Chapter 5

A Pan-Canadian and Global Review of Curriculum Frameworks

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After exploring this chapter, you should be able to

1. Describe what is meant by the two broad types of curricula approaches—the social pedagogic approach and the pre-primary approach.

2. Discuss the concept of curriculum frameworks and their purpose in early learning programs.

3. Examine the similarities and differences among the seven Canadian curriculum frameworks presented and describe how international curriculum frameworks have influenced Canadian curriculum frameworks.

4. Discuss the guiding principles that should be evident in Aboriginal early learning programs.

5. Discuss why and how theories, philosophies, and programming models or approaches may change over time.

6. Discuss the roles and responsibilities of early learning professionals, educational institutions, and government departments in advancing the knowledge about and ability to use the context of curriculum frameworks in practice.

A CHILD'S STORY   Jacob

I am school-ager now! I get to play with the big kids. Last year I was still in kindergarten, but now I go to school all day and come to the school-age program in the afternoon. We get to play with board games, cards, and computers when we are inside, and when we go outside we play sports. I love being a school-ager! I like our new project on the Beatles. I love my new teachers too. They don't seem as stressed out as my teachers last year. Last year they were always talking about things I didn't understand. They kept talking about something they called ELECT. It confused me. They would say, "Is that in the ELECT?" or "Check the ELECT." They would even talk to my parents about ELECT. Now that I am in the school-age program, I don't hear that word as much, but yesterday we had a class meeting and we were talking about our class community. We talked about making sure everyone in the class feels like they have a voice and are being heard. Our teacher Masooma told us that we should try to have a democratic classroom. She said our government is democratic. My friend Jeremy then suggested that we have an election for a class leader. When Masooma said that we could "elect" a leader, I got really confused. Today at our meeting I am going to ask her why we never had a class leader in kindergarten when the teachers were always talking about elections.

A child's representation of a project topic.
Diane Kashin

It should be realized that genuine interest cannot be forced.
Therefore all methods of education based on centers of interest
which have been chosen by adults are wrong.

—MARIA MONTESSORI (1870–1952)

Across Canada, the early years are increasingly subject to a variety of public policies associated with provincial and territorial initiatives. A current trend in the early learning sector in Canada is the adoption of either pedagogical curriculum frameworks or curricula to guide practice. Of the existing frameworks, some are mandatory and some considered optional. However, nowhere in the country is the same curriculum extended to both kindergarten and child care (Beach & Friendly, 2013). These emerging frameworks are most often designed for programs serving children before they enter the public education system, and they are seldom aligned with kindergarten or primary school curricula. School-operated

kindergarten curricula, usually mandated under the provincial education jurisdictions, follow a more defined, educator-guided curriculum, with specific learning standards or expectations divided into subject areas. These curricula and learning standards provide the impetus for the program-planning process, as does the assessment or testing of children's skills (McCain, Mustard, & McCuaig, 2011). Pedagogical curriculum frameworks are being adopted as a way to guide practice and increase the quality of programming for young children in organized early learning environments. Bennett (2005) has determined that "in terms of content, frameworks generally identify the key goals of early childhood services and propose how early childhood centres should support children's learning" (p. 8). Early learning professionals benefit from a close examination of these documents, including the foundational principles upon which the curriculum frameworks are based.

Bennett (2005) noted from his review of early learning policies, practices, and curricula in more than twenty countries that two primary approaches are most common in curriculum design. The first is a **social pedagogical approach**. This model is based on Bronfenbrener's ecological model, with the contextual focus of children's learning opportunities evolving from their environment—the people, places, and things within their environment, and past and current experiences within that environment. The second approach, known as the **pre-primary approach**, focuses on teaching, child outputs, and preparation for entry to the school system. Table 5.1 provides a comparison of the two approaches. The curriculum frameworks presented in this chapter have common features— they all take a social pedagogical approach to curriculum planning and implementation and are based on the principles that relationships with families are paramount to supporting the development of children, children learn through play, and the early learning professional plays a significant role in how the environment is created for and with children.

Bennett (2005) noted that a quality curriculum framework should be a guiding document for early learning professionals and parents. For example, he suggested that a framework have a statement of principles and values to guide early learning professionals, as well as a summary of program standards that would be transparent to parents, children, and visitors entering early learning environments. Curriculum frameworks outline broad goals and pedagogical guidelines that the early learning centre will pursue, reflective of and responsive to the unique individual, social, and cultural experiences and needs of the

social pedagogical approach An approach to curriculum that uses the child's context as the focus of the learning opportunities offered.

pre-primary approach An approach to curriculum that focuses on teaching, meeting outcomes, and school readiness.

Table 5.1   Comparison of Pre-primary and Social Pedagogical Approaches

Pre-primary Approach	Social Pedagogical Approach
Has a core centralized curriculum with defined goals and outcomes.	Focuses on broad-based curriculum outcomes with a local curriculum to reflect diversity among children, families, cultures, and community.
Teacher–child relationships focus on the teacher providing instruction toward achieving defined knowledge or skills to meet curriculum goals and standards.	The teacher–child relationship is collaborative in exploring and learning about ideas that are derived from the children's interests or broad curriculum goals.
Evaluation processes are used to assess each child with respect to the defined goals and competencies achieved.	The teacher, child, and parents together determine goals and outcomes. Assessment strategies such as narrative stories, portfolios, or pedagogical documentation are used to facilitate children's learning and areas of interest.

Source: Adapted from Bennett, 2005.

children in the program (Bennett, 2005). Bennett summed up his perspective on curriculum frameworks by saying they "will be strong on guiding principles and structural requirements, but flexible enough to allow practitioners to experiment with different methodological and pedagogical approaches, and to adapt overall goals to special needs children, and to local needs and circumstances" (p. 19).

The use of curriculum frameworks in public and private school settings is mandatory in Canada. When available, a curriculum framework is highly recommended for other settings, such as licensed child care, although it is not required. This is the case in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Ontario (McCain et al., 2011). Whether frameworks are mandated or voluntary, they offer early learning professionals a view of the deeper ideas that come with their use and of the complexity of working with children in their formative years. Some people assume that curriculum frameworks will be embraced and become a voluntary approach for early learning professionals. Others suggest that if frameworks are mandatory, there will be automatic, but perhaps not enthusiastic, compliance. Burgess and Fleet (2009) maintained that mandated initiatives may produce only surface adoption. How do you mandate an early childhood professional's practice when it involves philosophies and beliefs (Fenech & Sumsion, 2007)? One of the disadvantages of frameworks not being mandated as part of the standard of practice is that early learning professionals may not be interested in adopting them, which could result in an attitude of maintaining the status quo in programming.

Ultimately, a framework is intended to bring change to practice that enhances opportunities for children to have optimal play and learning experiences in early learning programs. Burgess and Fleet (2009) suggested that when early learning professionals engage with a curriculum document, they will perceive a potential benefit from making changes to practice. They will be able to "successfully implement the change, which may involve transforming their beliefs" (p. 47). The question then becomes how to provide the impetus for early learning professionals to engage with frameworks and to participate in discourse with colleagues so that the meaning of the document and ways of using it to guide practice may be examined. We suggest reviewing the following survey of provincial and international frameworks as a first step in engagement.

THE PURPOSE OF FRAMEWORKS

Internationally and across Canada, a number of jurisdictions have invested in the creation of curriculum frameworks for early learning programs. The purpose of each framework is to provide a guiding document that supports early learning professionals in creating pedagogical, focused learning communities that value children's exploration, autonomy, and desire to take risks and seek new ideas and learning. According to McCain et al. (2011), the curriculum frameworks developed to support early learning tend to be holistic and child-centred in their approach and are constructed around learning and developmental goals.

THE RATIONALE FOR FRAMEWORKS

Recent developments in neurological research have reinforced the importance of experiences and relationships in the first three years of life (Frost, Wortham, & Reifel, 2005; McCain, Mustard, & Shanker, 2007). This research has reinforced what many early learning professionals have always known—that the growth and development of the brain is influenced by a child's experiences and the environment (Dietze & Kashin, 2012). With this evidence, advocates for early learning have recommended increased attention to the environments and experiences extended to children. Early learning lays the foundation for future learning.

Documentation from an early learning program in a preschool classroom.

Diane Kashin
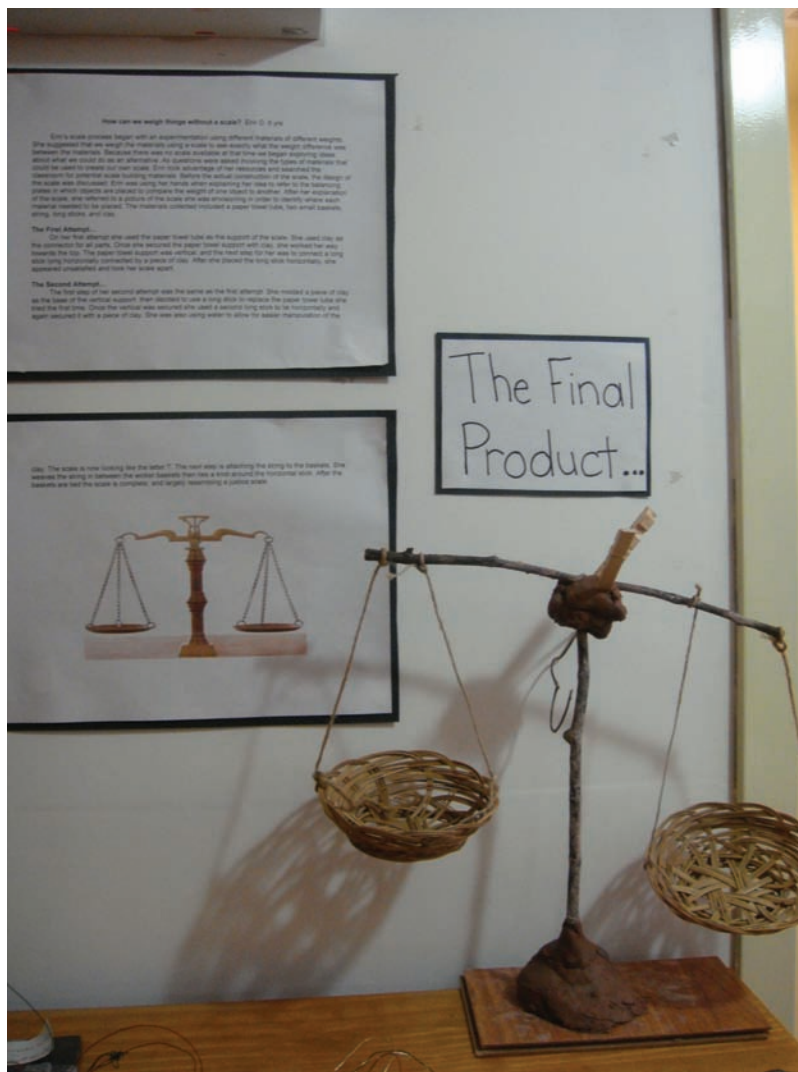
In the 1980s and 1990s, the Head Start and Perry Preschool projects in the United States produced an abundance of data demonstrating that investing in early learning programs has long-term benefits not only for the child, but also for the broader society because the "children grow up and become productive, well-adjusted citizens" (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2008, p. 12). In addition to the developmental benefits that children acquire from environments that follow curriculum frameworks, there is an economic rationale for frameworks to be used to guide and support early learning programs.

SURVEY OF CANADIAN FRAMEWORKS

Seven of Canada's provinces and territories have developed or adopted a curriculum framework for early learning. Others are considering development or are in the process of developing a curriculum framework. Table 5.2 lists current framework documents in Canada and provides websites where they are discussed and/or reviewed in full. In the sections that follow, we also provide a brief introduction to each of the frameworks. The frameworks have not been developed in isolation; in the various frameworks, you will find summaries of other provincial frameworks. For instance, in the Ontario early years framework, you will find summaries and reviews of frameworks from other provinces and countries.

Table 5.2 Provincial Curriculum Frameworks

Province	Year	Title	Requirements	Website
British Columbia	2008	*British Columbia Early Learning Framework*	Optional	www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/topic/57FDB4389CD0FB3F6EC9948B610A6BA9/earlylearning/early_learning_framework.pdf
Manitoba	2011	*Early Returns*	Mandatory in funded centres	www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/pubs/early_returns_en.pdf
New Brunswick	2008	*New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English*	Mandatory	www.gnb.ca/0000/ECHDPE/curriculum-e.asp
Ontario	2007	*Early Learning for Every Child Today*	Optional	www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf
Prince Edward Island	2011	*PEI Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences*	Mandatory to implement in the province's early years centres	www.gov.pe.ca/eecd/earlychildhood
Quebec	1997 and 2007	*Meeting Early Childhood Needs*	Optional	www.mfa.gouv.qc.ca/fr/publication/Documents/programme_educatif_en.pdf
Saskatchewan	2008	*Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide*	Optional	www.education.gov.sk.ca/ELCC/play-and-exploration-program-guide

British Columbia (2008)

The development of the *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* was led by the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Although the document was influenced by early learning frameworks from other jurisdictions, including New Brunswick, the northern Italian city of Reggio Emilia, Italy, Ireland, Sweden, and New Zealand, input was also provided by British Columbia families, early learning professionals, researchers, and post-secondary institutions. The framework was developed to be "uniquely British Columbian" (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 2). The British Columbia curriculum framework is used voluntarily by programs and adults who work with children in a variety of settings (Beach & Friendly, 2013).

British Columbia "is home to almost 200 First Nations, speaking more than 30 ancestral languages and dialects, along with First Nations, Inuit, Metis and Aboriginal peoples from other parts of Canada and the world" (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 5). The *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* acknowledges the importance of every child having his or her unique identity as well as cultural identity.

Vision   The vision for children and early learning in British Columbia,

> is based on the image of the child as capable and full of potential. Early learning is envisioned as a dynamic process, actively supported by families and other adults who care for and teach children in their homes and communities. Children, adults, and environments play distinct but interacting roles in promoting early learning. (Government of British Columbia, 2008, p. 14)

The framework outlines three core visions:

- the vision for children up to age five;
- the vision for families, communities, and governments; and
- the vision of children's environments.

These core visions are interwoven throughout the document and are intended to be evident in practice.

About the Document　The *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* document is intended to support adults working with children in creating environments and early learning experiences that reflect current research and practice. The document is designed to provide users such as early learning professionals with tools to use in reflecting on experiences and dialogue with children and their families. The framework is also designed to support adults who interact with children in strengthening "children's individual, social, cultural, and linguistic identities, and their respect and appreciation for other people's identities" (p. 3). The framework is based on the following principles:

- Children are born with the innate desire to learn.
- Families are the primary caregivers of children and have the most important role in promoting their children's well-being, learning, and development in the context of supportive communities.
- Play is vital to children's healthy development and learning.
- Consistent, responsive, and nurturing relationships are essential to the well-being and early learning of children.
- All aspects of children's development and learning—physical, social, emotional, cultural, linguistic, and intellectual—are interrelated and interdependent.
- Language plays a central role in connecting thought and learning.
- Children are active participants in their families and communities.
- The individual, cultural, and linguistic identities of children and families are respected and integrated into early learning settings, programs, and activities.
- The physical environment shapes children's learning and well-being.

The document is divided into three sections: the structure of the document, the background for the document (including the context for British Columbia), and the framework at a glance, including vision, principles, and areas of early learning. It provides learning goals and questions for readers to reflect upon and consider as part of their practice.

Manitoba (2011)

Early Returns: Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Preschool Centres and Nursery Schools is designed to support and be used by all the funded centres in Manitoba (Beach & Friendly, 2013). The curriculum framework reflects current research and best practices. Throughout the document, the information is intended to support adults working with children to think about what they do in their practice, explain the reasons for their practice, and discover ways to evaluate and enhance curriculum choices.

Vision　Manitoba's vision for children is that they have access to early learning and child care programs that demonstrate quality and foster and support children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. "Developmentally appropriate early learning and child care practice is child-centred, reflects family and community contexts and encourages meaningful partnerships between each child, his or her family and early learning and child care staff" (Government of Manitoba, 2011, p. 1).

About the Document   The *Early Returns* framework is divided into three sections: interactions and relationships, environments, and planned and spontaneous experiences. Throughout the document, the curriculum components presented are based on the perspective that children learn through play. The document provides contextual information on each topical issue, as well as examples of common comments and open-ended questions that may stimulate children's reasoning processes. There are also core questions that early learning professionals may ask themselves as part of their reflective practice. The *Early Returns* framework acknowledges that Manitoba's early learning programs use many different curriculum approaches and emphasizes the importance of early learning professionals having "well thought-out plans, systems, and processes—intention and purpose—for your curriculum" (Government of Manitoba, 2011, p. 20). The document suggests that the planning process for and with the children is as valuable as the particular program model used.

New Brunswick (2008)

In 2008, New Brunswick's Department of Social Development produced an English curriculum framework and one designed for the francophone population (Langford, 2010). For the purposes of this textbook we will focus on the English version. The curriculum framework, a requirement for use in licensed early learning programs (Beach & Friendly, 2013), "is firmly committed to a vision of all children developing to their fullest potential" (Government of New Brunswick, 2008, p. 1). The framework promotes the importance of focusing on the strengths that children bring to the environment through broad-based learning goals and the use of narrative assessment (Whitty, 2009).

Vision   The New Brunswick English curriculum framework states,

> Our vision is that all children will grow to their fullest potential with dignity, a sense of self-worth, and a zest for living and learning. It is a holistic vision that seeks to provide the environment and resources needed to support dynamic development in young children who are:
>
> - curious, courageous, and confident in their pursuit of knowledge and skills;
> - secure in their linguistic and cultural identities;
> - respectful of diversity, and
> - contributing to the development of a just and democratic society that nurtures connection and care for life on the earth. (Government of New Brunswick, 2008, p. 1)

The vision statements are illustrated in a variety of examples throughout the document.

About the Document   The curriculum framework, reflective of contemporary research and theory, and in keeping with the perspective that each child is unique, outlines a spectrum of approaches to support the diversity of children's abilities, strengths, and ensure that cultural and linguistic identities are honoured. The framework reinforces the importance of play and of children being viewed as confident and active learners, as well as their relationships with the people, places, and things in their environment.

> The *New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care—English* values and promotes children's experience of:
>
> - safe and caring environments where their emotional and physical health, positive self-identities, and sense of belonging are nurtured and protected;
> - open and flexible environments where playful exploration, problem-solving, and creativity are encouraged and purposefully planned;
> - intellectually, socially, and culturally engaging environments where their communicative practices, literacies, and literate identities are valued and supported;

■ socially inclusive and culturally sensitive environments in which consideration for others, inclusive, equitable, democratic, and sustainable practices are enacted, and social responsibility is nurtured. (Government of New Brunswick, 2008, p. 1)

Within the four sections of the framework, the following are outlined: a context and the requisite conditions for early learning and care; four goals for early learning and care; narratives and sample provisions and practices; and pedagogical issues and conditions for elaborating on the framework, including a literature review.

In addition to the early learning and child care curriculum framework, there are supporting documents that provide early learning professionals with ideas and examples for collaboration explorations. The supporting documents may be found at http://bit.ly/1ffAzzR.

Ontario (2007)

In 2007, the Ontario government published *Early Learning for Every Child Today*, a "curriculum and pedagogical framework for children from birth to age 8" (Langford, 2010, p. 3). Building on the Early Years Study (McCain & Mustard, 1999) and Ontario's Best Start Plan to support young children, the curriculum framework is intended to be part of the building-block process that will provide children with a best start (Best Start Panel on Early Learning, 2007).

The framework was developed based on extensive research and a review of early childhood curricula and pedagogy both in Canada and internationally, as well as on expertise from a variety of stakeholders, including early childhood professionals, teachers, directors, and post-secondary educators. It is often referred to as the ELECT or the OELF (Ontario Early Learning Framework), and sometimes the ELF (Early Learning Framework). The OELF is not a mandatory document; early learning professionals have the option to use it in their practice in Ontario (Beach & Friendly, 2013).

Vision   The Province of Ontario believes that "every child has the right to the best possible childhood. Ontario's vision is to make Ontario an international leader in achieving the social, intellectual, economic, physical, and emotional potential of all its children" (Best Start Panel on Early Learning, 2007, p. 3).

Early Learning for Every Child Today was developed based on the following principles:

■ Early child development sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, and health.

■ Partnerships with families and communities strengthen the ability of early childhood settings to meet the needs of young children.

■ Demonstration of respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion are prerequisites for optimal development and learning.

■ A planned curriculum supports early learning.

■ Play is a means to early learning that capitalizes on children's natural curiosity and exuberance.

■ Knowledgeable and responsive early childhood practitioners are essential in early childhood settings.

About the Document   The purpose of the practical guide is "to support curriculum and pedagogy in Ontario's early childhood settings, including child care centres, kindergarten classrooms, home child care, nursery schools, Ontario Early Years Centres and other family support programs and early intervention services" (Best Start Panel on Early Learning, 2007, p. 3). The document is intended to complement curricular and pedagogical approaches and regulated requirements, as well as provide support for programs that may not necessarily have a defined curriculum model or pedagogical approach.

The guide is organized into the following five sections: "Statement of Principles"; "Understanding Children's Development"; "Into Practice"; "Assessment, Evaluation and Monitoring"; and "Glossary." It provides comprehensive information on the developmental domains and skills, indicators of the skill, and interactions that support children in each phase of development. These developmental domains and skills are featured in a continuum that is designed to be applied to practice. The guidelines for the practice section provide an overview of the principles and understanding of development, along with examples of programming that would support practice guidelines. Appendix 2 of the document, entitled "Best Start: Parent Involvement," acknowledges that parents play a significant role in children's learning and care. It provides an overview of the research on parent involvement and gives strategies for early learning staff to support and encourage parent involvement.

The province also offers a website that supports the early learning framework by providing information on observation, documentation, and interpretation as a means to put the framework into action or practice. You can also find information on learning environments and the continuum of development, as well as questions and considerations for further discussion, at http://bit.ly/11Qm0vy.

Prince Edward Island (2011)

The Prince Edward Island Department of Education and Early Childhood Development created the *PEI Early Learning Framework*: *Relationships, Environments, Experiences* to focus on children from infancy to school entry. The framework was written for directors and educators in all of the province's early years centres (Beach & Friendly, 2013). The *PEI Early Learning Framework* "is specifically designed to provide consistency in methodological approaches and structure to the scope of learning in Early Years Centres" (Flanagan, 2011, p. 5). The framework recognizes the importance of having early childhood educators design and implement programs and experiences that are "relevant to their communities, respectful of PEI's different cultures and languages, and that are appropriate for children with a

wide range of abilities" (Flanagan, 2011, p. 5). Within the document, Flanagan (2011) acknowledged the need for early childhood educators to have a strong background in early childhood education and child development. She also pointed out that directors have a key role in exhibiting strong pedagogical leadership.

Vision   As part of the province's Preschool Excellence Initiative, a Vision for Children was created and underpins the framework. The vision statement is intended to support and facilitate the reciprocal relationship between the early childhood educator and children. The Vision for Children statement is,

> Children in PEI are healthy and happy, curious and creative, playful and joyous. They are loved and respected, and are safe and secure in their families, homes and communities. Children are our collective responsibility. They are valued for who they are today, and as the future parents and leaders of tomorrow. (Flanagan, 2011, p. 6)

About the Document   The document provides the reader with an overview of the theoretical perspective at the beginning of each of its sections. The eight sections of the document are the introduction, which includes theory; "Learning through Play"; "Role of the Early Childhood Educator"; "Inclusion"; "Learning Principles," examining relationships, environments, and experiences; "Learning Goals"; "Strategies and Reflections"; and "Documentation and Assessment."

Quebec (1997 and 2007)

In 1997, Quebec was the first province in Canada to develop an early learning framework. It drew upon the HighScope curriculum approach. In 2007, the framework was revised and updated (Government of Quebec, 2007; Langford, 2010). Quebec's framework is not mandatory (Beach & Friendly, 2013).

Vision   The Quebec early learning framework aims to foster the full and harmonious development of children so that they can realize their full potential in every dimension of their being. As quoted in the Ontario early years framework, the Quebec framework emphasizes the child's development process and refers to the social-emotional, moral, linguistic, cognitive, and psychomotor domains, "rather than the acquisition of specific skills or the potential product of a child's action." What is seen as important is "the children's ability to interact constructively with the environment" (Best Start Panel on Early Learning, 2007, p. 105).

About the Document   The document is divided into two parts. The first provides the objectives of the framework and other important references, including the theoretical influences and principles. The second part discusses application to practice, including observations, planning, and materials. Quebec's document links the goals of the early learning frameworks with kindergarten learning outcomes (McCain et al., 2011). The theoretical foundations of the document are aligned with an ecological approach and attachment theory (Langford, 2010) and support adapting the American HighScope approach to focusing on the development of the whole child.

As identified in the Ontario framework (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007), Quebec's framework is based on viewing each child as unique and on pedagogical principles that

- focus on play as the venue for children's learning and development;
- see educators, parents, and children contributing to creating environments; and
- focus on experiences and opportunities that support the harmonious development of each child.

Saskatchewan (2008)

In 2008, Saskatchewan launched *Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide* (Langford, 2010). The program guide is designed to promote high-quality play-based programming for three-, four- and five-year-old children in a variety of early learning programs. Although implementation of the curriculum framework is considered optional (Beach & Friendly, 2013), "the intention is that all programs will reflect the vision, principles and quality elements described in the Guide" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008, p. 1). A number of examples are presented in the document that would be helpful for early learning professionals to consider in their practice.

Vision The guide outlines the vision for early learning programs that are holistic, responsive, and developmentally appropriate. They focus on the healthy development of the whole child, including social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual development. Children, family members, and early childhood educators collaborate in enriching children's learning and growth (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008). Early learning professionals are therefore encouraged to think about the following:

- children and their learning experiences;
- children and their relationships; and
- children and their environments.

About the Document The guide was developed based on "early childhood education research, examples from successful practice of early childhood educators and understandings passed on through community culture, values and beliefs" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2008, p. 1). The guide presents the user with information on children as competent learners, the changing role for educators, how young children learn, observation and reflection, and high-quality programming. Each section provides an overview of the theoretical context, as well as prompts for early learning professionals to use to engage in reflection and in decision-making processes that include reflection, action, and evaluation. The final section of the document provides a comparison of selected early program approaches and key recommended references. In addition to the guide, there are supplementary *Into Practice* booklets and companion guides, including *Play and Exploration for Infants and Toddlers*, which can be found at http://bit.ly/105uKAt.

Curriculum Frameworks under Development

At the time of writing, the Newfoundland and Labrador government had made a commitment to develop an early childhood learning curriculum framework. The framework is intended to outline a pedagogical approach that emphasizes play-based learning, the role of adults in creating environments that model a holistic approach to children's development and learning, and inclusion of children with exceptionalities. In addition, as identified on the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education website, the framework will include

- a priority focus on parent–child interaction in relation to emergent literacy skills and child development, targeting infant and children from birth to age eight; and
- a curriculum with guiding principles for the early learning of children across all settings, such as regulated child care, family resource programs, early intervention programs (e.g., Direct Home Services Program), schools, early literacy programming, and homes.

Go to http://bit.ly/13pRZZ1 to learn more about the development of the curriculum framework in Newfoundland and Labrador.

In Alberta, a discussion paper was released in 2010 that calls for the establishment of a provincial curriculum framework for the early years. At the time of writing, it was thought that a group of Alberta provincial ministries would work together to develop a framework to be used in all regulated early learning settings. The framework will outline learning principles for different-aged children and identify key learning areas for programs to include in their service. "In developing the framework the ministries will be seeking a wide range of input internally and from other jurisdictions with early learning frameworks or curricula" (Muttart Foundation, 2010, p. 24). The paper, *In the Best Interests of Children and Families: A Discussion of Early Childhood Education and Care in Alberta*, can be found at http://bit.ly/16PQ2UH.

Other Guiding Practices: Nova Scotia

In Nova Scotia, licensed child care facilities are required to have a documented daily program plan. The actual approach to curriculum will vary from centre to centre. The daily program standards, established by the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services in accordance with the Day Care Act and Regulations, are necessary so that play-based and child-centred programs are delivered.

Promising Practices for Aboriginal Early Childhood Curriculum Frameworks

In the mid-1990s, Canadian royal commissions on Aboriginal people and education highlighted the need to improve Aboriginal education, beginning with early childhood experiences. This led to First Nations communities prioritizing early childhood care and education as an important strategy to promote the optimal development of their children, while maintaining and building on their traditional culture, their language, and the overall prosperity of their communities and societies. This resulted in Aboriginal Head Start initiatives being expanded in off-reserve and on-reserve communities. The curriculum framework for Head Start programs is based on six component areas: culture and language, education and school readiness, health promotion, nutrition, social support, and parental and family involvement (Health Canada, 2004). According to Nguyen (2011), the first two components—culture and language, and education and school readiness—are viewed as the most important guidelines. The culture and language component is designed to provide children with experiences that will revive and retain their culture and language, and support them in learning their languages and participating in their communities' culture. The education component is designed to

> support and encourage each Aboriginal child to enjoy life-long learning. More specifically, the projects will encourage each child to take initiatives in learning and provide each child with enjoyable opportunities to learn. This will be done in a manner which is appropriate to both the age and stage of development of the child. The ultimate goal is to engage children in the possibility of learning so that they carry forth the enthusiasm, self-esteem, and initiative to learn in the future. (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2004, p. 13)

In addition to the principles outlined above, the Aboriginal Head Start programs have adopted the HighScope curriculum and a generative curriculum model inspired by the Italian Reggio Emilia approach.

Bolduc, Schneider, Gerlach, and Gray Smith (2009), in their document *Creating Pathways—an Aboriginal Early Years Five Year Strategic Plan*, identified that the guiding principles illustrated in Figure 5.1 are the ideal foundation on which to build early childhood programs and must be transparent to families and communities.

SURVEY OF INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Early learning and child care curriculum frameworks have been developed relatively recently in many provinces across Canada; however, in other countries they have been in prior to or since the turn of this century. Although each jurisdiction has created a framework that is intended to reflect its vision and views of children, early learning professionals in Canada may see themes or positions that support aspects of their own frameworks, while other aspects remain distinct. Below, we provide summaries of six international frameworks.

Australia

Australia's *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* was designed to provide high-quality early childhood education and care for children from infancy through to five years of age throughout Australia. The Australian government has a goal that all children will begin school as healthy and confident learners. The following five principles are embedded in the framework:

- secure, respectful, and reciprocal relationships;
- partnerships;
- high expectations and equity;

- respect for diversity; and
- outgoing learning and reflective practice.

The framework emphasizes that children require environments that are play based and contain appropriate stimuli that will support optimal brain development. The framework also outlines the need for early learning programs to be rich in communication and language, early literacy, and social and emotional developmental experiences—and for such experiences to be clearly present throughout the program. The framework can be found at http://bit.ly/1qm1gHW.

New Zealand (*Te Whariki*)

The *Te Whariki* curriculum was developed based on the following aspirations for children: "to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body, and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society" (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 9). The curriculum has a contemporary focus on the critical role that socially and culturally mediated learning has for children. As well, this framework emphasizes the importance of the individual child, and the reciprocal and responsive relationships that children and their families should be exposed to with people, places, and things in their environment.

The guiding principles of *Te Whariki* are that

- the curriculum is to support the holistic development of children;
- empowering children is an essential role of adults and the environment (Maori principle);
- family and community are partners with children and are continuously strengthened; and
- children learn and thrive through responsive and reciprocal relationships.

Some of the key attributes of this framework are the emphasis on the interactions and the role of the adult with children and continuity. The document also reinforces the importance of celebrating bicultural values and diversity. For further information, go to http://bit.ly/14MCqJO.

Sweden

The Swedish curriculum framework emphasizes a social pedagogical, constructivist approach to curriculum and the importance of children learning through play and meaning making. The framework suggests that children's knowledge is created by the relationships they have with other children and adults in their lives. Play, social interaction, creativity, observations, discussions, reflective practice, and language are viewed as the essential attributes of early learning environments to support children in bringing meaning to their experiences. The curriculum, which was updated in 2010, can be found at http://bit.ly/19lpN9v.

England

The current curriculum document for England incorporates goals from the *Early Learning Goals* document released in 1999, with a specific focus on the early years. The document has a strong focus on thirteen principles for early years education. Within these principles, the knowledge, skills, abilities, and roles of early learning professionals in partnering with children and families to create inclusive environments are addressed. The framework, which was updated in 2013, can be found at http://bit.ly/19VKLyD.

> **A Reflective Moment**

What do you think the purpose is of early learning professionals and government departments examining curriculum frameworks from international jurisdictions? How might this knowledge strengthen our work with children in Canada? How might examining curriculum frameworks support us in working with children who are new immigrants to Canada?

Scotland

Curriculum for Excellence is Scotland's curriculum for children and young people aged 3 to 18. It replaces A Curriculum Framework for Children 3 to 5 and the 5-14 curriculum.

Scotland's framework promotes active, experiential and holistic learning through play. Mulit-media support to facilitate the implementation of the new curriculum can be found in Curriculum for Excellence: Supporting the early level http://bit.ly/Zw2QBa.

Internationally and provincially, frameworks are gathering momentum and driving policy directions for early learning. While we can supply only an overview of provincial and international frameworks, we encourage early learning professionals to think critically about overarching principles and applications to practice from as wide a perspective as possible. We ask you to read the Reflective Moment box above and consider international and provincial frameworks and their possible implications for practice.

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Implementing curriculum frameworks requires a collaborative approach among professionals in the early learning setting and within government departments.

One of the first strategies for early learning professionals is to clearly distinguish between the terms *curriculum* and *curriculum frameworks*, as "a curriculum framework is not the same thing as a curriculum" (Office of Childcare, 2004, p. 20). As identified in Chapter 1, *curriculum* refers to how early learning professionals organize the overall programs, experiences, and environments for children that align with the centre's goals and philosophy. According to the New South Wales Office of Childcare (2004), a *curriculum framework* is "a sieve through which the professional 'sifts' thinking as a means of reflecting critically on practice" (p. 20). The curriculum framework is a "thinking" document that becomes a guide or tool to support early learning professionals in determining their values, principles, and perspectives related to pedagogy, how children learn, and how programs and environments can be designed to reflect their pedagogy (Langford, 2010).

Early learning students and professionals benefit from examining the curriculum frameworks and using them to support children in their play and learning. All the frameworks we've presented suggest that high-quality early learning programs are ones where children's play and experiences are co-constructed by the children and adults, and are reflective of principles and practices that are consistent with curriculum models and curriculum frameworks. What this means is that early learning students and professionals can and do use curriculum frameworks to support their practice and ensure that the indoor and outdoor environments offer children rich play experiences; that the communication among children, teachers, parents, and visitors is respectful and inviting; and that the children and early learning educators are involved and engaged in the process of intentional play and learning.

The curriculum frameworks we've presented clearly articulate the importance of the role of early learning professionals in working with children and their families. Bennett and

Leonarduzzi (2004) suggested that early learning professionals' roles and responsibilities are changing from being primarily required "to provide a secure and stimulating environment for young children who would then ensure their own development" (p. 16) to understanding that "human development and learning is an exercise in co-construction, in which children, parents and educators all have a role to play" (p. 16). Similarly, as outlined in the Saskatchewan framework, early learning professionals are encouraged to take on several roles, including observer, researcher, co-constructor of play and knowledge creation, communicator, and guide.

As various curriculum frameworks suggest, early learning professionals determine "where the child is at" by considering ways to assess and document children's interests, learning, and ways of knowing (Best Start Panel on Early Learning, 2007). The curriculum frameworks we've presented offer a variety of assessment strategies for early learning students and professionals to use in their work with children. These strategies include pedagogical narration, learning stories, anecdotal records, portfolios, observations, albums of learning events, project webs, and various samples of children's creations and work (Langford, 2010).

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Curriculum frameworks offer early learning students and professionals pedagogical tools that will support them in thinking about their philosophy, perspectives, and ways of creating environments that will offer children rich places to use their sense of curiosity, wonderment, and discoveries for learning. Each of the frameworks introduced offers a theoretical and application context that, if explored and reflected upon, provides professionals with suggestions for discourse among colleagues and guidance in areas that may be new to the individual or trigger more in-depth examination of practice.

Bennett (2005) noted that in order for curriculum frameworks to be successfully implemented, the following three conditions must be present:

1. well-qualified, motivated staff who have been trained to understand the framework and ways to effectively implement curriculum;

2. adequate investment in buildings, outdoor play environments, and human resources, including adequate ratios of qualified educators to children and an array of materials that support children's interests; and

3. monitoring processes and support systems that offer early learning staff information about, and opportunities to continuously improve, program quality and accountability.

Kagan and Kauerz (2012) maintained that one of the problems in implementing and understanding the effectiveness of curricula and frameworks "is the lack of clarity about the distinctions between curriculum and pedagogy" (p. 2) among early learning professionals. Bennett (2005) also identified a concern that early learning professionals might not have adequate pedagogical theory and practice. He suggested that within early learning environments there are many examples of

> insufficient or inadequate interaction with children; little appreciation of horizontal learning for other children; a lack of training in managing groups and classrooms effectively; failure to provide or renew stimulating learning environments; insufficient team-working and reflection on practice; too great a focus on academic goals, or on the other hand, excessive suspicion of "schoolification" and reluctance to orient children toward learning goals valued by parents, schools and society. (pp. 14–15)

Bennett (2005) pointed out that early learning professionals using frameworks benefit from referring to what the research and observations tell us about children. Children have

Hands-on professional learning.
Diane Kashin

a tremendous capacity to learn, and their learning and behaviours are grounded in the affective and social domains to which they are exposed.

Langford (2010) suggested that without professional development, it may be difficult to sustain staff motivation and commitment "to put into practice a framework's vision and principles"(p. 27). In addition to the need for ongoing professional development, provincial governments and territories with curriculum frameworks must ensure that the correct resources and educational opportunities are made available in college and university early childhood programs, so that upcoming professionals will have a thorough understanding of how curriculum frameworks inform practice and are interwoven into practice, evaluation, and professional learning plans.

FEATURED RESEARCH

In *Innovations in Provincial Early Learning Curriculum Frameworks*, Rachel Langford (2010) examined the possible incentives for the recent emergence of frameworks, either as policy or regulation in Canada. The research base was established by 2004, when most of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries had developed either pedagogical frameworks or curricula for children aged three to six. When the OECD evaluated early learning programming in Canada, it recommended a national framework. Some provinces began working on framework development, encouraged by the federal government's move toward a national, universal, and regulated early learning system. They continued that work in spite of the cancellation of the plan after the election of a new Conservative federal government in 2006. According to Langford (2010), the key purpose of frameworks is to stimulate discussion among early learning professionals and offer pedagogical tools for providing "rich early learning experiences for young children that reflect a framework's vision and principles" (p. 11). Taken together, all the frameworks focus on children as competent learners and agents of their own development. In addition, the British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and New Brunswick documents highlight the importance of early learning professionals examining their image of the child, as well as children's rights. All the frameworks focus on relationships with families and reaffirm the importance of play as central to early learning. As a whole, the frameworks also reveal four tools for practice: learning goals; reflection questions; educator–child interactions; and assessment and documentation of learning. There are differences among the provinces in terms of implementation strategies; Langford (2010) concluded that while early learning professionals "across Canada may be aware of their provincial early learning frameworks, the extent to which they are using them is quite uncertain" (p. 27). Langford suggested that what is needed are opportunities for input from early learning professionals in "identifying at a national level a body of agreed-upon values, principles and objectives for early learning" (p. 30).

PEDAGOGICAL TOOLS

metaphor Applying a word or phrase to an object or concept, which it does not literally denote, in order to suggest comparison to another object or concept.

image A picture in the mind, as well as an opinion or concept of something that is held by the public. Images of children and teachers can influence pedagogical orientation.

Creating metaphors of practice and reflecting on images can be pedagogical tools for early learning students and professionals. A **metaphor** involves using a word or phrase in order to suggest comparison to another object or concept. An **image** is an idea or mental representation (Kashin, 2009). Images are one of the ways we make sense of the world. Metaphors and images can be used to capture the essence of what you do in a creative, expressive manner that challenges you to "be imaginative, to think, to reflect, and to find deeper meanings and understanding" (Hill et al., 2005, p. 31). Becoming conscious of images activated by practice can lead to professional growth. You can use metaphors as a catalyst for thinking deeply about your professional practice in many ways. Thinking about the work you do with children, do you see yourself as a farmer, a mountain climber, a conductor, or a zookeeper? You can see why metaphors can reflect who you are, including your values and beliefs. What is a metaphor that you could use to describe your professional responsibility in adopting curriculum frameworks in your practice? Write it down, and create a visual to represent your metaphor.

PROFESSIONAL CASE STUDY

After three years of working in a province that did not use a curriculum framework, my family has relocated to a province that has developed a curriculum framework as part of an early childhood education initiative. I have heard about curriculum frameworks but haven't invested time in examining them in relation to my practice. As I prepare to review curriculum frameworks in relation to my practice, I am trying to figure out answers to so many questions, such as where to begin in understanding how curriculum frameworks inform practice, how the framework will be visible in early learning programs, and how the framework will be used at staff meetings and for my performance review. I also wonder how curriculum frameworks align with my beliefs about how children learn and develop. If my beliefs and practices differ from the framework, how do I proceed in my practice? What will the discourse with my colleagues focus on in relation to the framework? How and where will I get the ongoing professional development I need to use curriculum frameworks as part of my practice?

Although I am excited to begin a new journey of incorporating my new province's curriculum framework into my practice, I am also scared. I keep asking myself why I feel scared. Maybe it is because this is a new journey for me in early childhood education, and with any new journey that I have embarked on in my career, I have always had mixed emotions until I have found colleagues with whom I can engage in discourse. I know that once this happens, I will be able to bring clarity to how the curriculum framework can enhance my practice and ultimately the environments I create for and with children and their families.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR SELF-LEARNING

Exploring the context of frameworks, reflecting on the context and how that transfers to practice, and having discourse about how curriculum frameworks inform practice are necessary components in figuring out how curriculum frameworks can guide the co-construction of early learning experiences with children and families. Working together groups of early learning professionals have important roles in sharing their perspectives of how curriculum frameworks apply to their practice and more broadly to the program experiences and learning opportunities offered to the children. When early learning professionals work through questions in discussion with fellow staff members, and then reflect upon practice using each section of the curriculum framework, over time comfort will be gained to use the framework as a support tool in practice. Early learning professionals may want to begin by examining YouTube clips that discuss curriculum frameworks, such as the following: http://bit.ly/147Hjuv. Thinking about the case study presented, answer the following questions in your professional journal:

1. Why do you think this early learning professional is feeling scared about incorporating curriculum frameworks into her practice? Does her experience working with children put her at an advantage or disadvantage in adapting her practice to include a curriculum framework?

2. Do you think individuals moving to a province that has a curriculum framework should be required to have specific training in it before being eligible for employment? Why or why not?

3. What roles should executive directors play in ensuring that their staff members are using the curriculum framework in their practice? What types of observations would executive directors make to determine how well staff members are using the framework?

4. How might staff and the executive director use the curriculum framework to support their program philosophy and approach to programming? What do you believe are the top five priorities that must be addressed? How would you proceed?

BIG IDEAS FOR DIALOGIC LEARNING

In the previous section on pedagogical tools, we asked you to explore the concept of metaphors as tools to examine professional practice related to curriculum frameworks. To encourage dialogue and to open your learning to multiple perspectives, we recommend a metaphor exchange. Draw your metaphor on a piece a paper and display your drawings as a group. Use the metaphors as an impetus for discussion about the values and uses of curriculum frameworks, in addition to exploring images and perceptions of early learning and early learning professionals. You may also wish to discuss and compare your answers to the following questions:

1. Do frameworks limit autonomy?

2. What would you do if you disagreed with your provincial framework in some way?

3. How would you use a framework in your program development and implementation?

VISION

In a perfect world, every early learning professional would have the supports and resources they need to examine curriculum frameworks within a community of other professionals. Given the enormity of the documents and the reality of practice, without these supports, implementation may be unrealistic. We envision a world where early learning professionals are provided with training at both the pre-service and in-service level to support their understanding and use of frameworks. We see the possibilities of using technology to encourage dialogue among these professionals and look to the example of Australia for inspiration in the hopes that one day, Canada will have a national framework with similar resources and supports. For more information on the Australian framework, go to http://bit.ly/1IJMZVE.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Advances in technology, in particular the widespread use of social media platforms, are globalizing the early learning profession, with many opportunities to make connections with others from all over the world. Your technological challenge is to get a glimpse into the early learning sector outside of your own context, whether in another province or another country. If you start with a Twitter account, you can search for early learning professionals practising in other places. Can you get a glimpse of what it would be like to practise as an early learning professional in other parts of the world, using social media as your vehicle? For an idea of how to use this social media platform to connect with like-minded educators from around the world, go to https://twitter.com/DianeKashin1 and check out the followers' profiles. Read the tweets of these individuals to see what they find interesting to discuss.

KEY TERMS

Image 126	**Pre-primary approach** 110
Metaphor 126	**Social pedagogical approach** 110

Figure 5.2 Key terms wordle

SUMMARY

By examining curriculum frameworks from around the world, early learning students and professionals acquire guidelines for pedagogical practice.

1. Early learning students and professionals can consider the two broad types of curricula approaches in use globally—the social pedagogical approach and the pre-primary approach—and relate these to their own practice.

2. There are multiple benefits to using curriculum frameworks as part of professional practice, as they increase knowledge, offer theoretical perspectives, and offer practical suggestions.

3. An examination of the similarities and differences among the seven Canadian curriculum frameworks shows the influence of international curriculum frameworks.

4. As Aboriginal frameworks are developed, early learning students and professionals will understand the guiding principles that should be in place for Aboriginal early learning programs.

5. Theories, philosophies, and programming models or approaches are influenced by the passage of time. Early learning students and professionals can reflect on these changes to understand historical perspectives and their relationships to future trends.

6. Early learning professionals, educational institutions, and government departments have a responsibility and role in advancing the knowledge about and ability to use the context of curriculum frameworks in practice.

For Further Thought	The OECD has a helpful resource to delve further into the concepts of curriculum frameworks that looks at strategies to tackle challenges in designing and implementing curriculum features from a wide range of countries. You can find it at http://bit.ly/11PKPXB.