

## **Proposed Update of the National Statement on Quality Early Learning and Child Care (June, 2006 draft)**

### **What is quality early learning and child care?**

Quality early learning and child care (ELCC) promotes children's physical and psychological safety and health and their physical, emotional, social, communication, cognitive, ethical and creative development and supports the family in its role as the child's primary caregiver. In a quality program, each child feels accepted, understood, supported and respected by the adults, enjoys positive relationships with the other children and generally finds the activities interesting, engaging and satisfying. Each family feels confident that the program promotes their child's well-being and optimal development and experiences its relationship with the program as respectful of its culture, traditions, values and goals for its child, supportive of its parenting role and collaborative. The program is affordable, conveniently located near the family's home or the parent's <sup>1</sup> place of work or study and operates for hours that meet the family's needs. Quality ELCC is provided through a variety of settings including child care centres, family child care homes, preschools, nursery schools, Aboriginal Head Start, family resource centres and other services with group programs for young children.

### **Promoting quality early learning and child care**

Government regulations that are consistent with the research evidence regarding the optimal number of children per adult, ELCC practitioner <sup>2</sup> preparation, group sizes and the amount of physical space per child provide a basic scaffold upon which to build a quality ELCC program. However, they are not sufficient. As identified by both North American and European research, quality ELCC requires the presence of nine other components working together in an interactive fashion. These components are:

- (1) **ELCC practitioners** who have the necessary knowledge, skills and abilities, <sup>3</sup> operate within a code of ethics that governs their attitudes to and behaviours with children, children's families, colleagues in the workplace, and other community service providers, <sup>4</sup> are emotionally engaged with the children and take responsibility for their own health and wellness needs and on-going professional development.
- (2) **Collaborative partnerships with children's families** that honour the family's role as the child's primary caregiver, respect its child-rearing beliefs and values and provide meaningful opportunities for families to determine their children's ELCC experiences.
- (3) **Indoor and outdoor physical and learning environments** that promote the health and safety of the children and adults, support the provision of warm, nurturing interactions, provide opportunities for children to explore and experiment, and enable the provision of daily experiences that promote children's social, emotional, communication and problem-solving skills and their creativity.
- (4) **A purposeful learning program** that promotes positive interactions among the children, involves them in different ways of communicating ideas and feelings, mobilizes their curiosity, questioning and problem-solving, supports their creativity, promotes their self-esteem and fosters their emerging literacy and understanding of number concepts.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "parent" should be understood to refer to a parent, another family member or other person who has primary responsibility for the child.

<sup>2</sup> The term "ELCC practitioner" refers to an adult who works directly with children in the provision of ELCC in a child care centre, family child care home or other ELCC service.

<sup>3</sup> As identified in: Doherty, G. (2003). *Occupational Standards for Child Care Practitioners*. Ottawa: Canadian Child Care Federation.

<sup>4</sup> As articulated in the Canadian Child Care Federation. (2000). "Code of Ethics." In Canadian Child Care Federation (ed.), *Partners in Quality: Tools for Practitioners in Child Care Settings*. Ottawa: Author, 17 – 22.

- (5) **An ELCC environment that supports the rights of children** as outlined in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and reaffirmed in its 2002 document *A World Fit for Children*
- (6) **A supported workforce** that has remuneration levels consistent with the knowledge and skills required to provide quality ELCC and the level of responsibility required, benefits that protect their income level and enable saving for retirement, reasonable workloads, opportunities for life-long professional development and career advancement and is valued and respected by other professionals working with children and by the general public.
- (7) **Leadership at the program level** that inspires those working in it to strive for the provision of high-quality ELCC, empowers them to do so, and involves families and the community in determining how best the program can meet their needs.
- (8) **Administrative practices at the program level** that promote the program's stability and viability, the continuity of relationship between the ELCC practitioner and the child, and enable a purposeful program that meets the needs of the children and their families and the community served.
- (9) **An effective infrastructure**<sup>5</sup> that includes: (a) a vision of the ELCC system desired; (b) legislation, government regulations, policies and practices that are based on research evidence and updated on the basis of new knowledge; (c) system-wide planning and resource allocation; (d) substantive public funding to support on-going program operating costs, capital development, the development and maintenance of a skilled workforce and affordable parent fees; (e) the data collection and research necessary to address key program and policy issues, identify best practices and monitor quality; (f) evaluation of the effect of government policies and practices; (g) and effective, broad communication of research and evaluation findings.

## **The individual components**

### **(1) The ELCC Practitioners**

- Have a warm, supportive and responsive relationship with each child and with the group of children.
- Reach out to children, children's families, colleagues and others in ways that support and nurture human dignity and convey respect for the worth and uniqueness of the individual.
- Have formal post-secondary education in ELCC.
- Take responsibility for maintaining and enhancing their professional skills and knowledge through engaging in life-long learning.
- Promote each child's physical and psychological health and safety and their optimal physical, emotional, social, communication, cognitive, ethical and creative development.
- Model respect for and care of the natural environment.
- Reflect upon their own practice and attitudes and the responses of children and their families to these and revise their approaches accordingly.
- Identify the need for and seek out additional information and/or support when required, for example, when working with a child from another culture or who has special needs.
- Engage in supportive, collaborative relationships with children's families, colleagues and ELCC students working in the same setting and other community service providers.
- Respect the confidentiality of information about the children, families, colleagues and ELCC students with whom they work and the Board of Directors where one exists.
- Promote their own physical and emotional health by identifying and addressing stress and balancing their personal and work life.
- Are active members in local, provincial/territorial, and pan-Canadian child care organizations.

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<sup>5</sup> The term "infrastructure" refers to the underlying foundation of a system or entity such as the infrastructure of roads, telephone lines, and water mains in a city.

**(2) Collaborative Partnerships with Children's Families**

- Genuine efforts are made by the program to understand the family's needs, cultural and/or religious practices and preferences related to child-rearing and its goals for the child before the child enters the program and throughout the child's stay in it.
- Before the child enters the program, the program and the family discuss the program's philosophy, policies and procedures and the child's daily routines.
- The practitioner and family work together to develop an approach to assist the child to settle into the program and to establish initial developmental goals.
- Routines, food and activities are modified, to the extent possible, to reflect family practices and respect family preferences.
- Families are encouraged to visit the program and participate in its activities any time their child is present.
- The program actively and continuously engages the family in information-sharing about the child's daily experiences and regularly involves the family in goal-setting and planning for the child.
- Families are encouraged and supported to share any concerns they have about the program or their child's progress.
- The program responds promptly when parents express concerns.
- When families have concerns or differences of opinion occur between the program and the family, there is a respectful exploration of the issues and consideration of possible solutions with the family.
- The program uses a variety of strategies<sup>6</sup> to provide families with information about and opportunities to input into significant proposed changes or decisions that may impact on them or their children and ensures that families are informed when there are changes in policies or procedures that effect them or their child.
- The program uses a variety of strategies<sup>7</sup> to encourage and enable on-going family involvement in setting program policies.
- The program ensures that parents who are elected to the board of directors are given an orientation to its role and responsibilities and specific training related to board membership.

**(3) The Indoor and Outdoor Physical and Learning Environments**

- The indoor and outdoor spaces, furnishings and equipment used for the program promote the health and safety and enhance the well-being of the children and the adults working with them.
- The physical environment is welcoming with displays and materials that reflect the cultural and religious diversity of the community served.
- The indoor space has many direct sources of natural light, views of the outdoors, natural materials such as wood, different colours and textures and soft furnishings in the area used by children.
- There are facilities for food preparation.
- The indoor environment provides sufficient space<sup>8</sup> and is arranged to support a variety of play and learning experiences including individual play, small group activities, large group activities and gross-motor activities; enable children's easy access to toys, equipment and materials; and provide areas of privacy for children.
- There is separate space for infants' and toddlers' nap time and an area where they can safely crawl and play.

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<sup>6</sup> For example, mail-out questionnaires, an information letter and mail-in ballot or number to telephone, parent meetings or the establishment of a parent advisory group to consider the proposed change or decision.

<sup>7</sup> For example, suggestion boxes, regular parent meetings, parent membership on the board of directors or a permanent parent advisory committee.

<sup>8</sup> The European Commission Childcare Network (1996), on the basis of a ten-year quality project, recommends at least 6 sq. metres of indoor space and of outdoor space per child age 3 – 6 years.

- The outdoor space is easily accessible from the indoor programming area, sufficiently large to enable active games and sports, provides opportunities to play in water and sand and has a variety of plants, ground surfaces and structures to encourage exploration, manipulation and dramatic pretend play.
- There are sufficient numbers and varieties of toys, books, games, equipment and materials that are developmentally appropriate, respectful of the cultures and values of the children and their families, support child choice and encourage interaction, exploration, experimentation and creativity.
- Modifications enable the building's use by people using mobility aids and equipment has been adapted to support the participation of children with special needs in the daily program with the other children.

**(4) A Purposeful Program that Promotes Children's Development**

- The number of children for whom the practitioner is responsible, considering the children's developmental levels, enables the adult to be warm and responsive with each child, involve them in different ways of communicating ideas and feelings, mobilize their curiosity, questioning and problem-solving, promote their creativity and foster their emerging literacy and understanding of number concepts.<sup>9</sup>
- The group size enables children to have a choice of friends while protecting them from the over-stimulation associated with too many children and the practitioner to spend a higher percentage of time on activities such as talking with and encouraging children rather than simply monitoring their behaviour.<sup>10</sup>
- The continuity and stability of the relationship between the practitioner and child is supported by having the same practitioner(s) working with the same group of children each day.
- The daily practices and activities promote the physical and emotional safety and well-being of each child.
- The program provides a predictable, daily routine with sufficient flexibility to allow for individual preferences, independent choices, and taking advantage of unexpected learning opportunities.
- The daily activities are designed to encourage positive interactions among the children and promote self-regulation.
- Activities and learning opportunities are based on continuous observation of the children and assessment of the effect of the programming and its acceptance by the children.
- There is a planned curriculum<sup>11</sup> that supports and promotes children's physical, emotional, social, communication, cognitive, ethical and creative development in a way that respects each child's culture and religion, promotes their self-esteem and provides opportunities for both child- and adult-directed activities.
- Child-directed activities are encouraged through the provision of easy access to wide range of materials and equipment and practitioner enthusiasm for and building on children's play and exploration.
- Children are regularly involved in exploring the local community with the guidance of the practitioner and have many opportunities to learn from the people that live and work in it.

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<sup>9</sup> A multi-state study indicated that the upper limit associated with quality practice is 1:3 for children under age 24 months, 1:6 for children age 25-36 months and 1:8 for preschoolers (Howes, Phillips & Whitebook, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> The study cited above also indicated that the upper group size associated with quality practice is six children under age 24 months, 12 children age 25-36 months and 18 children for preschoolers.

<sup>11</sup> The term "curriculum" refers to an intentional plan for providing experiences and activities that promote development and learning, including opportunities for child-initiated and -directed activities and free play.

**(5) An ELCC Environment that Supports the Rights of the Child**

- All the adults working in the ELCC program know the rights of children as outlined in the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
- Children's right to practice their religion, follow their family's cultural practices and traditions and use their own home language is respected in practice and policy.
- Children's right to privacy is respected and provided for.
- Children have meaningful and developmentally-appropriate opportunities to express their views as long as they do so in ways that do not offend or hurt others.
- Children's opinions and views are listened to by the adults in a respectful manner and given genuine consideration.
- Children are involved at a developmentally-appropriate level in developing and implementing program policies that affect them and in choosing, planning and evaluating program activities.
- Children have developmentally-appropriate opportunities to make choices about what they do and the adults respect the children's choices.
- Children are encouraged and supported to assert their rights in socially accepted ways that respect the rights of others including the right to protection from hurtful words or actions.
- Planned activities encourage children to respect the rights of others, cooperate with each other, consider the views of others in a respectful fashion, and honour diversity.
- Children's right to access information that is important to them is respected and the adults assist them to obtain and understand the information.
- The inclusion of children who have special needs and their participation in the daily activities to the maximum degree consistent with their abilities is supported by the program's policies, staffing practices and the physical environment.

**(6) A Supported Workforce**

- Practitioners receive remuneration levels that are consistent with the knowledge and skills required to provide quality ELCC and the amount of responsibility involved.
- Practitioners have benefit packages that protect their income level and contribute to preparing for retirement.
- Working conditions protect practitioners from the occupational health and safety issues associated with working with young children and address the demands inherent in the job, for example, the need for program preparation time.
- Practitioners are enabled to engage in life-long professional development.
- The occupation provides opportunities for career mobility and advancement through clear career lattices<sup>12</sup> and ladders.
- Practitioners are confident that their work is understood and valued by the general public and by other professionals working with children and their families.

**(7) Leadership at the Program Level**

The director:

- Articulates a clear vision of what quality ELCC should look like and uses it to set goals and chart a course of action that will bring the program closer to the articulated ideal.<sup>13</sup>
- Inspires others working in the program to be enthusiastic about the vision and motivated to work towards achieving it.

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<sup>12</sup> The term "career lattice" refers to opportunities to engage in work that has approximately the same income and responsibility level as the individual's current job but provides a different working experience and new challenges. Career ladders provide opportunities to obtain work that has a higher remuneration and/or responsibility level.

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- Models quality practice on a daily basis through respectful interactions with each family and actively promoting an inclusive program that is sensitive to the family background, ability level and needs of each child.
- Guides others in developing and implementing an inclusive and developmentally-appropriate curriculum based on the principles of early childhood development and learning and evaluates the effectiveness of the curriculum on an on-going basis.
- Listens respectfully to the opinions and concerns of others working in the setting and provides everyone with genuine opportunities to participate in goal-setting and decision-making.
- Fosters a working environment in which practitioners support each other and work collaboratively as a team.
- Actively advocates for the resources required to enable the practitioners to deliver quality ELCC.
- Encourages and enables each practitioner to engage in professional development.
- Takes a leadership role in annual reviews to evaluate the quality of the service being provided and the extent to which it is meeting the needs of the users and of the community and initiates the corrective action indicated.
- Promotes the concept of quality ELCC and advocates for ELCC practitioners within the local community and the broader society.

### **(8) Administrative Practices at the Program Level**

- Clear written statements of the program's values and its goals and objectives are used as the basis for decision-making, daily practice and program evaluation.
- The program's financial resources are managed in a way that promotes its long-term viability and stability.
- Roles and responsibilities in the program are clearly documented and communicated.
- The records required for an effective and responsive delivery of the program are accurate, complete and current and their confidentiality is protected by a reliable system of record storage, retrieval and disposal.
- The day-to-day operation of the program is guided by written policies and procedures that are reviewed on a regular basis and amended if indicated.
- The program's human resources are managed in a way that promotes continuity of relationship between child and practitioner and, where the program is delivered by teams of practitioners, continuity of each team's composition.
- People who work directly with the children participate in an annual written performance appraisal and engage in setting goals and establishing a professional development plan for the coming year.
- Strategies such as mentoring are used to assist less experienced practitioners to establish and maintain environments and activities that promote children's development and collaborative relationships with the children's families.
- The program initiates and maintains positive working relationships with other community services that are involved with the children it serves and/or their families.
- The program actively seeks the views of the families and school-aged children being served to determine the extent to which it is meeting their needs and undertakes an annual formal self-evaluation which includes input from people working in the program and other child and family services in the community.

### **(9) An Effective Infrastructure**

- ELCC is based on a clear articulation of what society wants for its young children and their families<sup>14</sup> and a policy framework that supports the implementation of the vision by articulating

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<sup>14</sup> The statement might include ensuring that all children are respected and protected from harm, develop self-confidence and an ability to work cooperatively with others, respect diversity and have a love of learning and that families feel supported in their parenting role and enabled to participate in the paid workforce.

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the purposes of ELCC, setting out broad principles for service delivery,<sup>15</sup> establishing goals and identifying priorities.

- ELCC legislation, regulations, standards and policies support the over-arching vision, fully integrate the research evidence related to the design and provision of quality ELCC and are regularly updated on the basis of new knowledge.
- The development and maintenance of ELCC services is guided by system-wide planning and resource allocation supported by current data on issues such as the availability and characteristics of ELCC programs, their utilization, the characteristics of the workforce and the existing and evolving needs of young children and their families.
- Government has specific strategies for implementing policy and developing services that include targets and timeframes for reaching goals plus benchmarks and reference points to enable the monitoring of progress.
- Systematic, on-going evaluation of the impact of policies and their implementation is supported by dedicated and appropriate financial and human resources and procedures and tools to collect and analyze information.
- Substantial, targeted public investment supports ongoing program operation, the development and maintenance of a skilled workforce, capital investment and affordable parent fees and ensures accountability for the use of public funds.
- Government regulations are enforced and monitoring of quality at the individual program level is supported by a sufficient number of government consultants with specific training for the job.
- Individual programs and practitioners are supported through professional consultation and services such as child care support programs, child care professional organizations and practitioner networks.
- There is a pan-Canadian, long-term agenda and funding for applied research and program evaluation that enables exploration of specific issues or questions related to ELCC policy development and practice and evaluation of initiatives to enhance quality.
- The broad dissemination of evaluation and research findings is supported by government policy and funding of non-government entities such as child care professional organizations.
- Appropriately resourced entities provide public education to families, employers and others about the importance of quality ELCC and how to identify it.

### **Contributing Documents**

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<sup>15</sup> For example, the principles of quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental (QUAD).

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