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CAN THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT INSTRUMENT BE A POSSIBLE ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR THE PERCEIVED GOVERNMENT LITERACY DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES AT ONTARIO EARLY YEARS CENTRES?

By

Katherine V. Senchuk

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research through the Faculty of Education in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
2003

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ABSTRACT

This study examined whether the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (McMaster University, Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, 2000) could be an effective assessment tool for the perceived government curriculum objectives at the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC). The Government of Ontario had created these Early Years Centres to help support the growth and development of children in their early years (0-6 years), and to support the parents of these children. Specifically, the government was aspiring to “make it possible for all children to have the chance to reach their full potential” (Ministry of Community, Family and Children Services, 2002).

The sample consisted of four girls and two boys, aged 3-4 years. All of the subjects attended the same OEYC Centre, located in Windsor, Ontario.

The Early Childhood Educators in the OEYC completed pre- and post-tests of the Early Development Instrument on each of the subjects. The researcher was an observer in the OEYC for two months. During this time, observational field notes were taken on the six subjects. The actions of each subject at the OEYC site, as well the words spoken by the subjects was recorded by the researcher.

The researcher also spent time exploring the City of Windsor Early Learning and Family (ELF) Centres curriculum, which the Windsor area Ontario Early Years Centres were using, while they awaited the arrival of a province-wide, government generated curriculum. It was discovered that the objectives regarding literacy and numeracy development, and preparation for school readiness were very limited in the written ELF Centre Curriculum. During observation at the OEYC site, the researcher took note of the curriculum in practice at the centre. It was also
discovered that the Early Childhood Educators had created a program that was much more specific in practice than the written ELF Curriculum implied.

This study used both the Early Development Instrument, and the observation of children enrolled at an Ontario Early Years Centre, to determine whether there was a correlation between the government objectives and curriculum, the centre practices, and a change in the participants “readiness to learn”. In all, findings indicate that the Early Development Instrument would not be an effective assessment tool for the Ontario Early Years Centres, and the government curriculum objectives.
DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this work to my parents, Bohdan and Helen Senchuk. Without the love, support and encouragement they have provided throughout the years, the completion of my Master of Education degree would have been impossible. My love of learning and my passion for teaching is a direct reflection of their influence in my life. Thank you for encouraging me and supporting me every step of the way!

This work is also dedicated to my fiancé, Chris Freeman. Your love, support and encouragement have made this day possible. Thank you for being my biggest fan, and for always helping me see the light at the end of the tunnel. I love you, and I share this accomplishment with you!
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Kara Smith who served as my Faculty advisor. Her guidance and words of wisdom have made this entire thesis process a valuable learning experience. She always had the foresight to see the potential for this study, and she helped me to see it too. All the time and effort she dedicated to this thesis, made it a reality. Thank you Dr. Smith for your vision, your dedication and your encouragement.

I would also like to thank Dr. Noel Williams and Dr. Dale Jacobs who served as my internal and external readers respectively. I greatly appreciate the expertise you have each contributed to this project.

This study would have been impossible without the help of Beth Johnson, Family Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centres. Beth was always willing to give of her time to answer any questions, and to explain the ELF and OEYC Centres role in the community. Special thanks also to the staff and parents at the Lassaline Ontario Early Years Centre. Your kindness, openness and assistance are greatly appreciated!
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. General Statement of the Problem

Preparing children to be “ready” when they enter school has become a growing concern for Canadian federal, provincial and municipal governments. Researchers have agreed that what happens to children when they are very young shapes their health and well being (Kunesh & Farley, 1993). Their capacity for life-long learning can be encouraged or impaired at a very young age.

Both the federal and provincial governments commissioned studies and programs to aid Canada’s children in achieving the best start in life (McCain & Mustard, 1999; McKellar, 1997). Since February of 1995, the Government of Ontario spent billions of dollars to make it possible for all children in Ontario to have the chance to reach their full potential (Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services, 2002). In 1998, the government commissioned the Early Years Study which found that the years before six are crucial to a child’s lifelong health and learning. The Early Years Study also found that all levels of society must work together to support a strong start in life and prepare children for school (McCain & Mustard, 1999). An Early Years Plan was developed by the Ontario Government to act on the findings of the Early Years Study.

A central feature of the Early Years Plan focused $114-million on the creation of Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC). These Early Years Centres focused on helping children in their early years (0 - 6 years of age) and their parents. Each centre was to provide a central location where parents and caregivers could get information about programs and services that were available to them, and their children. Programs were to focus on the important role a parent plays
as primary teacher to their child. Of significance in the creation of these centres was the government's focus on literacy and interactive learning activities involving parents and children (Ministry of Education, 1995; 2000; Ministry of Community, Family, and Children Services, 2001; 2002).

One of the directives that emerged from the Early Years Study Final Report was to “provide options and recommendations with respect to the best ways of preparing all of Ontario’s young children for [scholastic] success” (McCain & Mustard, 1999, p. 1). The Government of Ontario, through its Early Years Study, indicated interest in a child’s ‘readiness to learn’. According to Janus & Offord (2000), “readiness to learn” measures many aspects of a child’s development. Dr. D. Offord, along with Dr. M. Janus, from McMaster University created the Early Development Instrument (EDI) in an “effort to operationalize and measure school readiness to learn of Canadian children” (Janus & Offord, 2000, p.71).

One of the first 42 Ontario Early Years Centres that was opened by the Government of Ontario opened in Windsor, Ontario. Prior to being named the Ontario Early Years Centres, the centres in Windsor were Early Learning and Family Centres (ELF), which were run by the City of Windsor. As the OEYC were awaiting a province-wide curriculum, the Windsor area Early Years Centres were using the original ELF Curriculum. This ELF Curriculum was developed using the EDI as a guide, as both a focus for assessment and the development of curriculum to increase a child’s “readiness to learn”.

This study endeavoured to discover whether the Early Development Instrument (McMaster University, Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, 2000) could be a possible assessment tool for the perceived government literacy development objectives.
B. Significance of the Study

An examination of the literature relating to the research question revealed the following information:

Federal, provincial and municipal governments have become increasingly concerned with providing children in their early years (0-6 years) a strong start in life, and aiding these children to be “ready” to enter school. Millions of dollars have been spent by the Government of Ontario alone on research and services aimed to prepare Ontario’s youngest citizens for their future in school and life (Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services, March 2002). The creation of the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) was part of the Government of Ontario’s intention to “reach every child” (Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2001).

Researchers have also concluded that school readiness predicts a child’s ability to benefit from academic instruction in early grades (Pulkkinen & Tremblay, 1992; Tremblay, Masse, Perron, LeBlanc, Schwartzman & Ledingham, 1992). Barrington and Hendricks (1989) stated that academic performance in the early grades is a significant predictor of a child completing high school. Being “school ready” at school entry, Doherty (1997) argued, provides children with the opportunity to benefit from all that school has to offer, both socially and academically. According to Doherty the likelihood that children will complete high school, find employment, and be able to contribute to society in many ways is increased when children are “ready” to enter school.

The Early Development Instrument (EDI), developed by Drs. Magdalena Janus and Dan Offord (McMaster University, Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, 2000) evaluated how ready children are to learn when they enter school. The Greater Essex County District School Board is currently using the EDI to assess the “readiness to learn” of its Senior Kindergarten students.
The Ontario Early Years Centres in Windsor, Ontario were using a curriculum which was developed using the Early Development Instrument as both a focus for assessment and the development of curriculum to increase a child's "readiness to learn". This curriculum was developed in 2001 by the City of Windsor for its Early Learning and Family (ELF) Centres which shared the same vision and philosophy with the Ontario Early Years Centres; that is, to provide learning opportunities for children focusing specifically on literacy and numeracy skill development, and helping children become ready to start school.

This study used both the Early Development Instrument, and the observation of children enrolled at an Ontario Early Years Centre to determine whether there was a correlation between the perceived government literacy curriculum objectives, the centre practices, and a change in the participants "readiness to learn".

The conclusions of this study will affect and influence a number of different groups. These groups include, but are not limited to, the Early Childhood Educators at the Windsor area Ontario Early Years Centres, the children who attend the Windsor area Ontario Early Years Centres, and their parents.

The Early Childhood Educators who work in the OECY Centres will benefit the most from this study. The Ontario Early Years Centres ECE's are charged with delivering a program that not only encourages literacy and numeracy development in children, but helps to prepare children to enter school ready to learn. It is true that assessment should drive instruction - meaning that the Early Childhood Educators will have a better understanding of the needs of the children who visit their centres, when they are sure that their assessment tool is reliable (Grace, 1992). It is also important for the ECE's to have a clear understanding of the objectives and
expectations they are working towards. If the EDI is a useful assessment tool for the OEYC Centres, this will allow the ECE’s to define their objectives using a standard instrument. If the EDI is found to be an inappropriate assessment tool for the OEYC Centres, the ECE’s will be able to request an assessment tool which will better serve the needs of the children they work with.

The children who attend the Windsor area Ontario Early Years Centre will also benefit from this study. High-quality early childhood experiences can promote intellectual, language, physical, social, and emotional development, creating school readiness and building a foundation for later academic success and competence (NAEYC, 2002). The goals of the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) and the original ELF Centre Curriculum highlight the importance of developing literacy and numeracy skills, and “readiness” for school entry. The children will benefit from attending a program that is geared to meet these important objectives.

Parents will be interested and affected by the results of this study because their involvement has a direct influence over their child’s development. Parents will want to help their child to develop literacy and numeracy skills, and to help their child to become ready for school. Attending the OEYC Centres not only connects parents with supports and services, but allows them to participate in learning activities with their child (Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services, 2001). When the ECE’s at the OEYC Centre can assess their child with a reliable and credible assessment tool, parents will be able to discover where their child is developmentally, which will also help them to take any needed steps to further support their child’s learning at home.
C. Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined for this study by the researcher for the Ontario Early Years Centre environment in which this study took place.

Written Curriculum: Refers to the document entitled, “ELF Centres, Core Curriculum” (2001) which was compiled by a team of community partners for the City of Windsor Early Learning and Family Centres. This is the curriculum document currently being used by the Windsor area Ontario Early Years Centres while the centres await a province wide, government generated curriculum.

Curriculum in Practice: The activities, plans and actions carried out by the Early Childhood Educators of the Ontario Early Years Centres, which were observed by the researcher. These practices demonstrated overall and specific literacy and numeracy development objectives.

Literacy Table: A central table situated in middle of the Ontario Early Years Centre observed in this study. Different literacy and numeracy activities were placed on this table every week. The activities coincided with the theme book of the week. The researcher observed that almost all of the activities presented on this table dealt with literacy development as opposed to numeracy development. Thus this table was referred to as the literacy table.

Readiness for School: According to Kagan (1990, p. 273), readiness for school is “a child’s ability to meet the task demands of school, such as sitting quietly, and to assimilate the curriculum content at the time of entry into the formal school system.”
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Introduction

Helping young children to receive a strong start in life has become a national concern in Canada. The federal government, the Government of Ontario, and the City of Windsor have all created and implemented initiatives that aspired to support children in their early years (aged 0 - 6). The review of literature that follows focused on the importance of the early years, change within early childhood education, early years curriculum, “readiness to learn”, and looked closely at various federal, provincial and local early years initiatives - focusing specifically on the Ontario Early Years Centre in Windsor, Ontario.

B. Importance of the Early Years

The first four years of life are critical for later outcomes, and as the basis for later growth and development (Albrecht & Miller, 2000; Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Young children have an innate desire to learn. The executive summary from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2002, p. 2) states that high-quality early childhood education “can promote intellectual, language, physical, social, and emotional development.” Academic attitudes and practices in the early years, many researchers suggest, provide a challenge that enhances young minds and increases academic and intellectual abilities (Kagan 1990; McKellar, 1997)

C. Changes Within Early Childhood Education

The decade of the 1980s saw numerous calls for widespread school reform in both Canada and the United States (Rothman, 1989). Changes were recommended in teacher education,
graduation requirements, school structure, and accountability measures. Rothman (1989) claimed that with the emergence of the 1990s, school reform began to ask the essential question: what do we teach? Bredekamp, Knuth, Kunesh and Shulman (1992) concurred that in the 1990s, many organizations critiqued prevailing curriculum content and methods, and called for sweeping change.

D. Early Years Curriculum

According to Hatch (2000), “curriculum is a tool used by educators to capture and direct the interest of children toward developmentally appropriate activities.” Smith (1996) agreed that an early childhood curriculum should provide a solid foundation on which children will build their knowledge, understanding and experience of the world through active play and manipulation of materials. Researchers had various views on what essential components should be included in early childhood curricula.

Yang (1987) asserted that curricula reflect a given society’s expectations regarding the philosophy and pedagogy of education, as well as social and cultural values. Curricula are not only influenced by social values and perceptions, they also both preserve and reshape those values and the conditions in which they exist.

Albrecht and Miller (2000) identified four elements that should be included in early childhood curricula to “stimulate babies brains and maximize learning” (p. 1). These four components included: understanding growth and development, building parent partnerships, creating appropriate environments, and providing stimulating play and activities. Albrecht and Miller stated that focusing on these four components would help babies, toddlers and children to thrive, and would give them the tools necessary for later success. It is interesting to note that
each of these four components was clearly evident within the Ontario Early Years Centres that was the focus of this study. Within the Ontario Early Years Centre the early childhood educators demonstrated their knowledge of child growth and development on a daily basis, in sharing with and responding to parent enquiries and questions. The physical layout of the centre was completely dedicated to stimulating and encouraging children to feel comfortable and explore. All the activities and play areas within the centre were colourful and inviting to children.

When considering the important elements needed in early childhood curricula, Bredekamp et. al (1992) shared that the traditional scope and sequence approach to curriculum, emphasizing drill and practice of isolated academic skills did not mirror current knowledge of human learning. Bredekamp et. al stated that this type of traditional curriculum did not prepare students who possessed the kind of higher-order thinking that were needed in the twenty-first century. Bredekamp et. al asserted that early childhood education should place greater emphasis on: interactive teaching; co-operative learning; meaningful, relevant learning experiences; conceptual learning that lead to understanding; and active, hands-on learning. Once again, the Ontario Early Years Centres embraced hands-on learning, and each centre created meaningful and relevant learning experiences. At the Ontario Early Years Centres, children were given the opportunity to learn through exploration and discovery, rather than drill and repetition.

Smith (1996) focused on the aspect of quality early childhood programs being those that combine “care” and education [educare]. Smith asserted that the concept of “educare” challenges the view that education and care are separate components of early childhood environments. The belief that both care and education should be part of all early childhood is repeated several times by Smith. Small children do not easily learn in environments that do not nurture their physical and
emotional well-being. “Quality care is educational, and quality education is caring” (Smith, 1996, p. 331). Smith also argued that goals for early childhood should be flexible rather than rigid, responsive to social circumstances and parental views. Smith’s description of a warm, secure, flexible and responsive environment to promote learning was directly reflected in the Ontario Early Years Centre. The teachers and parents in the observed Ontario Early Years Centre created an inviting, comfortable environment in which children felt at ease, and seemed prepared to explore and learn. Evidence of this is provided in the findings.

Rogoff (1990) commented that another important aspect of early childhood education and curricula was the active role of the child. Teaching is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but rather a process of sharing meaning and understandings. Children take an important role in these negotiations about meaning. Rogoff also stressed children’s active participation in their own development: “Children seek structure, and even demand assistance of those around them in learning how to solve problems of all kinds” (p. 18). Therefore, ‘early childhood education’ research (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; NCREL, 1999) demonstrated that early access and exposure to forms of print and learning is indicative of later academic success. Again, child-initiated learning (or free-play) was one of the themes that emerged from the curriculum observed in practice at the OEYC. The ECE’s worked diligently to create activities around the centre that the children could choose to explore at their own pace. The children at the centre chose which areas of the centre they visited, and their parents were encouraged to follow their child’s lead.

E. Readiness to Learn

“Readiness to learn” measures many aspects of a child’s development (Janus & Offord, 2000). What children learn, how they learn, and how much they learn depend upon many factors.
Among the most important factors are the child’s emotional and cognitive relationships with those who care for him, as well as his physical well-being (Kagan, 1990). Researchers and media alike have reported on growing evidence that early childhood experiences have significant long-term effects.

According to Kunesh and Farley (1993), what happens to children when they are very young shapes their health and well-being. This included their capacity for life-long learning and overall success. Kunesh and Farley focused on the fact that the healthy development of children in all areas is not solely the responsibility of parents, but should include the community, because “all have a stake in the healthy development of children and families” (p. 2). To Kunesh and Farley, the importance of school readiness focused on the process of raising and educating healthy children who were able to succeed in society.

Katz (1990) commented that when considering a child’s “readiness to learn”, the child’s general social development and intellectual background should also be taken into account. Children, Katz asserted, are more likely to have a successful first school experience if they have had a positive experience being in a group away from their home and familiar adults (social readiness). As for intellectual readiness, Katz suggested that children are more likely to feel competent in school if they can understand and use the language of the people they meet in school. Katz agreed with other researchers in the belief that to realize the goal of having all children ready to learn, and ready for school requires the efforts of all involved, not only parents, teachers and administrators, but the entire community. This community based approach to increasing children’s readiness to learn is reminiscent of the community minded goals and approach of the Ontario Early Years Centres, as well as the original City of Windsor ELF
Crnic and Lamberty (1994) discovered that despite the best intentions of those concerned with the educational process, a young child’s readiness for school remains a “critical yet controversial, complex and perhaps misunderstood construct.”

Kagan (1990) concurred that although a wealth of literature over the past two decades has addressed school readiness, “the lack of a clear conceptual definition of the qualities that comprise school readiness” has impeded efforts to clarify the concerns regarding what it means to be “ready for school.”

Some researchers argued that there appears to be two types of readiness: readiness to learn and readiness for school (Katz, 1990; NCREL, 1999). Kagan (1990) defined readiness for school as a “child’s ability to meet the task demands of school, such as sitting quietly, and to assimilate the curriculum content at a time of entry into the formal school system” (p. 273). Both Canadian and American researchers discovered that school readiness predicts children’s ability to benefit from academic instruction in the early grades of elementary school. Although school readiness and readiness to learn as theories have not been concretely defined, both have become national priorities with both the Canadian federal, provincial and municipal governments. Perhaps Offord and Janus’ (2000) argument that the individual child, their family and society as a whole would benefit from fostering healthy childhood development and supporting parents and caregivers has propelled the Canadian government to take such a key role in promoting early year initiatives, for example, the Ontario Early Years Centres which are the focus of this study.
F. Government Early Years Initiatives

i. Federal Government Initiatives

The Canadian government indicated interest in a child’s readiness to learn. This concern is reflected in the 1997 federal Speech from the Throne. In September of 1997, the SFT (Speech from the Throne) stated the Canadian government’s intention to “measure and report on the readiness to learn of Canadian children so that we can assess our progress made in providing our children with the best possible start” (McKeller, 1997).

Many initiatives and studies followed from the federal government that were centred around children in their early years (aged 0 - 6 years) and their “readiness to learn”. The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), a long-term study of Canadian children, tracked their development and well-being from birth to early childhood. Nationally, it surveyed over 30,000 Canadian children every two years. The survey began in 1994 and is done in partnership by Human Resources Development Canada and Statistics Canada.

Another government program involving young children was a community based research initiative that involved teachers, parents, guardians and community agencies, as well as Canada’s leading child development researchers, in improving the well-being of children between the ages of 0 and 6. Understanding the Early Years (UEY) looked at how neighborhoods, families, child care facilities, children’s programs and services, and schools influenced early childhood development. Human Resources Development Canada stated that “Understanding the Early Years is providing answers to the question ‘How are our children doing?’, so that communities and governments can develop the policies, programs and services that best promote the well-being of our children” (Stewart, 2000).
ii. Provincial Government Initiatives

The provincial government of Ontario also affirmed their commitment to investing in, and developing resources to enhance student achievement. In February of 1995, Education and Training Minister Dave Cooke announced many sweeping changes that effected children in their early years. The initiatives he announced included: mandated early literacy programs throughout Ontario, an Early Literacy Fund, and early childhood curriculum. Mr. Cooke stated: “Ontarians want excellent results from their education system. We believe that the best way to improve student performance is to give students a strong start in school by making sure that all children develop literacy skills early” (Ministry of Education, 1995). This indicated the governments initial commitment to create programs specifically aimed at developing skills earlier in life.

In 1998, the Ontario government commissioned an Early Years Study which asserted that “the years before six are critical to a child’s lifelong health and learning” (Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services, 2000; 2001; 2002). The stated purpose of the Early Years Study was to “provide options and recommendations with respect to the best ways of preparing all of Ontario’s children for scholastic, career and social success” (McCain & Mustard, 1999). The Early Years Study (McCain & Mustard, 1999) found that all levels of society must work together to support a strong start in life and prepare children for school. The importance of communities taking ownership of early childhood programs and development was emphasized in the study.

From the conclusions of the Early Years Study, the Ontario government developed an Early Year’s Plan which meant to build on existing community relationships, partnerships, programs and services for young children. The government of Ontario announced in May of
2001, that it would proceed with the creation of Early Years Centres across the province. "The Centres [are to] serve as a ‘one-stop shop’ where all parents can go to find the answers to questions they have about their child, and be referred to services to support them in their parenting role" (Ministry of Community and Social Services [CSS], 2001). A Government of Ontario Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services memo (2002) stated that the Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) would help build stronger communities by providing a central location where parents and caregivers could get information about what programs and services are available for their children. The OEYC would also provide an opportunity for caregivers the chance to meet and speak to early years professionals as well as other families in the community. Each of the OEYC Centres were built to provide various services and activities to the community. These included: pre- and post-natal resources, information and training, as well as information and referrals to link with families external services, literacy and interactive learning activities, parenting programs covering all aspects of early child development, outreach to encourage parent participation, (Ontario Early Years, 2001). The first 42 Ontario Early Years Centres opened their doors in the spring of 2002, and by April 1, 2003, a total of 103 Centres were operating throughout Ontario (Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services, 2002). One of the first 42 Centres that opened, opened in Windsor, Ontario. This centre was the subject of this study.

Another component of the Ontario Early Years Plan included the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (McMaster University, Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, 2000), a teacher questionnaire that assessed how ready children would be to learn when they enter school (See Appendix C). This instrument, developed by Drs. Magdalena Janus and Dan Offord can evaluate
the effectiveness of community environments and resources for groups of children and help communities decide how best to support their young children. The EDI can also be used as a first-stage to screen children that may require special assessment and interventions. The Government of Ontario made the EDI available to school boards across Ontario, for use in their kindergarten classrooms.

iii. Local Implications

As previously mentioned, some of the first OEYC Centres in the province opened locally in Windsor, Ontario. The Windsor OEYC Centres were originally called Early Learning and Family Strengthening Centres (ELF Centres) before they received classification as Ontario Early Years Centres for the City of Windsor, and surrounding area. The original ELF Centre curriculum was developed using the EDI as a guide, as both a focus for assessment and the development of curriculum to increase a child’s readiness to learn. The OEYC are awaiting a province-wide curriculum. While this curriculum is being developed, the Windsor OEYC Centres are continuing to use the original ELF curriculum.

The ELF Centres chose to use the EDI as guide for their curriculum development, because it helped to assess “readiness for school”, and the local school board was also using the EDI to assess its Senior Kindergarten students for school readiness. One of the purposes in creating the ELF Centres originally was to help with “preparation for success at school” (ELF Core Curriculum, 2001, p. 1). The use of the EDI as an assessment tool in the centres would give the ECE’s a head start in assessing the “readiness for school” of the children that visited the centres, even before the children began Kindergarten.

A subsequent goal for the ELF Centres (and now the Ontario Early Years Centres) was to
provide children with the opportunity to participate in activities that promoted “early literacy and numeracy development” (ELF Core Curriculum, 2001, p. 1). The Ontario Early Years Centres mandate was almost identical to that of the ELF Centres philosophies and goals. Early literacy development and helping to equip children for school readiness was the main thrust of the Ontario Early Years Centre philosophy (Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services, 2000; 2001; 2002).

G. Research Question

This study endeavored to discover whether the Early Development Instrument could be an effective assessment tool for the Ontario Early Years Centre (ELF) curriculum and the perceived government objectives focusing on literacy development. Thus the research question that arose from the review of literature is:

Based on the curriculum developed by the City of Windsor for the Ontario Early Years Centres, could the Early Development Instrument (McMaster University, Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, 2000) be a possible assessment tool for the perceived government literacy development objectives (as indicated by the aforementioned government studies and programs implementations). This thesis sought to answer this evolving question.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A. Introduction

Since the opening of the first Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) in the province, many children and their parents have visited the Ontario Early Years Centres on a daily basis. There was no assessment method or protocol in place at the OEYC Centres at the time of this study. The local OEYC Centres in Windsor were following a curriculum that was written based on the Early Development Instrument (McMaster University, Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, 2000). The design of this study seeks to discover whether the EDI could be a possible assessment tool used within the OEYC.

B. Subjects

Subjects selected for this study consisted of the entire child population (6 children) of three and four year olds at one Ontario Early Years Centre in Windsor, Ontario. The OEYC site was chosen by the researcher in consultation with the Family Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centres for the City of Windsor. The chosen site had the highest population of children aged three or four years of age than any other OEYC site in the city. The Family Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centres introduced the researcher to the Early Childhood Educators at the OEYC site. Both the Family Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centres and the Early Childhood Educators introduced the researcher to the parents of the possible participants. The researcher shared the procedures of the study with the parents, and thoroughly explained the consent to participate with each participant’s parents. The parents of each participant signed the consent to participate in research (see Appendix A).
Participants were between three and four years of age. This specific age group was targeted as these children were not yet attending Senior Kindergarten. As previously mentioned, the Early Development Instrument was being in use by a local school board to assess the "readiness to learn" of its (5 year old) Senior Kindergarten. As both the Ontario Early Years Centres, and the original City of Windsor ELF Centres were committed to helping children prepare for school readiness, the use of the EDI with children not yet in Senior Kindergarten would give the ECE's and parents an early indication whether their child was "ready" for school.

With the permission of the participant's parents, each child aged three or four enrolled at the OEYC Centre was tested.

C. Subject Biographies

Observational field notes were taken over the two month observation period at the Ontario Early Years Centre. While observing the subjects, the researcher noted the words spoken by the subjects, and the also the actions they displayed. The field notes were reviewed to highlight any important behaviours exhibited by the subjects. The following are biographies of each subject's participation and actions during the two month observation at the OEYC. Special care was taken to note how often each subject visited the literacy table, and was engaged in literacy activities. Names have been changed so that identities may remain confidential.

Amanda

At the time of observation, Amanda had just turned four years old, and had just begun visiting the Ontario Early Years Centre. Amanda was a very adventurous child who immediately began investigating the centre upon arrival. Amanda was immediately very independent of her mother. She seemed to enjoy doing things on her own, even when mom offered to help. Amanda
really enjoyed playing with other children, but she would also find things to do on her own if she needed to. Amanda really enjoyed playing with Sandy, and was very protective when they would play together. Amy would often try to join in, or ask Sandy to leave Amanda and play at another centre. During these instances, Amanda would vie for Sandy’s attention, and would follow if the girls left. However, when playing with both Sandy and Amy, Amanda would often ignore Amy and only interact with Sandy. Amanda enjoyed “being heard”. If she was speaking to someone, and they didn’t hear her, she would simply repeat her statement louder and louder until someone answered her.

Amanda was not very interested in the literacy table. When her mom or one of the OEYC teachers would try to lead her in an activity at the literacy table, Amanda would wander to another centre. Amanda seemed to enjoy having books read to her. Whenever a story was read during Sharing Circle, Amanda paid very close attention.

Amy

At the time of observation, Amy had just turned four years old and had been visiting the Ontario Early Years Centre for approximately 8 months. Amy displayed definite leadership qualities from the first time she was observed at the centre. Each morning Amy arrived at the centre, she would stick close to her mother for the first 3-5 minutes. During this time, Amy would observe the other children in the centre, trying to find her friends. Once Amy established who else was at the centre, she would choose whom she wanted to play with, and would confidently approach that child. Once Amy began to play with the other children, she would almost immediately assume the role of the leader. For example, if playing at the Sand Table, Amy would direct imaginative play, and then direct the other child to the next “stop” in the centre.
Amy found it hard to wait for her turn at various activities. Over the time of observation at the centre, Amy improved her ability to be able to wait her turn. Through gentle reminders from her mother, and OEYC staff, Amy slowly learned that she could not interrupt other children’s activities in order to play herself. Amy’s vivid imagination drew other children to her, and Amy loved this attention. Amy seemed most content when she had at least one friend following her and playing with her.

Amy did not visit the literacy table very often. She would approach the table once in awhile, look over the activities available, and then move on to another part of the table. Several times, one of the ECE’s would invite Amy to the table, and explain one of the activities to her. On these occasions, Amy usually completed the activity, but would move to another area of the centre upon completion.

**Barbara**

At the time of observation, Barbara was four and a half years old, and had been visiting the Ontario Early Years Centre for approximately 9 months. Barbara always arrived happy at the OEYC. Each time Barbara attended the centre, she immediately began to search out activities to complete. Barbara was very close to Amy, and every time Amy attended the centre, Barbara would travel around the centre with her. However, Barbara seemed just as content at the centre whether Amy was there or not.

Barbara really enjoyed visiting the literacy table. She would play with many of the activities she found. On many occasions, Barbara would work with one of the OEYC teachers, classifying, matching and “explaining” activities to the teachers. As the summer progressed, I found Barbara would seek out her mom, or OEYC teachers to “read” the instructions to her at
the literacy table.

Barbara always played well with the other children in the centre. She was always very concerned about being polite and kind. Although she usually played with Amy, she would try to also include other children in their activities.

**Danny**

At the time of observation, Danny was four years old, and had been visiting the Ontario Early Years Centre for many months. He was very comfortable with the OEQC teachers, and the other children who attended the centre regularly. Danny was always very interested in helping his mom “write” out the family name tags at the centre. Although Danny did not yet know how to form most of the letters, he always wanted this “job”. He would slowly work on a name tag for each member of his family.

Danny always seemed to enjoy working at the literacy table. After he finished with the name tags, the literacy table was usually his first stop. He usually searched out activities which involved colours and numbers. However, when Danny would choose an activity from the literacy table, he liked to do it “his way”. Although his mom and the ECE’s would read him the instructions, and try to help him complete the activity, he often explained that he could do it “another way” and would proceed to do so. Danny’s method usually involved try to sort everything he found. Although he didn’t follow the directions, he enjoyed his time at the literacy table.

From time to time, Danny seemed insecure, and would seek out his mother. However, usually after re-connecting with mom, he would happily travel to other parts of the centre. Danny had an older brother and a younger brother who also attended the centre. Danny seemed to enjoy
playing at times with his younger brother in the infant area. Danny would help his younger brother "make the toy sing" and complete puzzles. During the time of observation, Danny seemed to gain confidence not only with the literacy table activities, but also in moving around the centre independently.

**Evan**

At the time of observation, Evan had just turned four years old, and had just begun visiting the Ontario Early Years Centre. Evan was always very attached to his mom when visiting the centres. He seemed to enjoy building with blocks and making towers. During building, Evan would always pause to compare his towers, telling his mom which tower was taller/shorter etc. Evan was very introverted, and would often refuse to speak to anyone other than his mom. When one of the OEQC teachers would approach Evan to speak with him, Evan would often answer their questions, but speak directly to his mom (not making eye contact with the teacher).

Evan was very sensitive to the noise in the centre. On many occasions, Evan would cover his ears, look to his mom and speak loudly, telling her it was "too loud". He entered the centre with his ears covered several times. Evan also seemed very uncomfortable sitting at the snack table with the other children. When sitting at the snack table, Evan’s mom would have to sit right beside him. Also, Evan was usually unable to play at various centres unless his mom pulled up a chair beside him. During the time of observation, Evan slowly became accustomed to the level of noise in the centre. As the time of observation drew to a close, Evan also began to open up slowly to the other children. Remaining at a centre when other children joined, and allowing other children to help him clean up a centre were big steps for Evan.

Evan often sat at the literacy table, but rarely took part in the activities he found. His
mom would read the instructions to him, and encourage him to try the activities, but he was not interested. During his time at the literacy table, Evan often looked around the room, watching the other children.

**Sandy**

At the time of observation, Sandy was almost five years old, and had been visiting the Ontario Early Years Centre for many months. Sandy arrived at the OEYC with her mom and her sister each morning when the centre opened. She would often have an hour to play by herself before most of the other children arrived. During this quiet time, Sandy was very independent. She enjoyed moving around the centre and exploring all the different centres. When the other children began to arrive, Sandy would simply continue to play on her own until one of the other children approached her.

Sandy played well with the other children. She was always very concerned with sharing and playing fairly. Sandy was a leader during play activities, but not in a bossy way. Sandy would suggest new activities and ask the other children if they were interested. When Sandy became frustrated with another child, or with her sister, she would seek help from her mom. Sandy’s mom would not solve the problem for her, but suggest various strategies Sandy could use. During the time of observation, Sandy seemed to become more confident solving her own problems.

Sandy also enjoyed reading stories, and listening to stories. Often during play time, Sandy would seek out her mom, an OEYC teacher, or another mom and ask them to read to her. Even when other children asked Sandy to come and play, she often chose to listen to the story. Sandy also enjoyed asking questions about the stories, and commenting on the illustrations.
Sandy spent quite a bit of time at the literacy table. She seemed to enjoy working with the various activities, and would try to “figure out” what to do without any help. Sandy completed most of the activities on her own, with confidence. As previously mentioned, Sandy and her family arrived at the centre early each day. It was during this quiet time that Sandy would explore the literacy table. Once the centre became busier, Sandy often spent her time between the sand table and the dramatic play centre.

D. Instrumentation

Early Development Instrument (EDI) (McMaster University, Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, 2000) The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a student questionnaire administered by the teacher which determines how “ready” children are to learn when they enter school (See Appendix C). The test consists of a Likert-type scale (ranging from three to six points). Teachers answer 129 items directed towards children’s proficiencies in various areas of development including: physical well-being, language and cognitive skills, social and emotional development, general disabilities or impairments, and teachers general comments. This instrument can evaluate the effectiveness of community environments and resources for groups of children. The EDI can also be used as a first-stage to screen children that may require special assessment and interventions. For the purposes of this study, the results of Section B of the EDI (Language and Cognitive Skills) were highlighted to emphasize the literacy aspect of the Ontario Early Years Centres.

At the time this thesis was written, no information about the validity or reliability of the Early Development Instrument was available, although the EDI has been self-tested by its developers, Janus and Offord, McMaster University, and is currently in use by Ontario school
boards to evaluate "readiness" in Kindergarten. It was chosen for use in this study because it was being considered as an assessment tool for the Ontario Early Years Centre by the City of Windsor Social Services Department who managed the centres locally. Oral consent to use the EDI was obtained through Dr. M. Janus, McMaster University.

E. Design and Procedures

This study utilized a pre and post test of all participants. Parents of each child aged three to four years old, who were enrolled at the OEYC were asked to allow their child to participate in the study. Each parent met with the researcher who thoroughly explained the consent to participate in research. The parents of each participant agreed, and signed a consent to participate in research (see Appendix A).

Prior to beginning this study, all appropriate permissions to conduct research were sought. This included a research proposal to the Research Ethics Board of the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor (See Appendix B). Once approval for the study was granted, a meeting was planned between the researcher and the Family Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centres for the City of Windsor. The specific OEYC was chosen as the test site for two reasons. First, the chosen site had the most three to four year olds attending the centre as compared to the other OEYC sites. Secondly, the parents and children at the chosen site had the most consistent attendance compared to other OEYC sites. Permission was granted by the Manager of Social Services to conduct the study in the OEYC. The research outline confirmed the following process.

The researcher was an observer in the Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC). Before observation began, the researcher sought to meet with each participant's parents. The Family
Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centres introduced the researcher to the Early Childhood Educators who worked at the OEYC. The Family Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centres, and the Early Childhood Educators introduced the researcher to the parents of all children aged three or four who attended the chosen site. During the meeting with the parents, the researcher thoroughly explained the outline and procedures associated with the study. The researcher emphasized the right of the parents to withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. Those parents who wanted their child to be a part of the study signed a consent to participate in the research (See Appendix A) after the researcher fully explained the consent form. The researcher was also introduced to other parents of children who attended the OEYC Centre who were not part of the study. In this way, all parents and children who attended the centre were aware of the researchers presence, and purpose. During the meetings with other parents, no parent voiced objection to the researchers presence in the centre.

Once permission was obtained from each of the participant’s parents, the researcher observed the children, staff and parents enrolled at the centre everyday for a period of two months to determine whether there was a correlation between the government literacy development objectives and curriculum, the centre practices, and a change in the participants “learning readiness”, as measured by the Early Development Instrument (EDI) used in this study. The observation period each day lasted from 9:00 a.m. until 11:15 a.m.

The Early Childhood Educators (ECE) who were assigned to the OEYC administered the EDI twice. The first EDI was completed at the commencement of the study. The second EDI was administered at the end of the two month observation period. Although there were four or five ECE’s at the centre throughout the two month observation period, only two of the ECE’s
completed the EDI. Both of these ECE’s were permanent staff at the OEYC, and had worked with the subjects the longest. The ECE’s were unable to complete the EDI tests for children who had only started visiting the centre shortly before the initiation of the study. In this case, the parents of the child were asked to complete the EDI, with the help of the researcher for clarification. The researcher worked closely with the ECE’s to explain the EDI questions and procedures to the Early Childhood Educators before they completed the EDI.

During the two month observation period, the researcher took observational notes while visiting the centre. These notes focused on each of the subjects and took note of their actions and reactions during play, circle and snack times, as well as words spoken. Notes were taken about each subject and their interaction with each other, and other children in the OEYC. The names of children who were not subjects in the study were never used in field or observational notes.

Both quantitative (EDI Instrument, 2000) and qualitative (observational field notes) research were gathered to answer the following research question: Based on the curriculum developed by the City of Windsor for the Ontario Early Years Centres, could the Early Development Instrument (McMaster University, Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, 2000) be a possible assessment tool for the perceived government literacy development objectives (as indicated by the aforementioned government studies and programs implementations)? As previously stated, at the time this study was conducted, the Ontario government had not produced a specific Ontario Early Years Centre curriculum. Based on the curriculum that was being used at the time (City of Windsor ELF Curriculum), both the quantitative and qualitative methods were needed to answer the research question.
F. Data Analysis

To analyze the pre test and post test scores of each participant, each of the categories on the Early Development Instrument (EDI) were given a numerical value. For each participant, a total was calculated on both their pre and post test. These scores were organized according to each section of the EDI. Once each participant’s pre- and post-test scores were compiled, these results were compared to see which scores had increased, decreased or stayed the same. The Section B scores (Language and Cognitive Skills) were of particular interest, due to their focus on “literacy”.

As previously mentioned, the researcher took observational field notes while observing at the chosen OEYC for two months. Once this observation came to an end, the researcher qualitatively analyzed all the compiled field notes for themes and content. Once the EDI test results, and the observational field notes had both been reviewed, participant observations were analyzed for changes, particularly regarding literacy gains. The researcher then looked closely at each individual involved, and produced a biography of each subject. These biographies helped to explain any changes observed while the researcher observed at the OEYC.

The researcher also investigated the City of Windsor ELF Curriculum that was being used at the OEYC. The researcher made two lists which focused on both the written curriculum and the curriculum in practice that was observed in the OEYC. The original ELF Curriculum listed both early literacy and numeracy skill development as areas which they focused on when developing the curriculum (ELF Core Curriculum, 2001, p. 1). The Ontario Early Years Centre mandate focuses specifically on early literacy skill development more so than on numeracy skill development. Therefore, the researcher focused on the early literacy development objectives
specifically. Once the quantitative and qualitative research had been analyzed, the researcher cross-checked the findings with the literature.

G. Limitations of the Design

Despite efforts to control for extraneous factors, the study design still had some methodological limitations.

Some of the EDI results were completed by the parents of the subject, because the child had recently started visiting the centre before the commencement of this study. These results may be more biased than the EDI results given by the Early Childhood Educators at the OEYC. Also, the EDI was written to be administered to children aged 3.8 -6.5 years of age (M. Janus, personal communication, March 8, 2002). Most of the subjects in this study, fell below the aforementioned (ideal) age group. The subjects young age may have an effect on the EDI results. Some of the questions on the EDI refer to activities that some of the subjects were not cognitively or developmentally ready for.

Due to the lack of research on the validity and reliability of the EDI Instrument, the researcher exercised caution while interpreting the results.

Despite these limitations this was the best course for research because the EDI was the instrument used when developing the curriculum that is currently being used within the Windsor OEYC Centres. The EDI is also being used by local school boards to test their kindergarten students for “learning readiness”.

In summary, written curriculum and observed, practiced curriculum at the OEYC were assessed for themes and commonalities with the Early Development Instrument and the students attending the centres to see if the government objectives of “increasing literacy” (Ministry of
Education, 1995) were being met.
CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The OEYC (Ontario Early Years Centre) that was the site for this study, was managed by the City of Windsor Social Services (Children’s Services) Department. Most of the OEYC Centres in Windsor began as Early Learning and Family Strengthening Centres (ELF). When the government of Ontario, in May 2001, announced that it would proceed with the creation of Early Years Centres across the province, it chose the City of Windsor’s ELF Centres to become the Ontario Early Years Centres in Windsor, and local area (Ministry of Community and Social Services [CSS], 2001). The design of the ELF Centres was similar to that of the proposed Ontario Early Years Centres, as both focus on literacy development and “readiness for school” preparation. The Windsor and area OEYC Centres planned to use the original ELF curriculum, until the government of Ontario produced a curriculum specifically for the Ontario Early Years Centres.

The findings of this study focused specifically on three areas of curriculum within the Ontario Early Years Centre in Windsor, Ontario. These included: the written ELF Centre curriculum, the curriculum in practice, the interaction of each subject with the curriculum, and the current, proposed assessment results of Section B of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) as it related to literacy development.

A. ELF Written Curriculum

As previously mentioned, the ELF Centre philosophy and curriculum are very similar to the concept and approach laid out by the Government of Ontario for the Ontario Early Years Centres. The ELF Centre curriculum stated that “[a]n Early Learning Family Centre is a place
where children and parents come to participate in activities that promote child development in preparation for success at school”; focusing on and promoting numeracy skills and early literacy development (ELF Centres - Core Curriculum, 2001). The ELF curriculum was also aligned with the Ontario Early Years Centres mandate to “identify developmental delays for early remediation” (ELF Centres - Core Curriculum, 2001).

The ELF Centres were created in an effort to support children and parents. Parents would be provided an opportunity for growth themselves, and would be empowered to share with and learn from other parents, Early Childhood Educators, as well as connecting with many community organizations in a “web of connectivity that [would] propel people to their potential and create a healthy community environment” (ELF Centres - Core Curriculum, 2001). The vision of the ELF Centres was encapsulated in the ELF Centre philosophy:

“At an ELF CENTRE
FUN is the spirit of the endeavour
CHILDREN are the focus
EVERYONE is welcome
CONNECTEDNESS is the goal
NEIGHBOURHOODS identify their needs
At an ELF Centre CHILDREN LEARN THROUGH PLAY”

(ELF Centres - Core Curriculum, 2001)

Similarly, in 2001, the Government of Ontario highlighted the $30 million commitment to establish Early Years Centres across the province. According to a Ministry of Community and Social Services News Release dated May 10, 2001, the Ontario Government wanted these centres to be accessible to all children and families to “help children engage in meaningful literacy activities, support parents in their important role and be a place where they can access a range of services.” The ELF Centre vision, and that of the OEYC have evolved hand in hand.
The ELF Curriculum was developed by a group of diverse community partners. This group included individuals representing the City of Windsor (Children’s Services staff, Early Childhood Educators), Early Literacy Consultants from the public (Greater Essex County) and separate (Windsor-Essex Catholic) district school boards, a children’s author, the New Canadians Centre, the Windsor Public Library, as well as St. Clair College Child Care Services.

The written curriculum developed for the ELF Centres deals at great length with physical programs and schedules, focusing as well on the community partners and “healthy” community model. The Chapters in the ELF Curriculum included:

- Background and Philosophy
- Quality Literature
- Learning Environment
- Program and Schedule
- Readiness to Learn/Supports to Learning and Evaluation
- Parents and Care Givers

“Overall curriculum expectations” as an educator may find as an objective for learning in Ontario Ministry of Education Documents (e.g. The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8, Language) are not clearly stated in the ELF curriculum. “Overall expectations” in the ELF curriculum were limited to a philosophy of the centres:

“An Early Learning Family Centre is a place where children and parents come to participate in activities that promote child development in preparation for success at school. The activities [promote] early literacy and numeracy skill development and [identify] developmental delays for early remediation” (ELF Centres - Core Curriculum, 2001, p. 1).

Nowhere in the ELF curriculum did it list specific objectives for the Early Childhood Educators (ECE) working at the centres. A list of literacy and numeracy activities was included (See Appendix C). Within the curriculum, there was also a list of suggested themes, concepts to explore when reading a book, as well as several examples of daily schedules. The curriculum
included a sample floor plan, expectations for climate/atmosphere of each centre, and a list of furniture, equipment and materials needed in each of the centres. The remainder of the curriculum included the Early Development Instrument (EDI), which is the instrument that was chosen for this study, as well as “readiness to learn” research articles.

At the time the ELF Curriculum was being written, the Greater Essex County District School Board announced that it would begin testing its senior kindergarten students using the EDI. The ELF Centres were created to be a “place where children and parents come to participate in activities that promote child development in preparation for success at school” (ELF Centres - Core Curriculum, 2001, p. 1). As a follow-up to the proposed assessment instrument, the ELF committee chose to use the EDI to develop the ELF curriculum. In an interview with the Family Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centres, she stated that the EDI was chosen by the Children Services, City of Windsor because it assessed “readiness for school” (Janus & Offord, 2000). Helping children to become “ready” for school was part of the vision for the ELF Centres. The City of Windsor concurred that Sections A (Physical Well-being) and C (Social and Emotional Development) of the EDI were mostly unrelated to the goal of the ELF Centres, but most parts of Section B (Language and Cognitive Skills) did relate to the ELF Centre goals. As a result, the findings from this data also focused on Section B of the instrument.

In reviewing the data from the two EDI tests conducted in this study, the researcher also focused on the Language and Cognitive Skills (Section B) of the EDI. This section relates most directly to the ELF Centre written curriculum, and the Ontario government’s outline of the services that are to be rendered to all Ontario Early Years Centres in regards to literacy development.
In conclusion, the written ELF Curriculum was lacking in overall and specific objectives and expectations in regards to literacy development. Although the curriculum contained many important and informative articles and organizers, it did not clearly underscore what the Early Childhood Educators were seeking to accomplish at the Ontario Early Years Centres. The written curriculum focused on the ELF Centre philosophy which attempted to provide children with learning activities that prepared them for “school readiness”, and focused on literacy and numeracy development. However, the curriculum observed in practice at the OEYC was much more specific and definitive.

B. Curriculum Observed in Practice

While observing at the Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC), it became evident to the researcher that while the written ELF curriculum was vague in regards to literacy and numeracy development objectives, the curriculum in practice at the OEYC was much more specific and comprehensive. Each of the specific expectations that was observed over the two month period clearly supported the ELF Centre vision to offer activities to parents and children that would promote child development in regards to preparation for success at school, specifically early literacy and numeracy skill development. The observed specific Ontario Early Years Centre curriculum objectives are listed in Table 1.
Table 1 - Specific Curriculum Objectives Observed in Practice at the Ontario Early Years Centre Observed For This Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literacy Skills</th>
<th>Numeracy Skills</th>
<th>Other Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* letter identification</td>
<td>* counting</td>
<td>* colour identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* phonemic awareness</td>
<td>* sorting</td>
<td>* developing fine motor skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* literacy awareness</td>
<td>* predicting</td>
<td>- cutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* directionality</td>
<td>* problem solving</td>
<td>- pencil control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* characteristics of print</td>
<td>* classifying</td>
<td>- stringing beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* literary elements</td>
<td>* patterning</td>
<td>- completing a craft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* exploring illustrations</td>
<td>* sequencing</td>
<td>* developing gross motor skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* punctuation</td>
<td>* shape recognition</td>
<td>- building with blocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* comprehension</td>
<td>* shape attributes</td>
<td>- movement activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* reading stories</td>
<td>* number identification</td>
<td>* developing confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* listening to stories</td>
<td>* matching</td>
<td>* imaginative play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* oral communication</td>
<td>* measurement</td>
<td>- dramatic play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* visual communication</td>
<td></td>
<td>- puppets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- dress-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ECE's delivered their weekly plans around several central ideas that helped to foster the development of each child in regards to preparation for school readiness. These ideas included: the use of a central literacy table, thematic units, child-initiated learning (free-play), and parental involvement.

i. Literacy Table

   The activities specifically dedicated to literacy and numeracy skills were made available to children on one main table in the middle of the centre. Beside each activity, the Early Childhood Educators placed neatly printed, clear instructions on how to complete the activity. The ECE's encouraged parents to travel to each centre with their child, and to help their child read the instructions provided. This further highlighted the importance of print and reading for understanding to the parents and children, both of which are important aspects of literacy.
development. The researcher noted that the majority of the activities available on this table were devoted to aspects of literacy development as opposed to numeracy development. Due to the overwhelming amount of literacy activities located on this central table, the researcher refers to this table as the literacy table.

The ECE's attempted to present various activities on the literacy table that ranged in level of difficulty. Due to the fact that each OEYC is open to parents with children aged 0-6, it is necessary to provide literacy learning opportunities for children at approximately 30 levels of literacy development. However, the space on the literacy table was limited, and due to this fact, the literacy activities focused mostly on literacy concepts that were above the developmental level of most subjects observed for this study. In this way, many of the younger children who visited the centre were not developmentally ready to complete the activities on their own.

Looking closely at the field notes, it was evident that 4 of the 6 subjects of this study were only ready to work with early literacy concepts (eg. letter matching and recognition), as opposed to emerging literacy concepts (eg. reading and writing simple words). For example, Danny visited the literacy table often, but he would use the activities presented in ways that differed from the instructions given. On July 25th, the researcher noted that Danny chose to stack the colored blocks provided at the literacy table. Although Danny's mom explained that he was to match the pictures on the blocks with a sequenced time line of the story (If You Give A Mouse A Cookie), Danny was only interested in stacking the blocks.

Although the activities presented at the literacy table were developmentally above some of the children who attended the centre, the curriculum in practice at the Ontario Early Years Centre was clearly focused on providing various activities that helped children to develop literacy and
numeracy skills. This focus on literacy development extended to creating an overall program that would also help the children to prepare for success in school; promoting child development in preparation for success at school is a mandate for both the ELF Centres and Ontario Early Years Centres (ELF Centres Core Curriculum, 2001; Making a Difference, 2001).

ii. Thematic Units

While observing the curriculum in practice at the OHEYC, it became clear to the researcher that the Early Childhood Educators took a lot of time to plan each thematic unit that was used to incorporate literacy and numeracy activities that related to the story of the week. Each week, a book would be chosen as the theme book. Some of the titles included: *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*, *The Mixed Up Chameleon*, *The Teddy Bear’s Picnic* and *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*. Each of the activities presented in the centre, would reflect the book of the week. For example, when the book of the week was *The Mixed Up Chameleon*, by Eric Carle, many of the activities at the literacy table centred around the colours and the sequencing described in the children’s book. The book tells the tale of a chameleon who changes colours often, and the activities presented throughout the week echoed this. At the end of the week, there was even a visit by a live chameleon.

The researcher noted many times that the subjects identified and connected the various thematic activities presented throughout the centre. For example, on July 11th, Barbara mentioned to her older brother that the activities at the literacy table reflected various aspects of the weekly (thematic) story. While sequencing colour cards, she said “Hey - these are just like the chameleon in the book.” She also referred to the story at the flannel board, saying “I can make the chameleon change sizes and shapes, like the book does.” The use of thematic units is supported
often in research literature. According to Jensen (1998) brain research indicates that learning is
easier for young children when experiences are interconnected and not isolated into subject areas.
Katz and Chard (1989) agree that using teaching strategies such as thematic units provide needed
subject integration and challenge. Thought-provoking, hands-on experiences engage children’s
curiosity, motivate the application of skills, and challenge children to think reflectively (Harris-
Helm and Gronlund, 1999).

The Early Childhood Educators presented a new, well planned, thematic unit each week at
the centre. The children enjoyed the books, and all the related activities presented around the
centre. Both the comments and actions of the children that were observed, and the research
discovered in the literature reviewed support the use of themes to enhance literacy and numeracy
development. The use of these thematic units as part of the curriculum in practice at the OEYC is
directly in line with the ELF Centre and Ontario Early Years Centres philosophies to provide
children with opportunities to develop their literacy before entering school.

iii. Child-Initiated Learning (Free-Play)

Another aspect of the early literacy development program at the Ontario Early Years
Centre focused on the importance of child-initiated learning. The majority of the morning (9:00
a.m. - 10:30 a.m.) was free play for the children. The children could roam around the centre
freely, with their parent(s). During this time, the ECE’s would interact with the children and
parents modeling positive behavior, language and learning experiences. This was an opportunity
for the parents to ask the ECE’s for advice, and also to share with the other parents. Often, the
ECE’s would interact directly with the children, even inviting them to the literacy table. This
direct interaction between the children and the ECE’s was very important.
Schweinhart (1997) emphasized the importance of child-initiated learning activities in early childhood. According to Schweinhart, studies suggested that preschool programs based on child-initiated learning activities, as the OEYC Centres are, contribute to children’s short- and long-term academic and social development. Programs that were based on teacher-directed lessons obtained a short-term advantage in children’s academic development by sacrificing a long-term contribution to their emotional and social development.

Katz (1999) suggested the young child, from the teacher-directed perspective, is dependent on adults’ instruction in the academic knowledge and skills necessary for a good start for later academic achievement. Hyson et al. (1990) found that children in child-initiated classrooms scored higher on measures of creativity than children in academically oriented classrooms.

Parents attending the Ontario Early Years Centre seemed to appreciate that their child could choose which activities they wanted to explore. On July 22nd, one parent mentioned to another that “{Kim} likes it here because she can explore on her own.” On the same morning, another mom stated that “I always know {Alan} will find something fun to do that is also educational.”

It was evident from the reactions of both the parents and children observed at the Ontario Early Years Centre, and the research that emerged from the literature review that the child-initiated learning that was encouraged at the OEYC helped to foster the development of literacy skills, and helped to prepare the children for school readiness.
iv. Parental Involvement

While the Early Childhood Educators at the Ontario Early Years Centre encouraged child-initiated learning, they also stressed the importance of parental involvement while the children explored the centre.

As previously mentioned, the ECE's would interact with the children and parents modeling positive behavior during free-play. This behavior modeled by the ECE's was often emulated by the parents. For example, on August 16th, the researcher noted that Evan's mother was having a difficult time convincing Evan to take part in a group activity. His mother had pleaded and prodded him to join the other children for 6-7 minutes. One of the ECE's joined Evan's mom, and spoke directly to Evan saying "Evan, we would love for you to join us. When you are ready, why don't you come on to the carpet with us?". After this brief conversation, the ECE returned to the large group activity on the carpet, giving Evan the choice to join or remain outside the group. Evan did not immediately join in the group activity, but he moved closer to see what was happening. Later that same day, Evan's mom tried to convince him to join the other children at the snack table. Instead of pleading and imploring him to join the other children, as she had before, she simply said "Evan, I am going to sit at the snack table. If you would like to join me there, I will save you a seat." The researcher noted that this was similar to the technique the ECE had demonstrated to Evan's mom earlier in the day.

Some parents were very conscientious, and travelled from centre to centre with their child. These parents would sit down with their child and read each word presented in the instructions. On July 4th, Danny and his mom travelled from centre to centre together. Danny's mom would wait patiently for Danny to choose an activity. "Mom, can you help me? I need
some help.” This was Danny’s cue to his mother that he needed help completing the activity. On August 18th, Evan and his mom also worked closely together at many centres. “What does it say?” Evan asked, referring to the written instructions at the writing centre.

However, many parents, especially those who accompanied more than one child to the OEYC did not often travel to each centre with their child. Some of these parents would only visit the literacy table with their child if their child called them over. The researcher also noticed that some parents would quickly read the instructions to themselves, paraphrase what the children were to do, and just verbally tell their child, instead of helping their child to read and understand the instructions. For example, on July 5th, Amy was at the craft table with her friends. Her mother was speaking to another mom while sitting on the couch. Amy didn’t know what to do, so she called her mom over to the craft table. Amy’s mom read the instructions, but simply said “You are supposed to make a monkey.” Amy didn’t want to do it on her own, so she said “Mom, make me a monkey!” After Amy refused to make the monkey on her own, Amy’s mom finally cut out the monkey herself, and handed it to Amy.

Peterson (1989), explained that there are many advantages when parents play an active role in their child’s educational process. “Many studies underscore the point: parent participation in education is very closely related to student achievement” (p.7).

C. EDI Results

Pre- and a post-tests of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) were administered prior to and following the two month observation of the subjects at the Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC). Qualitative data was recorded about the 6 subjects in the form of field notes during the two month observation.
Students pre- and post tests of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) were examined to note overall changes in results. Two Early Childhood Educators at the OEYC completed the pre- and post-tests. The only exception were the EDI tests of two children who had started attending the centre shortly before the commencement of the study. The EDI pre- and post-tests for these subjects were completed by their parent with clarification from the researcher when needed.

Section B of the EDI focuses on Language and Cognitive Skills. This section was focused on by the researcher because of its connection to literacy development. It is important to note that when the original ELF Centre Curriculum was created, Section B of the EDI was the main focus of the curriculum writers. For these reasons, the subject scores for Section B of the EDI pre-and post-tests have been isolated for analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>EDI #1 Section B Total</th>
<th>EDI #2 Section B Total</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>+20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>+25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Between the pre- and post-test of Section B (Language and Cognitive Skills) of the EDI, the scores of two subjects increased after the two month observation, while two decreased and two stayed relatively the same.

i. Individual Subject EDI Results

The researcher looked closely at the observational field notes and discovered evidence regarding the EDI results for each subject.
Amanda

EDI Section B #1 = 133  EDI Section B #2 = 112  Difference in Scores - 20

Between the pre- and post-test of the EDI, Amanda’s Section B results dropped by 21 points. Amanda started visiting the OEYC Centre shortly before the observation period began. The ECE’s at the centre were unable to complete the EDI tests on Amanda, so Amanda’s mother completed the pre- and post- test with the help of the researcher for clarification. The researcher and Amanda’s mother had many conversations over the two month observation period. As the time of the study proceeded, Amanda’s mother made many comments regarding Amanda’s interaction with other children. Before she began visiting the centre, Amanda only had regular interaction with two of her cousins. Visiting the OEYC was Amanda’s first opportunity in a play group setting. While observing Amanda’s interaction, her mother made many comments such as “I am surprised to see how she reacts to the other kids” (July 16) and “You can tell she is younger than the other kids. She can’t do as much as they can” (August 1st). The decrease in Amanda’s pre- and post-test scores may reflect her mothers realization of exactly what Amanda could and couldn’t do. The post-observation EDI test may be a more realistic assessment of Amanda’s language and cognitive skills.

Amanda had turned four years old just before the study began. In this way, she may not have been developmentally ready for most of the literacy activities located on the literacy table. Many instances are recorded in the observational field notes (July 12, 22, 26, 29) stating that Amanda was not very interested in spending time at the literacy table, even though her mother encouraged her to play there. The drop in Amanda’s EDI scores are a reflection of her mother’s heightened awareness of Amanda’s true cognitive skill level after observing her with the other
children, and her inability to focus and complete the literacy activities presented at the literacy
table.

Amy

EDI Section B #1 = 159   EDI Section B #2 = 160   Difference in Scores +1

Amy’s EDI Section B total test scores increased by 1 point after the two month
observation, remaining relatively the same. When looking closely at the field notes regarding
Amy, it is very evident that Amy did not often participate in literacy or numeracy activities. Most
of Amy’s time in the centre was spent directing the play of the other children. Amy is a natural
leader, and often needed to be in control. This need for control caused Amy to travel around the
centre leading other children with her, but Amy rarely found time to engage in meaningful play at
the various centres. Examples of Amy’s leadership role appear repeatedly in the field notes.
Specific examples include: July 9th, directing imaginative play with Sandy - “I said we’re cooking
now” and “on August 2nd, “You have to be a pirate now, or I won’t play.”

Amy wanted to be involved in every activity at once. If another child cried or was upset,
Amy would leave what she was doing, and try to find out what was going on. During play time, if
another child took the role of leader, Amy would simply abandon that play area, and seek out
another opportunity where she could be in control. Amy did not seem to enjoy quiet time at the
literacy table, working by herself. It seemed that Amy needed the attention of the other children
to remain at a centre for an extended period of time.

It is also evident in the observational field notes that Amy’s mother did not spend much
time with Amy while at the OEYC. Amy had an older brother who also attended the centre, who
needed a lot of one on one attention from Amy’s mom. Amy’s mother also brought children she
babysat with her to the centre. The number of children Amy’s mom accompanied to the centre ranged from two (just Amy and her brother) to six. Amy’s mother was very busy looking after the infant she babysat. In this way, Amy was left on her own to explore the centre and play where she wanted to. The lack of parental involvement, and the limited amount of time spent at the literacy table account for Amy’s pre- and post-test EDI scores remaining relatively the same.

**Barbara**

EDI Section B #1 = 150  EDI Section B #2 = 170  Difference in Scores +20

Barbara’s EDI Section B test scores rose 20 points after the two month observation. Barbara was a very active participant at the literacy table. She often spent time working on the activities laid out at the literacy table. If Barbara did not understand the activity before her, she would ask for help. For example, on July 26th, while working at the literacy table, Barbara was trying to complete a matching exercise. Before beginning, she asked the ECE, “What does this say?” (referring to the written instructions beside the activity). Barbara enjoyed playing with her friends at the centre, but she also enjoyed working quietly, on her own at the literacy table. Barbara was always willing to attempt new tasks and she always demonstrated self-control. Her ability to concentrate at the task at hand was a great asset in aiding in her time at the literacy table. Barbara was four and half years old at the time of this study. Chronologically, and developmentally, she was able to experience maximum benefit from the activities presented on the literacy table.

**Danny**

EDI Section B #1 = 160  EDI Section B #2 = 130  Difference in Scores - 30

Danny’s Section B score dropped 30 points between the pre- and post-tests. When
looking closely at the field notes, it is interesting to note that Danny’s attendance greatly fluctuated during the two month observation period. Danny did not visit the centre from July 26th to August 12th, as his family was on vacation during this time. The infrequency of Danny’s time spent at the OEYC may have had a significant impact on his EDI scores. It is also interesting to note that although Danny spent a fair amount of time at the literacy table, he often created his own activities with the materials provided. For example, on July 12th, Danny used a colour matching activity which included coloured blocks as a building activity, simply stacking the blocks. It is obvious from observing Danny at the literacy table, that the activities presented at the literacy table were not appropriate for Danny’s level of literacy development.

Danny had an older brother, and an infant brother who also visited the centre with his mom. Danny’s mom had to spend most of her time with Danny’s younger brother, and this lack of parental contact may also have affected Danny’s opportunities to learn at the literacy table.

Several factors effected the drop in Danny’s pre- and post-test EDI results. These factors included: Danny’s irregular attendance at the centre, his inability to benefit from the activities at the literacy table and the lack of parental involvement.

Evan

EDI Section B #1 = 132   EDI Section B #2 = 132   Difference in Scores 0

Evan, like Amanda, had only started visiting the centre with his mother before the commencement of the study. His mother completed both the pre- and post- EDI tests. Evan’s scores remained the same on both tests. Evan’s attendance at the centre was very limited over the two month observation period. The only days Evan attended the centre were July 4, 8, 23, 24, August 5, 6, and 16. Although Evan’s attendance was minimal, it became evident to the
researcher that he was having a great amount of trouble adjusting to the centre. Evan’s mom shared with the researcher that they had tried a play group once before, but the “experience was painful for both of us.” Evan did not interact with the other children very much, but began to tolerate more interaction as the weeks progressed. Evan’s mom did not seem to be very objective when filling out the EDI, and this may account for this score remaining the same.

Evan would often sit at the literacy table with his mother, but he did not often engage in the activities presented. Evan seemed to enjoy activities which included building blocks, and sequencing activities, but often Evan would simply sit at the literacy table and watch the activity of the other children in the centre.

Similar to some of the other subjects, there are a couple reasons that Evan’s pre- and post-test scores remained the same. These include: infrequent attendance, and spending limited amounts of time at the literacy table.

Sandy

EDI Section B #1 = 165   EDI Section B #2 = 190   Difference in Scores +25

Sandy’s EDI test score rose 25 points between the pre- and post-tests. Like Barbara, Sandy often visited the literacy table. She was an eager participant in together time on the carpet and often sought out her mother, and other adults in the centre to read to her. Sandy was the oldest of the 6 subjects (almost five years old), and her maturity was evident in her daily dealings with the other children. Sandy was a quiet leader. Although she could be overshadowed by Amy at times, Sandy was usually quite content to play with other friends around the centre. She enjoyed playing with the other children, but also enjoyed working quietly on her own. Sandy often made conversation with her mother regarding the themes being studied in the centre. For
example, on July 10th, Sandy was playing quietly on the flannel board with the pieces of the story, *The Mixed Up Chameleon*. After matching all the pieces of the story, Sandy found her mother and explained to her that "Chameleons can be any colour Mom. Just like in the story."

The fact that Sandy was older than the other subjects, and was approaching the age group that the Early Development Instrument was originally written for is significant when explaining the large increase (25 points) between her pre- and post-test results. Sandy also spent a great amount of time at the literacy table. This increased amount of time spent at the literacy table, along with Sandy’s developmental readiness to learn from the activities at the literacy table explain the large increase in her EDI test scores.

D. Themes Affecting EDI Results

As a result of exploring the individual subject EDI test results, and researcher observational field notes, four themes emerged from the data: i., Developmental Level of the Subjects, ii., Attendance at the Ontario Early Year Centre, iii., Parental Involvement, iv., Amount of Time Spent at the Literacy Table Engaged in Literacy Activities. While no single cause can be given to explain each positive or negative changes of the EDI test results for the subjects involved, each of these themes clearly contributed to the change in the individual EDI scores. Two subjects scores remained relatively the same. In these cases, these themes can explain why there was no significant increase in their test scores.

i. Developmental Level of the Subjects

The Ontario Early Years Centres were created to support children in their early years (0-6). "The [Ontario] government has been a national leader in supporting the healthy development of all children aged zero to six and their families" (Ministry of Community, Family and Children
Services, 2003). The Early Childhood Educators at the OEYC Centres were called upon to help the children that visit their centre develop literacy skills. This challenging task is made even more complicated by the broad range of children’s developmental levels evident in the centre.

Reviewing the individual EDI results, it became apparent that the developmental level of the subjects had an effect on their EDI test results. Some of the younger subjects who were not as developmentally ready for the literacy activities presented (specifically at the literacy table) had noticeably negative changes in their EDI test results. Amanda’s score dropped 21 points, and Danny’s score dropped 30 points. Both Amanda and Danny had turned four years old just before the study began; they were not as developmentally ready to benefit from the literacy activities presented. Conversely, Barbara (four and a half years old) and Sandy (almost five years old) had significant positive gains in their EDI results. Both of these girls not only actively participated in all the literacy activities in the centre, but they were more developmentally prepared to do so.

According Dunn & Kontos (1997), in a typical classroom, children’s literacy development may range from just recognizing the concept of a “word” to being able to read and write simple sentences. Due to this vast difference in developmental levels of children in various classrooms, Dunn & Kontos asserted that developmentally appropriate practices help to enhance children’s development and facilitate learning. The children who spent time at the literacy table engaged in literacy activities (Sandy and Barbara) were developmentally ready for the activities presented there.

ii. Attendance at the Ontario Early Years Centre

The developmental level of the subjects in this study spanned a broad range, as did the attendance of each subject in the study. Some of the subjects had excellent attendance during the
two month observation period, and missed only a few days. Sandy and Barbara exhibited the best attendance during the two month observation period, missing less than 4 days each. However, Danny and Evan demonstrated irregular attendance and Amanda visited the centre consistently during the first month, but missed 10 days during the second month. Danny missed more than 14 days, while Evan only attended at the OEYC for 7 days during the observation period. Amy consistently attended the OEYC during the two month observation period.

These patterns of attendance had a direct effect on the EDI totals of each subject. It is interesting to note that both Sandy and Barbara exhibited the best attendance during the study, and both girls experienced substantial gains in their EDI scores. The reverse is true for both Danny and Amanda. Their inconsistent attendance had an impact on their test results. Danny’s scores dropped by 30 points, and Amanda’s scores dropped by 21 points. In is interesting to note that Evan exhibited the least consistent attendance of all the subjects in the study, although his EDI test results remained the same. As previously mentioned, this may be attributed to the fact that Evan’s mother completed both EDI tests, because he had only started visiting the OEYC shortly before the study began. In this way, Evan’s mother’s bias toward her son’s language and cognitive skills may not have been evident from his EDI test results.

Why did the subjects who attended the centre regularly experience an increase in their EDI test results, while those whose attendance was infrequent experienced a decline in their test scores? DeKalb (1999) states that “absenteeism is detrimental to students’ achievement” (p. 2). DeKalb’s research investigated students in elementary school, and the effects of truancy on their academic achievement. Although most of the subjects in this study were not yet attending elementary school, a parallel can be reached between DeKalb’s findings on attendance and
student achievement at school, and the effects of each subjects attendance on their EDI test results.

DeKalb found that the students who missed school fell behind their peers in the classroom. It is evident that Barbara and Sandy, who exhibited consistent attendance had more opportunities to engage in the centres literacy activities. While Danny and Amanda, whose attendance was inconsistent, spent less time in the OEYC environment, and less time engaged in various literacy activities.

Although the attendance of individual subjects and each subject’s developmental level effected their EDI test results, parental involvement is another theme that emerged from the individual EDI test results.

iii. Parental Involvement

Looking carefully at the individual EDI results, it was evident that the amount of parental involvement each subject experienced effected their individual results. Amy and Danny were the two subjects whose parents were least involved with them while at the Ontario Early Years Centre. Both Danny and Amy’s mothers accompanied more than one child to the centre. In both cases, the mothers had younger (infant) children to supervise. Danny had a noticeable decrease between his pre- and post-test scores, and Amy’s scores remained relatively the same. On the other hand, Sandy’s scores increased by 25 points, and her mother was the most involved of all the subject’s parents who attended the OEYC.

What are the benefits of parental involvement? Could the extra time Sandy’s mother spent with her at the OEYC help to increase her EDI test scores? According to Peterson (1989), there are many advantages when parents play an active role in their child’s educational process.
Peterson asserted that "many studies underscore the point: parent participation in education is very closely related to student achievement" (p.7).

Cunningham (2002) explained that parents who understand and support educational standards will help their child to meet with academic success. Cunningham suggested when parents support their children in academic pursuits, they are more likely to provide the resources to help their children meet with success. In this way, the subjects whose parents were more involved with their activities benefitted from this direct involvement with increased test scores.

iv. Amount of Time Spent at the Literacy Table Engaged in Literacy Activities

The final theme that emerged when reviewing the individual EDI test results dealt with the amount of time the subjects spent at the literacy table, engaged in literacy activities. All 6 subjects spent some time at the literacy table. Amy and Amanda spent the least amount of time at the literacy table engaged in literacy activities. Their scores did not show any gains between the pre- and post-tests. Barbara and Sandy spent the most amount of time at the literacy table engaged in literacy activities, and their scores showed significant gains between the pre- and post-tests. It is interesting to note that both Danny and Evan spent considerable time at the literacy table, however, they were not engaged in literacy activities. Danny and Evan both enjoyed stacking blocks, and sorting activities. However, neither seemed interested in completing the activities as instructed by their mothers or the ECE’s. Neither Danny nor Evan’s scores increased in regard to literacy gains. Thus, a distinction is made between those subjects who spent time at the literacy table, and those who spent time at the literacy table engaged in the literacy activities presented there.

According to Bredekamp (1987), in literacy-rich classrooms, children are able to learn the
skills and strategies necessary for reading and writing through engagement in meaningful activities. Finger plays, games, activities and poems all help children to pick up new vocabularies, and develop phonemic awareness (NAEYC, 2002). Bodrova et al., (1999) concurred that early literacy activities should teach basic skills and provide rich, meaningful, engaging learning environments. By having authentic literacy experiences, children will be better able to transfer their classroom learning to real life, and they will develop their abilities to use their literacy skills. This is translated in the increased test scores of the subjects who were engaged in the literacy activities presented on the literacy table.

After reviewing the researcher observational field notes, and the individual EDI results, it became apparent that the developmental level of each subject, each subject’s attendance at the Ontario Early Years Centre, the amount of parental involvement and the amount of time spent engaged in literacy activities at the literacy table had direct correlations to the differences in the pre- and post-test results. As previously stated, no one theme can be said to have exclusively caused a change in test results. Rather, it is a combination of the themes that emerged which help to explain the EDI test results that were obtained. The EDI test results, the overall themes that emerged from the observational field notes, and the literature review lead back to the original research question: Based on the curriculum developed by the City of Windsor for the Ontario Early Years Centres, could the Early Development Instrument (McMaster University, Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation, 2000) be a possible assessment tool for the perceived government literacy development objectives (as indicated by the aforementioned government studies and programs implementations)?
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION

A. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to discover whether the Early Development Instrument would be a suitable assessment tool for the Ontario Early Years Centres to measure the perceived government literacy development objectives. The OEYC was using a curriculum that had been developed for the original City of Windsor ELF Centres, before the Government of Ontario introduced the funding for the Early Years Centres. It was discovered that the ELF Centre philosophy, and that of the Ontario Early Years Centres were a good match, and both were striving to provide children in their early years opportunities to develop their literacy skills, while providing a support and educational environment for parents (Ministry of Community, Family and Children’s Services, 2000; 2001; 2002). Allowing children and parents this opportunity for early exposure to various literacy opportunities is very significant. Brain development research has informed us of the remarkable learning opportunities in the early years and of the long-term effect of early experiences (Shore, 1997). Bodrova et al. (1999) explained that major studies have found that “the seeds of literacy are planted before children enter school. Knowledge about letters and sounds, print and pictures, and words and sentences is a prerequisite for learning to read and write” (p. 12).

Looking closely at the curriculum currently used by the OEYC Centres in Windsor and surrounding area, it was discovered that there were limited specified objectives listed. The curriculum dealt more with the physical lay-out of the centres, as well as sample lessons, and articles which supported the ELF Centre philosophies.
However, when listing the curriculum observed in practice by the ECE's at the Ontario Early Years Centre, a much more specific list of expectations and objectives appeared. The ECE's at the OEYC Centre, under the direction of the Family Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centre for the City of Windsor, have developed a program which presents children with literacy activities presented in weekly thematic units. Many researchers support the use of thematic approaches within early years curriculums (Jensen, 1998; Katz, 1994; Katz and Chard, 1989). Motivating the application of literacy and numeracy skills, engaging children's curiosity and challenging children to pose questions about their environment are only a few of the outcomes from a well-developed thematic unit in early childhood classrooms (Harris-Helm & Gronlund, 1999).

Another aspect of the OEYC current curriculum observed in practice focused on the individual child's choice during free play. Allowing early years children to direct themselves while visiting the OEYC Centre is very important for their development. Marcon (1998) discovered that children in child-initiated classrooms had better verbal skills than children in academically or teacher-directed oriented programs. Burts et al. (1990) also found that children in developmentally inappropriate classrooms (those that emphasized didactic instruction for young children) exhibited more total stress behaviours throughout the day than those children in child-initiated classrooms.

During this study, the ECE's at the Ontario Early Years Centre administered the Early Development Instrument to 4 of the 6 subjects prior to and following the two month observation period. This study endeavoured to discover whether the EDI could be an appropriate assessment tool for the OEYC and the perceived government literacy development objectives. It has been
discovered that Section B (Language and Cognitive Skills) of the EDI is most relevant to the Ontario Early Years Centres because of its focus on literacy development. However, through the research findings, it became evident that there are several reasons why the EDI is not an appropriate assessment tool for the OEYC Centres.

Looking specifically at the EDI itself, the questions on the EDI (See Appendix C) do not lend themselves to the age of the majority of the population visiting the OEYC Centres. According to Janus and Offord (2000) the EDI was written for children aged 3.8-6.5 years old. The test is currently being used by the Greater Essex County District School Board to assess the “readiness to learn” of their senior kindergarten (5 year old) students. The children in this study were three and four years old. Many of the questions for assessment on the EDI are developmentally inappropriate for children under four years of age. Most of the children visiting the OEYC Centres are under five years of age, and are not yet enrolled at school. These questions are developmentally inappropriate for the majority of the children visiting the Early Years Centre. For example, three of the six subjects of this study had recently turned four years old. After observing the children, it was obvious that Sandy, who was almost five years old, was more mature, and developmentally ready for the tasks on the EDI than Evan and Amanda who had just turned four. Specifically, during visits to the literacy table, Sandy was able to complete almost all of the activities alone, with only limited help from her mom or the ECE’s. Sandy was able to focus and complete the activities. On the other hand, when Amanda visited the literacy table, she needed a lot of explanation from the ECE’s, and found it difficult to focus on the task at hand.

Another aspect of the Ontario Early Years Centres that does not lend itself to the use of
the EDI, is the attendance of the children who visit the centre. The OEYC Centres are open to all residents of Ontario, and are free of charge. Parents and caregivers are free to drop in to visit the centres at any time, and do not have to sign up or register for a specified amount of time. Unlike other preschool and day care programs which are scheduled for certain time slots, the OEYC Centres are more of a Drop-in Centre. Although some parents come regularly, others visit less frequently. For the Early Childhood Educators to be able to assess the children, using the EDI, they need to see the child interacting and exploring the centre for an extended period of time. In this study, two of the children had just begun visiting the Ontario Early Years Centre before the commencement of the study, so the ECE’s could not complete the tests. The EDI would be an appropriate assessment tool for use in Kindergarten classrooms because of the scheduled, calculated school day.

The Government of Ontario created the Early Years Centres to promote and develop early learning and early literacy (Ministry of Education, 2000). As an assessment tool, Section B of the EDI focuses on literacy, but the remainder of the test does not. The EDI is composed of five domains which include: social knowledge and competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development (Section B), and general knowledge and communication skills. Although each of the domains is an important aspect of child development, only one of the five deals directly with the mandate of the Government of Ontario and the Ontario Early Years Centres, which focuses on early literacy.

It was also discovered that the EDI is not be an appropriate assessment tool for the OEYC Centres if they want individual test results, because the EDI provides results on a population level. According to Janus and Offord (2000), “this means that [EDI results] are not
interpretable for individuals." This does not completely discount the use of the EDI, unless the OEYC Centres only want individual test results for each child that visits the centre. The EDI test results would be helpful when applied to the overall community being served by the OEYC Centre.

In conclusion, it has been discovered by the researcher that the Early Development Instrument would not be an appropriate assessment tool for the perceived government curriculum objectives for the Ontario Early Years Centres. There are several reasons why the EDI is not an appropriate assessment tool for the OEYC Centres. The test is not developmentally appropriate for the children who visit the centres. Fluctuating attendance is another reason the EDI is not an applicable test for the OEYC Centres. As the centres are set up on a Drop-In basis, the parents do not have to pre-register for time at the centres. The Early Childhood Educators at the centre may not know the children well enough to administer the test. Although Section B of the EDI focuses on Language and Cognitive skills, the majority of the test does not lend itself to the emphasis the government of Ontario has placed on developing the literacy skills of children who visit the centres. An assessment tool for the OEYC Centres must clearly focus in the objectives the government is trying to meet. The population level test results for the EDI may lend itself to the government to see the needs of communities, it does not lend itself to helping the teachers and parents of each individual child assess that child’s progress. It is clear to the researcher that the EDI is not an appropriate assessment tool for the Ontario Early Years Centres, and its perceived government objectives. This conclusion leads the researcher to propose the following areas for future research.
B. Areas for Future Research

The following areas for future research occurred as a result of the study. It has been discovered that the Early Development Instrument would not be an appropriate assessment tool for the perceived government literacy development objectives for the Ontario Early Years Centres. Due to the fact that the EDI is not an appropriate assessment tool, an area for future research would include creating a new assessment tool to that could be used in the Ontario Early Years Centres. Before this tool could be created, several criterion must be established. First, the Government of Ontario must deliver a province-wide set of specific objectives and expectations for the Ontario Early Years Centres. This list of objectives would be one of the key components needed to create a new, and appropriate tool for the OEYC Centres.

Another area for future research could be creation of an assessment tool not only for use in the OEYC Centres, but tests that are developmentally appropriate for children aged 0-6 years old. Children grow and develop at such a fast rate in the early years of life, it seems impossible that one test could be sufficient to evaluate all six years of life. It is important that each milestone, and developmental stage be assessed and accounted for individually.

After carefully reviewing all the EDI test results, observational field notes and the literature review, it is evident the EDI would not be an effective assessment tool for the perceived government curriculum objectives. The transient nature of the centre would make it impossible for the ECE’s to complete such an in-depth assessment as the EDI on most children who visit the centre. Also, the wide range of developmental abilities and age groups represented in the Ontario Early Years Centre make the scope of the EDI too narrow. The development that takes place between 0 and 6 years is extraordinary and could never be assessed with a single assessment tool.
Therefore, the Ontario Early Years Centres need assessment tools that are more individually focused on each child, and the activities presented at each particular OEYC. The ECE’s need assessment tools that they can pick up, and quickly check off. There are various assessment tools that could be used including: rubrics, checklists, rating scales and visual assessments. Educators use the term “authentic assessment” to define the practice of performance-based, realistic, instructionally appropriate assessment (Grace, 1992). One method of authentic assessment that may be more realistic for the ECE’s at the Ontario Early Years Centres to use is to assemble a portfolio of each child who visits the centre. The portfolio can include work samples, records of various systematic observation (rubrics, checklists, questionnaires, anecdotal records etc.) as well as more complex screening tests (if needed). The use of portfolios as an assessment tool for the OEYC Centres is more realistic than the EDI for several reasons. First, the transiency of some children would not exclude them from being assessed. The ECE’s could compile information on the child whenever they attended the centre, and build the portfolio slowly. Those children who attended the centre more regularly would have a more detailed portfolio than those who don’t attend consistently. However some assessment would be possible for all children. Secondly, the use of portfolios would allow each child to be assessed according to their personal level of development. Finally, the ECE’s would be able to assess the children quickly and easily without neglecting the rest of the children in the centre. With the use of rubrics, checklists and rating scales, the ECE’s could easily situate themselves at the literacy table and complete an authentic, individualized assessment as it pertains to one child, completing a specific literacy activity. While it has been determined that the EDI is not an appropriate assessment tool for the perceived government curriculum objectives at Ontario Early Years Centres, future research may discover a
realistic, developmentally appropriate assessment method which will help the government, Early Childhood Educators and parents to be sure that their early years child is getting the best start in life.
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Champaign, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

(ERIC Document No. ED312776).


### Section B - Language and Cognitive Skills

**How would you rate this child's:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>excellent</th>
<th>good</th>
<th>average</th>
<th>poor</th>
<th>very poor</th>
<th>don't know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ability to use language effectively in English</td>
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<td>2. ability to listen in English</td>
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<td>3. ability to tell a story</td>
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<td>4. ability to take part in imaginative play</td>
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<td>5. ability to communicate own needs in a way understandable to adults and peers</td>
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<td>6. ability to understand on first try what is being said to him/her</td>
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<td>7. ability to articulate clearly, without sound substitutions</td>
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**Would you say that this child:**

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<th>don't know</th>
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<td>8. knows how to handle a book (e.g., turn a page)</td>
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<td>9. is generally interested in books (pictures and print)</td>
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<td>10. is interested in reading (inquisitive/curious about the meaning of printed material)</td>
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<td>11. is able to identify some letters of the alphabet</td>
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<td>12. is able to attach sounds to letters</td>
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<td>13. is showing awareness of rhyming words</td>
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<td>14. is able to participate in group reading activities</td>
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<td>15. is able to read simple words</td>
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<td>16. is able to read complex words</td>
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<td>17. is able to read simple sentences</td>
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<td>18. is experimenting with writing tools</td>
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<td>19. is aware of writing directions in English (left to right, top to bottom)</td>
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<td>20. is interested in writing voluntarily (and not only under the teacher's direction)</td>
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<td>21. is able to write his/her own name in English</td>
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<td>22. is able to write simple words</td>
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### Section B - Language and Cognitive Skills

**Would you say that this child:**

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- is able to write simple sentences
- is able to remember things easily
- is interested in mathematics
- is interested in games involving numbers
- is able to sort and classify objects by a common characteristic (e.g., shape, colour, size)
- is able to use one-to-one correspondence
- is able to count to 20
- is able to recognize numbers 1 - 10
- is able to say which number is bigger of the two
- is able to recognize geometric shapes (e.g., triangle, circle, square)
- understands simple time concepts (e.g., today, summer, bedtime)
- demonstrates special numeracy skills or talents
- demonstrates special literacy skills or talents
- demonstrates special skills or talents in arts
- demonstrates special skills or talents in music
- demonstrates special skills or talents in athletics/dance
- demonstrates special skills or talents in problem solving in a creative way
- demonstrates special skills or talents in other areas (please specify)
- can communicate adequately in his/her first language (based on your observation or parent/guardian information)
Appendix B

UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Can the Offord Early Development Instrument be Used as an Effective Assessment Tool in Ontario Early Years Centres?

You are asked to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Kara Smith and Katherine Senchuk, from the Faculty of Education at the University of Windsor. This research is being conducted as part of the requirements for my Master's in Education.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Katherine Senchuk at 735-6447, or Dr. Kara Smith, at 253-3000, extension 3826.

• PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The Government of Ontario has recently opened Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) to aid Ontario's children in "readiness for school". In Windsor, these OEYC are run by the City of Windsor. The current curriculum being used in Windsor OEYC was developed by the same City of Windsor department, based on the Early Development Instrument. This instrument was developed by Dr. D. Offord to test children's level of readiness for school. This study seeks to discover whether the Early Development Instrument could be an effective assessment tool for the Ontario Early Years Centre (ELF) curriculum.

The research conducted in this study will be used in connection with my Master's of Education thesis.

• PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Early Development Instrument (Pre-test)

There is a section of the Early Development Instrument in which you must answer questions about your child's exposure to Early Learning situations (day care, babysitter etc.). This must be completed before a two month period of observation.

Observation

Your child must attend the OEYC as regularly as possible for a two month (July and August) period. During this time, field notes will be taken on your child's interaction at the OEYC Centre. This interaction will be noted by the researcher. Your child's interaction with other children, with the Early Childhood Educator, and with yourself will be noted. The researcher will also note many of the activities your child participates in while at the OEYC.

72
**Early Development Instrument (Post-test)**
After the two month period of observation, you will once again be asked to provide various information about your child’s experiences with Early Learning situations (day care, babysitter etc.).

The total length of time for participation in this study is approximately two months. You will be required to help complete the Early Development Instrument twice, once before observation, and once after observation. Both the EDI information collection, and the observation will be done at the Lassaline site of the Ontario Early Years Centre. At this time, there are no plans to contact you for follow-up sessions, or for a subsequent related study. The research findings will be made available to you upon completion. These results will be made available to you through the Early Childhood Educator at the Lassaline Early Years Centre site.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND TO SOCIETY**

The Early Development Instrument results will be tabulated, and from these, you will learn about your child’s readiness for school. This test (as of September 2002) will be given to all Senior Kindergarten students enrolled in the Greater Essex County Distract School Board. Participating in this study will give you an earlier opportunity to learn where your child stands.

The results from the EDI will also help the Ontario Early Years Centre. The results are community based, and will benefit the Lassaline community, and will better equip the Lassaline OEYC to refine its goals and objectives.

- **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

You will receive no payment, of any kind, for participating in this research.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed with your permission. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent to the disclosure. Every effort will be made to keep the results of this study confidential.

The group based results of the EDI may be released to the Family Strengthening Coordinator with Ontario Early Years Centres, Beth Johnson. The reason for this disclosure would be that as the EDI gives a community based result, the information will help the OEYC to refine and review its objectives for the needs of the Lassaline community. Once again, this information will not be released without your specific consent. Upon the completion of the study, you will be given the opportunity to see the results of the study. The results will be in a sealed and secured package with the ECE at the Lassaline site. You will be able to pick this up at your
convenience. The ECE will inform you when the data has arrived.

The results of the EDI and all observational/anecdotal notes taken by the researcher will be kept, and locked in the home office of the researcher. The researcher will be the only person eligible to access this information.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may exercise the option of removing your data from the study. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don’t want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the University of Windsor Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact:

Research Ethics Co-ordinator
University of Windsor
Windsor, ON
N9B 3P4

Telephone: 519-253-3000, #3916
Email: ethics@uwindsor.ca

- **SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT/LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE**

I understand the information provided for the study “Can the Offord Early Development Instrument be Used as an Effective Assessment Tool in Ontario Early Years Centres?” as described herein. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

______________________________
Name of Subject

______________________________
Signature of Subject

______________________________
Date
• SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

In my judgement, the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate in this research study.

__________________________________________  _________________
Signature of Investigator                          Date
Appendix C

Literacy and Numeracy Activities*

Reading books
Story telling
Nursery Rhymes
Games
Singing Songs
Movement
Finger Plays

Interaction through conversation
Drawing and Writing
Creative Activities
Chants
Dramatic Play
Cooking/Baking Activities

* as listed in the ELF Centres Curriculum (2001)
NAME: Katherine Vera Senchuk

PLACE OF BIRTH: Windsor, Ontario, Canada

YEAR OF BIRTH: 1977

EDUCATION: Riverside Secondary School, Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1991-1996

University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1996-1999 Bachelor of Arts, English Language And Literature

University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1999-2000 Bachelor of Education, Primary/Junior

University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada
2000-2003 Master of Education, Curriculum Studies