

DEVELOPMENTS

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New Publication!

“Investing in Children: Ideas for Action”

Minister Jane Stewart announced the release of the report from “Investing in Children: A National Research Conference, 1998” on November 22, 1999. Minister Pettigrew had challenged the conference to integrate the research into their policy and program thinking, discuss their ideas in the workshops and respond. “Ideas for Action” is the response to that request.

While the discussions focused on specific workshop topics, they ranged across several broad themes. These included the need for early intervention; a combination of universal and targeted child and family support programs; universal parent support programs; building bridges between home, school and communities; increased partnerships and service integration; and the link between poverty and poor child outcomes in every aspect of life.

“Ideas for Action” is intended to stimulate further discussion on what steps can be taken by professionals, communities, and organizations across all sectors to improve the lives of Canadian children. This publication is available on the NLSCY website (<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/nlscy-elnej>). To obtain a hard copy of the publication, see the ordering information on page 13. All participants in the conference will receive a copy by mail.



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RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS

➤ Research Contracts for Cycle Two

We have currently funded 14 contracts for cycle two research touching on the following topics:

- Bullying and victimization
- Parental marital status and the cognitive and behavioural development of children
- Childhood injuries
- Family functioning and child outcomes
- Income and child health
- Family processes and school achievement
- Child hunger
- Delinquency in early youth
- Dating and sexual activities in early youth
- Poverty and immigration

The research papers will measure the change in the determinants between 1994 and 1996 and assess the relative impact on selected child outcomes. Research papers will be published as ARB working papers in the spring of 2000.

➤ Future Research

We conducted the second round of research in a manner similar to the first. Since that time, the Applied Research Branch has received important feedback from a wide range of interested groups concerning the development of research capacity and the maintenance of research relevance.

There has been much discussion in the federal government about the problem of developing and maintaining empirical research capacity for a range of social policy issues, a problem that has also been experienced in trying to move the NLSCY research agenda forward. In addition, many researchers have expressed concerns about the difficulty of attracting, training and retraining young researchers in the field, a message consistent with the government discussion. Furthermore,



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we have received feedback on the importance of improving the policy and research linkages as well as creating more focus for our research efforts.

The current method of contracting one piece of research at a time, for one year at a time, is clearly inadequate to meet this challenge. ARB has therefore concluded that a long-term commitment is needed to create ongoing, effective links between NLSCY research and policy. The development of a plan to put NLSCY research on a more systematic long-term foundation is underway. We hope to be in a position to announce our new research model very soon.



UPCOMING DATA COLLECTIONS & RELEASES

➤ Cycle 2

Fall 1999 – final release of data including public microdata file

➤ Cycle 3

2000 – First data release

2001 – Second data release

➤ Cycle 4

Spring 2000 – Field Test

March-April 2000 – UEY community collection

Fall 2000 – Nationwide collection of data begins

➤ Cycle 5

Spring 2000 – Content development begins



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⊗ Understanding the Early Years ⊗

The Applied Research Branch has developed a new study to investigate child development and learning. Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a federal research initiative to increase knowledge about children's development, to monitor our progress as a society in improving outcomes for young children and to catalyze community action.

UEY focuses on the child and the way the child learns, in the context of child development – physical, social and emotional development, language and cognitive skills. Using composite measures, “readiness” will be gauged and reported at the national, provincial/territorial and community levels.

At the national level, an additional sample of children will be added to the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth as well as additional content to measure aspects of “readiness”. This will allow for more detailed monitoring and reporting at national and provincial/territorial levels.

At the community level, the UEY – Community Component will examine the influence of community and

neighbourhood characteristics on child development (with the focus on measures of children in kindergarten). It will consist initially of five pilot research projects representing a cross section of communities across Canada. The Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of HRDC, announced the five communities on November 18, 1999: Coquitlam/Fraser North, British Columbia; Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Prince Edward Island; and the Southwestern region of Newfoundland. These projects will build on the results of a prototypical project that is nearing completion in North York, Ontario. In each community, as in North York, an Early Development Instrument (formerly called the readiness-to-learn measure) will be used and linked to NLSCY data. Community mapping of the distribution of programs and services available to families with young children will also be undertaken. The analysis of the data from these three instruments will aid communities in developing and refining local strategies to improve outcomes for children and families. In addition, under the UEY Initiative, the National Literacy Secretariat will be helping communities implement tools to improve children's early literacy and learning.



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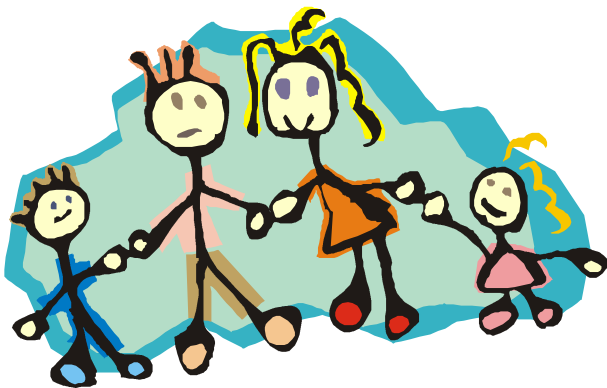
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CONTENT DEVELOPMENTS

Cycle 4 Changes

Two of the most important influences on children's lives are family income and parenting styles. In an attempt to enrich our understanding of the impact of income, we have added a few questions on the parent's feelings of economic insecurity. In addition, because our parenting questions ask only about the parenting behaviours of the Person Most Knowledgeable (PMK) about the child, we have no knowledge about if and how the parenting behaviours of the PMK's spouse may differ. Therefore, for children living in two parent families we have added an additional question about the degree to which both parents agree on what to do when there are parenting decision to be made.



Our Youngest Respondents: Children from birth to five

We will soon be finalizing the content for measuring the early development and learning of our children under six. We are attempting to cover many of the factors in our child development and learning framework: physical health and motor development, emotional health, social knowledge and competence, language skills, cognitive development, learning processes and general knowledge. Statistics Canada has recently completed a field test of children under six in Vancouver and Montreal. The focus was an evaluation of five possible direct assessments of 3 to 5 year olds. The test also assessed some new parent-report questions, a parent-completed developmental screener, a parent-completed vocabulary questionnaire, and a short interviewer observation questionnaire. The new parent-report items include social skills and communication for 3 to 5's, developmental milestones, sleep, and parent's sense of competence. We are using the results to finalize content that will be tested in the full NLSCY Cycle 4 field test in April 2000. Our next task is to review the kindergarten teacher questionnaire in light of other work being done to screen kindergarten children in communities.

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NLSCY Strategy on Learning and Cognition

A meeting of several experts was held on June 16th to develop a long-term strategy for measuring learning and cognition in the NLSCY. This strategy will apply to children of all ages in the survey, from birth to 25. A long-term strategy is needed to follow children's learning pathways as they grow. This will allow us to identify predictors of later learning outcomes, thus linking early learning to learning and behaviour in adulthood.

What is cognition and learning?

Cognition and learning encompass the skills and abilities we acquire as well as the processes through which we acquire, store and use knowledge. These are all developed as a result of the interaction between biological factors and life experiences.

How have we measured them?

In the first three cycles of the NLSCY, we measured certain aspects of cognition and learning at specific ages. Two tests administered in the schools assessed the reading and math skills of children in



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grades 2 to 10. The revised Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-R) was given to children aged 4 to 6 at home. The PPVT-R assesses receptive vocabulary. The survey asked parents questions about their children's physical health, motor skills, emotional health, social skills and relationships. These are all aspects of development and learning. Teachers also provided information on the children's emotional health and social skills. In addition, teachers provided ratings of the children's literacy and numeracy skills compared to skills of classmates.

The new strategy

This early strategy had to be improved for several reasons. It did not adequately assess development and learning for newborns to five year olds. The survey must now measure children's "readiness to learn", which is focussed on these early years (see article on Understanding the Early Years).



It also did not allow for the assessment of cognition and learning for older youth who may have left school. Lastly, there was no clear strategy in place to tie measures together for children from birth to age 25. The June 16th group decided that the strategy for the NLSCY should focus on

three outcomes: numeracy, literacy and problem solving. The measurement of these outcomes will be developed over the next two cycles. For cycle four, several new instruments will be tested.

The measurement of early development and learning will include short assessments of numeracy and literacy for four and five year olds, as well as additional questions for parents.

Sixteen and seventeen year olds will complete a test comprised of prose/document and quantitative literacy. Cycle five will look at ways to measure problem solving and to improve the link of concepts across ages.

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An Update on Adolescents...

It's hard to believe but our NLSCY children are growing up! For the cycle four collection in the Fall of 2000 our oldest NLSCY children will be sixteen and seventeen years old. We have gone to great lengths to prepare our survey for this older age group and want to take this opportunity to fill you in on some of the changes.

In May 1999, we met with experts from Canada and the United States to discuss adolescent issues. What do we need to measure? How should the survey change? The most important decision that came out of that meeting was to restructure the questionnaire so that the **youth is now the principal respondent** to the survey through their own face-to-face interview,

a self-complete questionnaire and a cognitive test. We will also collect some sociodemographic information from parents.

Some exciting new additions have been made to the content as well. The labour force section for this age group has been expanded to capture the multiple jobs youth hold and the impact work may be having on school. The education section is now divided into four modules with questions for high school students, post-secondary students, school leavers and school finishers to reflect the diverse educational situations. The other large addition to content for this age group includes a scale on **decision-making styles**. The experts we consulted



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advised us that in order to have a better understanding of the life choices of youth, we need to know more about the way in which they make decisions. Some youth are *informative* decision-makers in that they seek out the information they need to make a good life choice. Others are *normative* decision-makers in that they usually do what is recommended to them or they take the next logical step. And others are *diffuse-avoidant* decision-makers in that they avoid making decisions at all. This age group will also receive a **new cognitive test** that taps into the concepts of prose, document and quantitative literacy.

The new content was tested in a **focus test** this fall. We asked forty youth from Ontario and Quebec if the

questionnaire makes sense to them, if appropriate in length, and if it reflects their lives and the lives of their friends.

But we aren't stopping there! Cycle five content development of the eighteen and nineteen year old questionnaire will begin as soon as possible. This group will again prove to be challenging as more of them are living away from home and some are even starting families of their own. However, their maturity will give us an opportunity to explore issues that were deemed too sensitive for younger age groups. Perhaps we will see questions on family formation, establishment of independence, and more on post-secondary education and work. We will keep you updated.



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NLSCY Research Included in Other Publications

Family Matters Series The Globe and Mail

A year long series of articles that examines the state of the Canadian family, including the joys and anxieties of the newborn child and newborn parent; the marvels of early childhood; the upsets of adolescence; and the travails of teenagers. Available at the website: <http://www.globeandmail.com>

The Early Years Study – Reversing the Real Brain Drain (1999) J. Fraser Mustard and Margaret McCain

This report calls for radical change in how our society supports children and their families from conception to entry into the formal school system at age six. Its recommendations are a road map for governments, communities, and the private sector.

Custody, Access and Child Support: Findings from The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (1999) Nicole Marcil-Gratton and Céline Le Bourdais (Justice Canada Research Report CSR-1999-3E)

This report presents a statistical profile of Canadian children whose parents have separated, in terms of custody and living arrangements access to the non-custodial parent and the availability of support payments.

Developmental Health and the Wealth of Nations: Social, Biological, and Educational Dynamics (1999) Edited by Daniel P. Keating and Clyde Hertzman

This book examines the effects of the social environment upon human development and asks how we can best support the health and well-being of infants and children in an era of rapid economic and technological change.

Towards a Healthy Future: Second Report on the Health of Canadians (1999)

Prepared by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health (Health Canada H390468/1999E)

This report summarizes and comments on the state of the nation's health. It shows that factors in the socioeconomic and physical environment, as well as early childhood experiences, personal health practices and biology, have a major impact on health.





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What is the Best Policy Mix for Canada's Children? (1999) Sharon M. Stroick
(Canadian Policy Research Networks)

This report explores the interrelation between Canadian social trends, changes in the Canadian welfare state, and Canada's social deficit. It demonstrates the need to build a sustainable social and economic environment. Canada's past history in supporting children and families is described and compared with that of other nations.

From Home to School – How Canadian Children Cope (1999) Garth Lipps and Jackie Yiptong-Avila (Statistics Canada 89F0117XIE)

This report examines the longitudinal influence of early childhood care and education and literacy activities on young children's future academic and cognitive outcomes.

Parents and schools: the involvement, participation, and expectations of parents in the education of their children in

Education Quarterly Review, July 1999, by Christina M. Norris

This article offers one definition of parental involvement and reviews the educational involvement, participation, and expectations of parents of elementary school children (aged 4-11). It summarizes the perceptions of teachers and parents by looking at some of the factors associated with increased parental involvement in education.

A profile of NLSCY schools in Education Quarterly Review, July 1999, by Jeffrey Frank and Garth E. Lipps

This article explores principals' evaluations of

the adequacy of their schools' resources and the presence, activity and influence of school advisory committees. It also looks at the levels of regular staff and special resource staff and describes a few features associated with students attending the schools.

Academic achievement in early adolescence: Do school attitudes make a difference? In Education Quarterly Review, October 1999, by Jennifer A. Connolly*

This paper examines the links between academic achievement, children's views of themselves, and adults' support during the transition to early adolescence. The paper also examines whether children's attitudes toward school contribute uniquely to achievement and whether this linkage is adversely affected by puberty and gender.

How do families affect children's success in school? In Education Quarterly Review, October 1999, by Bruce A. Ryan and Gerald R. Adams*

This paper examines the relationships between children's school achievement and family processes, explores possible differences in these effects between boys and girls and at different ages, and evaluates how well the Family-School Relationships Model represents the data in the NLSCY.

Neighbourhood affluence and school readiness in Education Quarterly Review, October 1999, by Dafna E. Kohen*

This study examines the influences of various neighbourhood and family characteristics on the competencies associated with school readiness of children in two age groups.

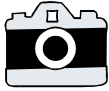
* previously published by HRDC

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Say Cheese! ARB Contest

The NLSCY has been recognized by Strategic Policy and HRDC as a creative and innovative program and has been given an art award of \$2000. We have decided to use the money as a prize in a national photography contest, open to students of photography in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Photos depicting different age groups, regions, ethnic backgrounds, and economic circumstances

Hosts a National Photography

of Canadian children will be given special consideration in the contest. The final five photos chosen will be published in an upcoming newsletter and will be used to decorate ARB's national headquarters boardroom! This concept is consistent with our theme "Investing in Children and Youth in Canada," and will serve as a pictorial representation of the NLSCY.



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NLSCY PROJECT TEAM

Team members include Allen Zeesman, Satya Brink, Margo Craig Garrison, Susan McKellar, Liz Nieman, Cindy Cook, Sarah Connor, Christina Norris, and Tony Haddad, as well as those who work with us on the project at Statistics Canada. Administrative support is provided by Joelle Picard and Joanne Jones. Co-op students Allison Kates, François St-Onge, Shelly Waskiewich, and Anne Guèvremont work on all aspects of the project.



WE'VE MOVED...AGAIN!

We are now located at:

165 Hôtel de Ville
7th Floor, Phase II
Place du Portage
Hull, Québec K1A 0J2

WHERE TO DIRECT YOUR REQUESTS

In an attempt to balance the workload and also to try to ensure some continuity, we are asking people to direct requests to a specific member of our team. We have divided this according to the type of organization you work in.

Non-governmental organizations and consultants	Cindy Cook (819) 953-3621 cindy.cook@spg.org
Provincial government	Liz Nieman (819) 953-9949 liz.nieman@spg.org
Federal government and international issues	Sarah Connor (819) 953-8110 sarah.connor@spg.org
Research institutes and universities	Tony Haddad (819) 953-8180 tony.haddad@spg.org
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UEY communities	Margo Craig Garrison (819) 953-8182 margo.craig@spg.org
	Christina Norris (819) 953-3644 christina.norris@spg.org

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SPECIAL EDITION BULLETIN

A synthesis of the conference research has been published in a special edition of the Applied Research Bulletin. This special edition features highlights from papers presented at the conference. See the ordering information on this page.

KEEP IN TOUCH!



Please let us know if you are changing addresses so that we can continue to update you. Contact Susan McKellar by phone [(819) 953-8101] or by email [susan.mckellar@spg.org] to inform us of any changes.

The Applied Research Branch, Human Resources Development Canada, produces "Developments". The following publications are available:

- Cycle 1, Cycle 2, and Cycle 3 questionnaires (can also be acquired on the Internet at www.statcan.ca/cgi-bin/downpub/freepub.cgi)
- additional copies of the newsletters (also obtainable on the Internet at www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/nlscy-elnej)

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ORDERING INFORMATION

For hard copies of the following publications:

- Ideas for Action
- Applied Research Bulletins

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