was seriously limited in its goals to offer accessible, seamless before- and after-school care for 4- and 5-year-olds. With respect to accessibility, the high cost made this service largely unaffordable, particularly to immigrant families with limited financial means. Other accessibility issues such as lack of flexible enrolment options and incompatibly of program hours and work schedules further
made this program inaccessible to families. Given that lower SES families need more affordable, flexible, and secure child care services (Johansen et al., 1996; Kim & Fram, 2009), the extended-day program largely failed to alleviate the challenges that many families face in finding high quality, part-time care for young children.

In summary, the cumulative findings pertaining to the weaker influence of parent engagement and support pathway, the underdeveloped family-school partnerships, and the limited role of FDELK in enhancing social support for parents points to the limitations of the FDELK design that emphasizes the integration of early education and care without including family support in the integration mix. Moreover, if families of diverse socio-economic backgrounds were to take advantage of the extended-day program, issues of affordability and flexibility must be addressed.

Methodological Contributions

This study used a novel approach to advance our conceptual understanding of how full-day early learning programs, such as Ontario’s FDELK, work for families. Much of the previous research on understanding the causal mechanisms of early childhood programs has used quantitative methods to investigate how program participation links to favourable outcomes in adolescence and adulthood. In particular, Reynold’s (2000) confirmatory program evaluation (CPC) approach has been used to evaluate the effectiveness of three well-known preschool programs in the US. It is a confirmatory approach to testing the validity of program theories rather than an approach for building theories from the ground up, based on the experiences of those who deliver and use the services. While the evidence base generated from the CPC approach has significantly contributed to our understanding of how broad categories of causal mechanisms operate to influence desirable outcomes in the long-term, it does not
inform our understanding of how proximal program processes or experiences influence short-term outcomes in children, parents and families (Hayakawa & Reynolds, 2014). Finally, CPC studies are immensely expensive and time consuming to conduct, and cannot meet program improvement needs of ongoing initiatives. In addition to furthering our understanding of causal mechanisms, this study offers a methodology for measuring parent engagement; previous attempts at capturing parent participation experiences have been limited to the use of surveys, narrowly focusing on parental satisfaction or parent involvement behaviours (Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013).

Given the constraints of existing methodologies, an alternative approach was needed to understand how proximal program mechanisms operated to influence short-term outcomes for children, parents, and families based on the perspective of parents. For the purpose of the current study, template analysis was a good fit as it supported both deductive and inductive knowledge generation processes and the use of a template structure for organizing themes that emerged from the data. By having an explicit organizing framework in mind, it was then feasible to focus on coding only relevant aspects of the text. At the same time, the data-driven inductive coding process allowed for the discovery of unanticipated insights, which was crucial given the exploratory nature of this study. This ‘abductive’ reasoning that moves back and forth between deduction and induction is akin to mixed method approaches that combine qualitative and quantitative methods in a sequential fashion (Morgan, 2007). The pragmatic nature of this theory generation process bridges the dichotomy of postpositivism and social constructivism worldviews and offers researchers a more flexible, and manageable approach to theory building. While this approach is used more commonly in health and sociology related fields (Waring & Wainwright, 2008), this study showed that it can be effective-
ly applied as a methodology for generating program theory for integrated early childhood programs.

An additional innovation was the use of an alternative data source to generate a theory of change. This study showed that it is possible to ask parents to theorize about how a program works for their family. Parents were not only willing and engaged research participants; they were also reflective and thoughtful historians and detectives when asked to theorize about how a program was working or not working for their family. Parents were generous in sharing both their positive and negative experiences of the program, and the integrity of this research endeavour was built solidly on the foundation of parents’ insights and expert knowledge of their children and of the inner workings of their family. The comprehensive scope of developmental outcomes reported by parents suggests that parents were thinking about children’s development in a much more holistic manner than what is often captured in early childhood research (Anderson et al., 2003; Friend et al., 2009; Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013). These findings also support the notion that parents have a good basic understanding of development that would permit them to interpret adequately the child development issues they may face with their own children (Sameroff & Feil, 1985). The use of parent perspectives to generate a theory of change for FDELK mirrors the efforts of other researchers who are developing methods to capture relationship quality from the perspective of parents (e.g., Porter & Bromer, 2013).

Beyond the integrity of using parents’ perspective to generate a theory of change, there are other practical reasons for understanding what is most important to parents. If programs are to serve the needs of families, parents’ goals and expectations should inform the
ways in which programs and services are designed and delivered to families in the first place (Patel et al., 2008).

Finally, as part of the building a theory of change for FDELK, this study captured a broader scope of outcomes for children, parents, and families. Despite widely accepted assertions that the development of children unfolds in the context of their relationships with important adults in their lives and effective interventions ought to include significant engagement with parents and other caregivers, little evaluation research has examined this premise. Brooks-Gunn et al. (2000) noted: “It is almost as through the primacy of parental change has been reified to the point that empirical verification is not considered necessary” (p. 562). Indeed, program effectiveness has been most commonly measured in terms of child outcomes, and parent or caregiver outcomes have been viewed primarily in terms of their value as mediators of child change rather than as desired objectives in their own right (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013). The findings of this study suggest that with a deeper understanding of program processes, we can begin to conceptualize a more accurate scope of potential program effects on the entire family system.

Taken together, the theory of change approach holds much promise. The use of both qualitative (theory-building) and quantitative (theory-testing) analyses in this approach produce rich stories backed with quantitative evidence, which may do a better job of engaging stakeholders than numbers or narratives alone, and in turn, may be more effective in practice and policy improvement. As well, they may serve to engage the broader public and the media in important ECEC concerns. The current study further builds on the efforts of other researchers who have used innovative, qualitative methods to further our understanding of CCIs. For instance, Nelson et al. (2012) used turning point stories to examine the long-term
impact of the Better Beginnings, Better Futures project on youth who participated in the intervention from ages 4 to 8 years. They reported that narrative analysis, which is typically not used in program impact studies, “can produce significant added value in understanding and articulating programmatic outcomes, particularly in the case of long-term prevention-oriented programs such as Better Beginnings” (p. 303). Given the significant challenges associated with documenting the effects of CCIs, innovative methods are needed in order to fulfill both the accountability and program improvement needs of stakeholders.

**Limitations of the Study**

Despite the methodological strengths discussed above, there are several noteworthy limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the larger context of the study must be considered when interpreting the findings. This study was conducted during the year 1 of FDELK implementation. This meant that schools were still in the process of making sense of a novel and complex school reform initiative. Although the service integration ratings suggested that relatively high levels of collaborative practice were achieved during year 1 (Pelletier, 2012b), findings from the larger Peel study suggest that as service integration improved from year 1 to year 3, so did children’s performance on standardized measures of academic outcomes (Pelletier, 2014). Additionally, some schools had not yet established the envisioned extended-day program due to a host of logistical and political issues, and across many schools that did offer the extended-day program, it was operated by a third-party child care agency rather than by the school board. The key implication of this arrangement was that the extended-day program was delivered by a completely separate staff of ECEs, with no overlap with the FDELK staff team. This is contrary to the intended delivery of the extended-day program as outlined in the Ministry’s Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program: The Extended
Day Program draft document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b). The existing evidence comparing extended-day programs operated by school boards and by third party agencies suggest that continuity is compromised in the latter arrangement particularly if school staff team and the community child care providers do not share the same goals (Janmohamed et al., 2014). Thus, the perspectives of parents sampled in this study reflected the reality of challenges that are common in the early stages of implementing a large-scale school reform initiative. It is possible that a more comprehensive theory of change would have emerged at a later stage of FDELK implementation when staff teams and extended-day programs were operating with greater fidelity to the FDELK model.

Second, I recruited parents who were already participating in the larger Peel FDELK study. Given logistical constraints, only four out of seven school sites were sampled. Moreover, although I attempted to collect a purposeful sample of families with varying personal, family, and work contexts, given the challenges of recruitment and data collection (e.g., reaching parents by telephone and cancellations), I was not able to reach each parent who met criteria for participation and several parents who agreed to participate did not complete the interview. Although the majority of parents that I contacted agreed to participate, it is possible that parents who had more negative or less articulate perspectives about the program purposefully avoided being recruited for the study. Although the goal of this study was to gather rich, contextualized data that captured vivid picture parents’ perspectives rather than to collect a representative sample of families for generalizability purposes, a larger sample size of families may have enhanced the strength of the evidence base for the theory of change that emerged for FDELK.
Thirdly, it is important to consider the issue of reporting bias. Although parents were assured of their anonymity, it is possible that some parents may have felt pressured to provide a perspective slanted toward the positive given that FDELK was a brand new program that was being framed by the Ministry of Education as an innovative and promising initiative. As the sole interviewer for this study, my sense was that after rapport was established, the majority of parents appeared comfortable to share both positive and negative experiences. Nevertheless, the possibility of a reporting bias cannot be entirely eliminated.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge that the inclusion of member checking (i.e., sharing the FDELK theory of change with parents in focus groups to elicit judgements about the accuracy of interpretations) as part of the research design would have further enhanced the credibility or accuracy of the findings. Member checking is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility.

**Implications for Future Research, Practice, & Policy**

This study represents the initial stage of research for building and testing a theory of change that will inform the ongoing delivery and measurement of program effects. Ongoing research is needed to further develop and refine the framework. In particular, the voices of more families who have used the extended-day program need to be captured to further understand how this program benefits or challenges families. Moreover, the following dimensions should be explored to further develop a more complete and precise understanding of how FDELK pathways operate in the context of families’ lives:

1. **Locale/Contexts**: Examine the influence of school, home, community contexts as potential mediators or moderators of program effects
2. **Person/Demographics:** Further explore the influence of key demographic factors as potential mediators or moderators of program effects

3. **Time:** Distinguish between immediate experiences vs. cumulative experiences over time that children and parents take with them, as well as short-term developmental outcomes vs. longer-term developmental outcomes

4. **Structural vs. Relational/Experiential Processes:** Examine the relative influence of costly structural features versus not so costly yet difficult to replicate relational or experiential program processes

5. **Transactional Nature of Influence:** Further explore the cross-pathway influences and the transactional nature of child-parent relationships

Once a more complete theory of change framework has been developed based on parents’ perspectives, it would be beneficial to undergo a similar theory building process with educators, school administrators and community partners to capture the perspective of those who are involved in the delivery of FDELK. With the understanding that multiple theories of change may be operating simultaneously, these generated theories can be shared with key stakeholders to gain general agreement. This type of consensus building process is not only needed for furthering research and enhancing the fidelity of implementation, but also for strengthening relationships among stakeholders. Following the theory development stages, the generated theory of change can inform the design and implementation of ongoing FDELK research activities. Specifically, the framework will inform which outcomes and areas of program processes should be measured. This will likely lead to a more holistic understanding of the impact of FDELK on children, parents, and families, and inform what aspects of the program are working well and which aspects require further improvement.
At the current stage of research, the findings point to the strengths and weaknesses of FDELK implementation during year 1 for the school sites sampled. One of the most consistently reported program processes was related to a structural characteristic of FDELK – a full-day of learning for 4- and 5-year-olds. The practical impacts of lengthening the JK/SK schedule were perhaps most immediately apparent to families. Children experienced a simpler daily life and for some this resulted in an alignment of children’s schedules throughout the household. By engaging children in a program of learning for the full-day, parents reported enhanced capacity to work or study. Other parents who did not work outside of the home, were able to attend to other family responsibilities, which meant that after-school hours could be more readily devoted to quality time with children. In contrast, parents were less able to clearly discern the more process-oriented features of the early learning environment. While some parents described quality features of the early learning program based on their own observations and interactions, others inferred that these features or processes were present based on assumptions about the length of the school day and the integrated staff team. For instance, some parents assumed that FDELK enabled teachers to be more responsive to children’s individual needs and foster emotional support because there are two adults in the classroom. However, these parents did not provide specific examples based on their own observations of classroom interactions or their own interactions with teachers. This suggests that perhaps these parents had not yet had the opportunity to observe the inner workings of the FDELK classroom as suggested by the reported parent involvement challenges.

Perhaps the larger issue that frames these findings is the need for explicit strategies to enhance parent engagement and support so that more families, particularly newcomer families and families without prior relationships with the school, can feel connected to and sup-
ported by the school community. Certainly, many parents reported feeling a sense of joy seeing how much their child enjoyed attending the FDELK program. However, it appears that parents’ relationship with the school had not grown to the point that they entrusted the school as an essential source of social support. Compared to TFD parents sampled in my MA study (Arimura & Corter, 2010), a smaller percentage of families reported that they viewed the school community as part of their social support network.

A key step to strengthening parent engagement and support may be to establish a systematic communication strategy so that families remain informed about what children are expected to learn and how each child is progressing throughout the entire duration of the year. Lessons can be drawn from the TFD demonstration study. For example, the use of communication logs to explicitly share information between all members of the early years team (including ECEs that staffed the before and after-school portion of children’s day) meant that parents received information about the child’s entire day, not just bits and pieces of their day. The weekly sharing of classroom activities and learning goals meant that parents were in a better position to reinforce children’s learning in the home settings and to have an informed conversation with children about their day (Corter et al., 2007).

Findings of the study also suggest that FDELK parents were unsure about the pedagogy of play-based learning and how kindergarten and ECE teachers were expected to work together. It is likely that teachers themselves were in the process of making sense of these features of the FDELK program. Thus, the gap in parents’ understanding of these core features of the FDELK may have partly reflected the early stage of FDELK implementation. However, it is likely that lack of explicit parent engagement strategies to familiarize families with the inner workings of the FDELK program is also to blame. In particular, some FDELK
Parents reported a decline in their involvement from daycare to FDELK due to school barriers for regular, informal contact with the teaching team and limited access to the classroom. Furthermore, participation in school activities was clearly challenged by parents’ work schedules. Thus, open door policies such as those employed in TFD classrooms that welcome parents to take part in all activities at any point of the day are needed to support parents desire to be involved in their child’s learning (Corter et al., 2007). Furthermore, given the culturally diverse makeup of families in many neighbourhoods throughout Ontario, conventional definitions of parent involvement will need to be broadened to include ways in which newcomer families from various cultural backgrounds contribute to children’s educational success (Han, 2012; Lopez, 2001).

In an ideal world, the FDELK theory of change will evolve and expand over time as the broader community’s capacity to support the healthy development of parents and caregivers improves with a better understanding of how programs exert their influence and operative within the context of the lives of children, parents, and families. The current study suggests that we must broaden our scope of expected outcomes beyond the parameters of child achievement data to make judgements about the effectiveness of early childhood initiatives. The evidence that is emerging on the influence of parent mediated pathways suggests that we must also pay attention to processes and outcomes that influence parenting capacity and the well-being of children, parents, and families.

Pascal (2009) not only envisioned a seamless early learning program for 4- and 5-year-olds, but also an integrated system of community programs for children and families under a single municipal system manager. His vision is in line with the best available scientific evidence suggesting that it is simply not enough to enrich children’s early learning expe-
riences to protect them from the cumulative impact of adversity. The biology of adversity suggests that children who experience toxic stress may be less able to benefit from good quality early childhood programs because of impairments in their developing brain circuitry. Rather, fully integrated, two-generational programs that also explicitly aim to enhance the capabilities and needs of adult parents and caregivers are needed to reduce the impact of toxic stress that vulnerable families’ experience (Chase-Lansdale & Brooks-Gunn, 2014; Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013). Within this renewed framework, the priority is building the executive function and self-regulation skills of parents and providers of early care and education, strengthening caregiver mental health, and enhancing family economic stability (Shonkoff & Fisher, 2013). The accompanying theory of change is that better outcomes can be achieved for children if greater attention is paid to actively enhancing the capabilities and needs of adult parents and caregivers rather than to passively provide information and informal support to families.

Ontario’s Early Years Policy Framework suggests that we are moving toward the development of an effective approach to implementing Best Start Child and Family Centres (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b). However, the fate of these centres remains uncertain at this time. Given the diversity of services that have developed in isolation and currently operate as distinct services without connections to other community programs, it will be a significant challenge for many communities to integrate the existing web of services. The science of early childhood suggests that the consequences of inaction are greater than the challenges we face. Without a strong community capacity to support the capabilities of parents, caregivers and families, we are seriously limited in our efforts to promote the healthy development of children, parents, and families.
References


Bratsch-Hines, M. E., Mokrova, I., Vernon-Feagans, L., & The Family Life Project Key Investigators. (2015). Child care instability from 6 to 36 months and the social adjust-


256


257


Ferns, C., & Friendly, M. (2014). *The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012*. Toronto, ON: Childcare Resource and Research Unit; Centre for Work, Families and Well-Being at the University of Guelph; and Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba.


259


Pelletier, J. (2012b). Key findings from Year 1 of Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten in Peel. Toronto, ON: Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.


266


Appendix A: FDELK Indicators of Change

(From Corter, Janmohamed, & Pelletier, 2012, pp. 76-79)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-location</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers work as individuals in separate programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers share/discuss planning and observations with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers organize program planning and implementation to complement each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>ECEs' and teachers' roles and responsibilities overlap with each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration</td>
<td>A single common program—ECEs and teachers are an early learning team with interchangeable roles and responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Early Learning Environment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Framework &amp; Pedagogical Approach</th>
<th>Co-location</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Coordination</th>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECEs and teachers plan separate programs.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers communicate plans with one another.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers coordinate their plans with one another.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers work together on significant elements of the curriculum (e.g., share a common approach to early literacy).</td>
<td>Early learning team uses a common curriculum approach and similar pedagogical strategies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Daily Schedules & Routines | ECEs and teachers follow separate routines and schedules. | ECEs and teachers communicate their routines and schedules across separate time periods. | ECEs and teachers coordinate their routines and schedules with one another. | ECEs and teachers establish routines and a schedule that includes joint responsibilities. | Early learning team establishes common routines and schedule for which both are responsible. |

| Use of Space | ECEs and teachers are in separate spaces within the school community. | ECEs and teachers communicate their plans for the environment; however, it is the responsibility of one staff. | ECEs and teachers organize the space to complement one another’s programming. | ECEs and teachers together organize common spaces within the classroom and outdoor environment. | Early learning team designs and sets up the program space including indoor/outdoor early learning environments. |

| Children’s Development & Progress | ECEs and teachers track and document children’s development and early learning using tools and approaches. | ECEs and teachers discuss their respective tools and approaches to monitoring and assessing child development. | ECEs and teachers complement one another’s techniques and strategies for observing and documenting children’s progress. | ECEs and teachers work together to use the same observation tools to monitor some areas of children’s developmental progress. | Early learning team conducts on-going observations and assessment of students using common tools and strategies. |

| Program Quality | ECEs and teachers assess program quality using their own approaches and measurement tools. | ECEs and teachers discuss their respective program content and approaches with each other and are aware of what each other does. | ECEs and teachers use approaches to monitor program quality that complement each other. | ECEs and teachers combine their individual program quality approaches and information for a holistic view. | Early learning team monitors program quality together using a common approach. |

<p>| Extended Day Program | Extended day program is located in school or nearby school. Teachers, ECEs and principal are unaware of extended day program content or routines. | FDELK and extended-day educators discuss respective program content and approaches with each other and are aware of what each other does. | FDELK and extended-day educators coordinate their separate programs, space, schedules and routines with each other. | FDELK and extended-day program share the same space programming across core and extended day. | Early learning team uses a common approach to monitor children’s early learning and development. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Learning Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Planning &amp; Implementation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Either ECEs or teachers are responsible for the planning and implementation of program. The other plays a supporting role. No joint planning time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour Guidance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Parent Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Co-location</th>
<th>2 Communication</th>
<th>3 Coordination</th>
<th>4 Collaboration</th>
<th>5 Integration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Input &amp; Participation In Programs</strong></td>
<td>ECEs and teachers have separate communication with parents and provide separate opportunities for parental engagement (e.g., individual conversations, in-class participation).</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers discuss parental concerns, conversations and participation with each other.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers use common occasions (e.g., school registration, orientation, family nights) to engage parents.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers use ongoing joint opportunities to engage parents in the program and seek their feedback about the program.</td>
<td>Early learning team has common strategies to engage parents' participation in the program and solicit their input about the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>ECEs and teachers individually talk to parents about resources for parenting supports.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers share information with each other about resources for parents.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers complement each other's information to and resources for parents.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers establish joint opportunities to share information and resources with parents.</td>
<td>Early learning team establishes common information and resources for parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships with families</strong></td>
<td>ECEs and teachers develop separate relationships with families.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers discuss their interactions with parents with each other.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers complement one another's interactions with families.</td>
<td>ECEs and teachers work together to establish their individual relationships with families.</td>
<td>Early learning team has a common, pro-active approach to building connections and relationships with families.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extended Day</strong></td>
<td>FDELKP and extended-day staff have separate communication with families.</td>
<td>FDELKP staff and extended-day staff share their communications with families as needed.</td>
<td>FDELKP staff and extended-day staff coordinate specific events and activities (e.g., joint registration and orientation session).</td>
<td>FDELKP staff and extended-day staff establish ongoing events and activities to engage parents' input and participation.</td>
<td>Early learning team has common strategies to engage and support parents.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Parent Interview Protocol and Record Form

Parent Interview Protocol

Participant ID: ______________________________________________
Child ID: ______________________________________________
School & Classroom: _________________________________________
Name of Interviewer: _________________________________________
Date of Interview: _______ / _______ / _______
INTRODUCTION

“Thank you for agreeing to talk to me. As you know, I am conducting a research project that examines parents’ experiences of using early childhood programs. Specifically, I am interested in talking to parents about the types of programs they are using to care for their KG child, the kinds of benefits/challenges they have experienced from participating in programs, and features of the programs that were helpful/not helpful to parents. In other words, I want to know how programs work from the perspective of parents who use them.”

“As I explained earlier, the interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Also, everything that you say to me will be completely confidential — I will not share individual interview information with the school or other programs. Only the research team will see the interview. We have assigned each interview an ID number, and no one except the research team will be able to match your name with that ID.”

“If you have any questions at any time, or if you don’t understand something I’ve said, please let me know. Also, if you feel uncomfortable with any questions, please let me know and we’ll go on to the next one. Do you have any questions now?”

SECTION A: BACKGROUND

“I would like to take a few moments to ask you a few basic background questions.”

A1. What is your relationship to (name of KG Child)?

Mother
Father
Other: ________________

A2. What is your current marital status?

Married
Common-law
Single
Separated/Divorced
Widow/er

A3. What is your current employment status?

Working full-time
Working one part-time job
Working several part-time jobs
On parental leave
Unemployed
Stay-at-home parent
Full-time student
Part-time student

Follow up:
- Where is your work located?
- How flexible is your work schedule?

A4. What is the highest level of education that you have achieved?

No formal schooling
Completed elementary school
Completed junior/middle school
Completed secondary/high school
Completed community/technical College
Completed 4-year university degree
Completed graduate or professional degree

A5. Who lives in your home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(First Name)</th>
<th>(Relationship to participant)</th>
<th>(Age)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A6. Where were you born? Where was your child/ren born?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Participant)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(Child/ren)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A7. What language(s) do you speak? What language is spoken at home?

1st Language: ________________
Other: ____________________________________
“Now I would like to talk to you about programs you are currently using, as well as those you have used in the past to care for your KG child. These programs may support parents (such as parent drop-in programs) and/or serve children directly (such as child care).”

B1. Let’s start by making a list of the programs you are using or have used in the past to care for your KG child.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B2. Now I would like you to describe each program in more detail. Let’s start with (name of program). How are you using/have used the program?

Probes:

- **Where** was the program offered?
- **What** services did the program offer? Which services did YOU use?
- **When** did you use the program? How often?
- **How** did you find out about the program?
- **Why** did you use the program in the first place?
- **Who** did you interact with while using the program?

B3. What benefits have (your KG child, you as a parent, and your family as a whole) experienced from participating in (name of program)? How did the program enhance (benefit)?

Probes:
a) Was the program helpful in **enhancing your overall well-being**?
   If so, what changes have you noticed about your well-being?
   How did the program enhance your well-being?

b) Was the program helpful in **enhancing your social support system**?
   If so, what changes have you noticed about your support system?
   How did the program enhancing your social support system?

c) Was the program helpful in **enhancing your parenting skills**?
   If so, what skills/strategies have you learned?
   How did the program enhance your parenting skills?

d) Was the program helpful in making you **feel more confident as a parent**?
   If so, what changes have you noticed about your confidence level?
   How did the program help to make you feel more confident as a parent?

e) Was the program helpful in allowing you to **be more involved in your child’s learning at home? School? Community?**
   If so, what changes have you noticed about your ability to support your child’s learning?
   How did the program help you to be more involved in your child’s learning?

f) Was the program helpful in **supporting your work/study responsibilities**?
   If so, what changes have you noticed about your ability to engage in work/study activities?
   How did the program support you in your ability to work/study?

B4. In your opinion, **what features** of the program were most helpful to you? **What aspects of your experience were most positive for you?**

**Probes:**

- Location
- Scheduling
- Affordability
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Resources
- Staff characteristics

B5. Did you experience any **challenges** in using the program? If so, **what challenges** did you experience? **What aspects of the program led to these challenges?**

**Probes:**

- Location
- Scheduling
SECTION C: AVAILABILITY OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

“In addition to formal programs, parents may also use other types of informal support that help them meet their parenting responsibilities.”

C1. Let’s start by naming these informal supports. I only need the first name of individuals. If you like, you can make up a name for each person. What is (name) relationship to you?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Relationship to participant</th>
<th>Type of support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C2. Now, I would like you to describe the kind of support you receive from (name).

Probes:

Social-emotional
Child care
Financial
Advice
Borrowing things

C3. Why do you think that it’s important for you to receive support from (name)? What is it about your relationship with (name) that makes you feel supported?

Probes:

- Non-judgemental
- Frequent contact
- Shared experiences
- Speaks my language
- Part of my community
- Share same background

C4. Overall, how satisfied are you with your social support system? What’s missing? What would make you feel more supported as a parent?

SECTION D: OTHER CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

“For the last part of the interview, I am interested in talking to you about other aspects of your life that may influence your experience as a parent.”

D1. Has your KG child experienced any health/developmental/emotional/behavioural difficulties? If so, please describe them and explain how it affected you as a parent.

Probes:

- Born pre-term/low birth weight
- Overweight
- Fussy eater
- Sleeping problems
- Difficulty adjusting to new situations
- Shy with unfamiliar people
- Difficulty separating from family members
- Doesn’t get along well with other children
- Difficulty with routines
- Slow to develop language skills
Slow to develop motor skills
Slow to develop literacy/numeracy skills
Allergies
Major physical illness
Developmental disability

D2. Have you experienced any health issues? If so, please describe and explain how they affected your parenting experiences.

Probes:

Mental health issue
Chronic health condition
Physical disability

D3. Lastly, please describe any major events that your family has experienced in the recent years. How have they impacted your family?

Probes:

Marital conflict/divorce/separation
Relocation
Loss of job
Death in family
Family health issues

“This concludes the interview. Thank you again for participating. Do you have anything else you would like to add? Any questions you would like to ask?”
Name of Program: ________________________________

**Description of Program Use**  
(type of services/frequency of use/location/impetus/interactions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits/Outcomes</th>
<th>Mechanisms/Intermediate Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(well-being/social support/capacity/self-confidence/involvement/work &amp; study)</td>
<td>(daily life/relationships/communication/information &amp; knowledge)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Mechanisms/Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(access/availability/unmet needs)</td>
<td>(costs/scheduling/conflicting info/interpersonal factors)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Parent Consent Letter/Form

Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

May 3, 2011

Dear Parents:

I am a graduate student at the University of Toronto and I am conducting a research study called, Understanding parents' experience of using early childhood services. This study is part of Dr. Janette Pelletier's research project (Full-day Early Learning/Kindergarten in Peel: A longitudinal comparison of full-day, half-day, and Best Start sites), which you and your child are currently participating in. The purpose of this letter is to tell you about the study and ask you whether you would like to participate.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview that will involve talking about your experiences of using early childhood programs such as kindergarten, child care, and family supports. If you agree, the interview will be audio-taped so I have a better record of what we talked about. The interview will take less than 1 hour to complete and will take place in a quiet classroom at your child’s school or at your home. As a token of our appreciation for your participation, we will donate $10 towards your child’s classroom library.

If you agree to participate, all information will be held strictly confidential and will only be viewed by authorized research personnel. Your name, your child's name and your school name will NOT be used. We will use numbers to identify people and schools. If you would like to receive a copy of the research report at the end of our study, please include this request on the consent form.

I sincerely hope that you will participate in this research project. The study will benefit families as we learn how early childhood programs can best support parents and children. This study will also be used as a dissertation project for completing my doctoral degree. It will be shared with practitioners, policymakers, and scholarly audiences. There is a consent format the bottom of this; please sign it if you are willing to participate.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to contact me at 416-270-8911 or my supervisor, Dr. Carl Corter, at 416-934-4513. If you wish to speak to someone not directly associated with this project, you can contact the University Ethics Review Office about your participation at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Sincerely,

Tomoko N. Arimura, Ph.D. Candidate
carimura@utoronto.ca

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Departments of Human Development and Applied Psychology
McCain House, 48 Walmer Road, Toronto, Ontario M5R 2K3 Canada
Tel: +1 416 934-4513 Fax: +1 416 934-4500
Consent Form

I have read the information and hereby give consent to participate in the research study conducted by Tomoko Arimura at the University Toronto.

☐ Yes, I agree to take part in the above-named study.

Name: ___________________ Signature: ___________________

Date: ___________________
Appendix D: Coding Templates

Initial Template:

1. Inputs
   1.1. School & Community Programs
   1.2. Salient FDELK Program Features
   1.3. Family Context
   1.4. Work & Schooling Context
   1.5. Social Support Network

2. Processes
   2.1. Children’s Early Learning Experiences
   2.2. Parents’ Relationship Building Experiences
   2.3. Children and Parents’ Daily Life Experiences

3. Outcomes
   3.1. Benefits
      3.1.1. Child-Level Benefits
      3.1.2. Parent-Level Benefits
      3.1.3. Family-Level Benefits
   3.2. Challenges
      3.2.1. Child-Level Challenges
      3.2.2. Parent-Level Challenges
      3.2.3. Family-Level Challenges
Midway:

1. Inputs
   1.1. School & Community Programs
      1.1.1. Kindergarten
      1.1.2. Child Care
      1.1.3. Preschool Programs
      1.1.4. Family Drop-In Programs
      1.1.5. After-School Programs
      1.1.6. Recreation
      1.1.7. Public Library
      1.1.8. Specialized Services
   1.2. Salient FDELK Program Features
      1.2.1. Full-Day Program
      1.2.2. Play-Based Curriculum
      1.2.3. Integrated Staff Team
      1.2.4. Extended-Day Program
   1.3. Family Context
      1.3.1. Family Composition
      1.3.2. Immigration
      1.3.3. Family Language
      1.3.4. Major Events
      1.3.5. Child Characteristics
      1.3.6. Child Health/Developmental Concerns
      1.3.7. Parent Health Concerns
   1.4. Work & Schooling Context
      1.4.1. Schedule
      1.4.2. Commute
      1.4.3. Flexibility
   1.5. Social Support Network
      1.5.1. Membership
      1.5.2. Type of support received
      1.5.3. Salient characteristics of members
      1.5.4. Overall satisfaction

2. Processes
   2.1. Child’s Early Learning Experiences
      2.1.1. Adjustment & Well-Being
      2.1.2. Engagement with Learning
      2.1.3. Relationships
   2.2. Parent’s Participation Experiences
      2.2.1. Parent Socialization Opportunities
      2.2.2. Parent Education Opportunities
      2.2.3. Parent Daily Life & Routine
      2.2.4. Parent Well-Being
      2.2.5. Parent Involvement
   2.3. Family Daily Life
      2.3.1. Family Child Care Arrangement
      2.3.2. Family Well-Being
   2.4. Program Characteristics
      2.4.1. Static Characteristics
      2.4.2. Staff Characteristics
      2.4.3. Service Integration Features
3. Outcomes

3.1. Benefits

3.1.1. Child-Level Benefits

3.1.1.1. Enhanced Child Daily Life
   3.1.1.1.1. Continuity
   3.1.1.1.2. Structured Routine

3.1.1.2. Enhanced Child Development
   3.1.1.2.1. Adaptive Skills
   3.1.1.2.2. Speech & Language Skills
   3.1.1.2.3. Social Skills
   3.1.1.2.4. Cognitive Skills

3.1.1.3. Enhanced Child Learning & Engagement
   3.1.1.3.1. Motivation to Learn
   3.1.1.3.2. Literacy Skills
   3.1.1.3.3. Accelerated Learning Rate
   3.1.1.3.4. English Language Proficiency

3.1.1.4. Enhanced Child Readiness
   3.1.1.4.1. Readiness for Kindergarten
   3.1.1.4.2. Readiness for Grade 1

3.1.1.5. Enhanced Child Relationships
   3.1.1.5.1. Relationships with Adults
   3.1.1.5.2. Relationships with Peers

3.1.1.6. Enhanced Child Physical Health

3.1.2. Parent-Level Benefits

3.1.2.1. Enhanced Capacity to Work or Study
3.1.2.2. Enhanced Parent Daily Life & Well-Being
3.1.2.3. Enhanced Parent Relationships
3.1.2.4. Enhanced Parent Involvement
3.1.2.5. Enhanced Parent Knowledge & Capacity

3.1.3. Family-Level Benefits

3.1.3.1. Enhanced Access to Services
3.1.3.2. Enhanced Child Care Arrangements
   3.1.3.2.1. Quality of Care
   3.1.3.2.2. Consolidation of Arrangements
3.1.3.3. Enhanced Family Well-Being
3.1.3.4. Enhanced Family Finances

3.1.4. Program-Level Benefits

3.1.4.1. Enhanced Program Quality
3.1.4.2. Enhanced Capacity of Teaching Staff

3.2. Challenges

3.2.1. Child-Level Challenges

3.2.1.1. Eating & Nutrition Concerns
3.2.1.2. Health & Well-Being Concerns
3.2.1.3. Learning Concerns

3.2.2. Parent-Level Benefits

3.2.2.1. Parenting Daily Hassles
3.2.2.2. Acculturation
3.2.2.3. Conflict
3.2.2.4. Chronic Health & Well-Being Issues

3.2.3. Family-Level Challenges

3.2.3.1. Chaotic Family Life
3.2.3.2. Child Care

3.2.4. Program-Level Challenges
   3.2.4.1. Program Quality
   3.2.4.2. Program Resources

3.3. Overall Satisfaction
## Inputs

### School & Community Programs

#### Child-Focused Programs

- **FDELK**
  - JK
  - SK

- **Child Care**
  - Onsite Centre-Based
  - Offsite Centre-Based
  - Offsite Home-Based
  - Offsite Kin-Based
  - Informal (Babysitting)

#### After-School Activity-Based Program

#### School-Based Readiness Programs

#### Camps

#### Recreation

### Parent-Focused Programs

#### Informal Parent Group

#### Language Classes

#### Fitness

#### Prenatal Classes

#### Home visiting

### Family-Focused Programs

#### Paid Sign-Up Family Programs

#### Free Drop-In Family Programs

- OEYC

#### Public Library Programs

### Specialized Services

#### Speech-Language Pathology (SLP) Services

#### Occupational Therapy (OT) Services

#### Physiotherapy (PT) Services

#### Paediatric Health Services

#### Developmental Assessment Services

#### Psychological Services

#### Autism Services

#### Behavioural Treatment Services

#### School-Based Multidisciplinary Services

### Salient Features of FDELK

#### Full-Day Program

#### Integrated Staff Team

#### Play-Based Curriculum

#### Extended-Day Program

### Family Context

#### Child Characteristics

#### Parent Characteristics

#### Family Characteristics

#### Major Events

#### Social Support Network

#### Membership

#### Type of Support Received
| 1.3.5.3. | Salient Characteristics of Members |
| 1.3.5.4. | Overall Satisfaction |
| 1.3.6. | Acculturation |
| 1.4. | Work/Study Context |
| 1.4.1. | Schedule |
| 1.4.2. | Commute |
| 1.4.3. | Flexibility |

## 2. PROCESSES ASSOCIATED WITH BENEFITS

### 2.1. Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment

#### 2.1.1. Increasing Length of Early Learning Program
- Full Day of School
- Full Day of Social Interactions
- Full Day of Learning
- Full Day of Self-Care Activities

#### 2.1.2. Enhancing Quality of Early Learning Program
- Building Motivation for Learning Through Play
- Greater Scope of Learning Activities With Two Teachers
- Greater Individual Attention from Two Teachers
- Two Adults in Classroom to Manage Behaviour
- Consistent & Clear Behavioural Expectations
- Availability of Two Teachers to Foster Positive Interactions
- Positive Child-Teacher Relationships
- Presence of ECE Teacher in Classroom to Provide Climate of Nurturance

#### 2.1.3. Enhancing Continuity of Children’s Early Learning Experiences
- Joint Curriculum
- Co-Location

### 2.2. Pathway 2: Parent Engagement & Support

#### 2.2.1. Fostering Parent Engagement
- Communication about Child’s Progress & Adjustment
- Timely & Family Friendly Communication
- Availability of Two Teachers to Communicate
- Wider Timeframe to Participate
- Invitation to Participate in PI Activities
- Family Learning Activities
- Welcoming School Environment
- Access to Translation Services

#### 2.2.2. Supporting Parents’ Well-Being
- Ensuring the Well-Being of Child/ren
- Observing Children’s Development
- Receiving & Giving Social Support
- Attending to Self-Care Needs

#### 2.2.3. Supporting Parents’ Parenting Role
- Reducing Child Care Hours/Costs
- Sense of Trust in Program Staff
- Spending Quality Time with Child
- Enhancing Options for Home-Based Care
- Accessing Child Care Registry

### 2.3. PATHWAY 3: FAMILY LIFE
### 2.3.1. Simplifying Child's Daily Life

| 2.3.1.1. | Elimination of Mid-Day Transition |
| 2.3.1.2. | Same Schedule as Siblings |
| 2.3.1.3. | Children Transition Together Throughout Day |
| 2.3.1.4. | Morning Routine in Home-Like Setting |
| 2.3.1.5. | Less Time Spent in Child Care |
| 2.3.1.6. | Consistent Discipline Throughout Day |

### 2.3.2. Alleviating Parents' Daily Life

| 2.3.2.1. | Freeing Up Time |
| 2.3.2.2. | Single Pick-Up & Drop Off Arrangement |

### 2.3.3. Consolidating the Family Routine

### 3 PROCESSES ASSOCIATED WITH CHALLENGES

#### 3.1. Pathway 1: Early Learning Environment

| 3.1.1. | Play-Based Curriculum |
| 3.1.1.1. | Not Enough Emphasis on Academics |
| 3.1.2. | Extended Day Program |
| 3.1.2.1. | High Cost |
| 3.1.2.2. | Low Enrollment of KG Peers |
| 3.1.2.3. | No Coverage for Preschoolers |

#### 3.2. Pathway 2: Parent Engagement & Support

| 3.2.1. | Barriers for Parental Involvement |
| 3.2.1.1. | Time Constraints |
| 3.2.1.2. | Lack of Info about Child's Progress |
| 3.2.1.3. | Limited Access to Resources |
| 3.2.1.4. | Cultural Gaps |
| 3.2.1.5. | Limited English Language Proficiency |
| 3.2.1.6. | Limited Direct Contact |
| 3.2.1.7. | New Program |
| 3.2.1.8. | Limited Notice for Participation |
| 3.2.1.9. | Racism |

#### 3.2.2. Child Care Challenges

| 3.2.2.1. | Hassles of Arranging Part-Time Care |
| 3.2.2.2. | Lack of Affordable Child Care |

#### 3.3. Pathway 3: Family Life

| 3.3.1. | Adjusting to FDELK Routine |
| 3.3.1.1. | Full Day Without Naps |
| 3.3.1.2. | Eating Lunch |
| 3.3.1.3. | Toileting |
| 3.3.1.4. | Taking the Bus |

#### 3.3.2. Managing Parenting Daily Hassles

| 3.3.2.1. | Packing Snacks & Lunches For Full Day |
| 3.3.2.2. | Managing Child's Toileting Challenges |
| 3.3.2.3. | Managing Child's Anxiety |
| 3.3.2.4. | Managing Child's Fatigue at End of Day |
| 3.3.2.5. | Worrying about Child's Eating at School |

### 4 OUTCOMES

#### 4.1. Child-Level Benefits

| 4.1.1. | Enhanced Child Daily Life |
| 4.1.1.1. | Routine |
| 4.1.1.2. | Continuity |

| 4.1.2. | Enhanced Child Well-being |
| 4.1.2.1. | Sense of Security and Safety |
### 4.1.2.2. Nurturance

### 4.1.2.3. Reduction of Daily Stress

### 4.1.3. Enhanced Child Development

- **4.1.3.1. Adaptive Skills**
- **4.1.3.2. Speech and Language Skills**
- **4.1.3.3. Social Skills**
- **4.1.3.4. Cognitive Skills**

### 4.1.4. Enhanced Child Learning & School Engagement

- **4.1.4.1. Motivation to Learn**
- **4.1.4.2. Accelerated Learning Rate**
- **4.1.4.3. Early Literacy & Numeracy Knowledge**
- **4.1.4.4. English Language Proficiency**
- **4.1.4.5. Multicultural Knowledge and Awareness**
- **4.1.4.6. Successful Transition to School**

### 4.1.5. Enhanced Child Readiness For Grade 1

### 4.2. Parent-Level Benefits

- **4.2.1. Enhanced Parent Capacity to Work or Study**
- **4.2.2. Enhanced Parent Daily Life**
- **4.2.3. Enhanced Parent Well-Being**
- **4.2.4. Enhanced Program-Family Relationship**
- **4.2.5. Enhanced Parent-Child Interactions**
- **4.2.6. Enhanced Parent Social Support**
- **4.2.7. Enhanced Parent Knowledge**
- **4.2.8. Enhanced Parenting Capacity**
- **4.2.9. Enhanced Parent Involvement**

### 4.3. Family-Level Benefits

- **4.3.1. Enhanced Quality of Family Daily Life**
- **4.3.2. Reduction of Family Daily Stress**
- **4.3.3. Reduction of Family Financial Stress**
- **4.3.4. Enhanced Access to Higher Quality Child Care**
- **4.3.5. Enhanced Sense of Belonging**
- **4.3.6. Enhanced Access to Resources**

### 4.4. Child-Level Challenges

- **4.4.1. Self-Care Skills**
  - **4.4.1.1. Eating**
  - **4.4.1.2. Napping**
  - **4.4.1.3. Toileting**
- **4.4.2. Academic Progress**
- **4.4.3. Initial Transition**

### 4.5. Parent-Level Challenges

- **4.5.1. Parent Involvement**
- **4.5.2. Parenting Stress**
- **4.5.3. School-Family Relationship**
- **4.5.4. Low Satisfaction with Child’s Progress**

### 4.6. Family-Level Challenges

- **4.6.1. Chaotic Family Life**
Appendix E: FDELK Program Processes Associated with Challenging Outcomes

**Figure E1.** Challenging pathway 1 processes and associated outcomes.

**Figure E2.** Challenging pathway 2 processes and associated outcomes.
Figure E3. Challenging pathway 3 processes and associated outcomes.