

Editor's column: Early childhood education: It's more than kissing boo boos ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A few weeks back, the B.C. early childhood educators (BCECE) association held its annual conference in Richmond.

Because I'm not great about checking my calendar before saying "yes," I agreed to moderate one of the panel discussions before realizing it was right in the middle of the election. I probably would have declined had I known, but thankfully I didn't — here's to disorganization.

The panel topic was "Pathways to Professionalism: Believe, Be Hopeful, Be Bold."

The first and very valid question is what the heck do I know about professionalizing the early childhood education sector? The answer — precious little.

However, as a working mom, who's tried every daycare, preschool and after-school arrangement imaginable, I do have some opinions on the subject. I also have a stake in the matter — as we all do.

How we raise our kids and what childcare options we provide parents is fundamental to the kind of society we are or aim to be.

So, what exactly does it mean to "professionalize" the early childhood education sector?

While a lot was discussed, the key theme that ran throughout was that of standardization — or a lack thereof — in both education and compensation.

Currently, some early childcare workers have bachelor degrees or even master's in the field, while others don't have a high school diploma.

One panelist talked about the challenge of implementing the latest concepts regarding brain development, while working alongside someone with no awareness and even less interest in understanding those concepts.

Daycare was an issue in the election. All parties talked about creating more spaces for kids and more options for parents. But there was a fundamental divide on how to make that happen; the NDP and Greens support a public system, the Liberals a private one.

It seems to me we've been going the private route, for some time now and the results have been massive wait lists, huge financial burdens on those who can least afford it and frighteningly unprofessional care.

The election may be over, but the campaign to establish a \$10/day daycare plan is just getting going. It would provide a clear and consistent framework for childcare in B.C.

Few of us would question the importance of a public education system for students K-Grade 12. I'm not sure why we're having such a hard time wrapping our minds around such a system from birth to age 12.

We can only give kids a fair chance in life if we also give them equal access to quality care; education and fair compensation for those providers are essential to that.

As one panelist said, "it's not just about kissing boo boos and giving hugs."

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