

Parenting is different to teaching - and children need both ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

As a parent of a toddler, I see every day the benefits of early childhood education and care. I watch my son develop social skills and a sense of independence, the beginnings of literacy and numeracy and most importantly, his curiosity about the world and fascination at all the things there are to learn in it.

I am not arrogant enough to take all the credit for this. Of course, we teach him about the world and share his curiosity for it but we must acknowledge the contribution of his teachers.

As a teacher, I know that it is an arrogant position to suggest there is nothing going on for three- or four-year-olds at preschool that cannot happen in the home. To suggest that because we are parents we are able to perform the exact same educational role as someone with a university degree is ludicrous.

It is a fundamental misunderstanding of education. It forgets that knowing something is not the same as being able to teach it. Early childhood educators are experts in how young children learn and develop and how to implement appropriate strategies to enhance that learning experience.

A substantial body of research now tells us that for every dollar invested in early education, particularly for disadvantaged children, we see greater return than if we were to invest it anywhere else on the education timeline. At age 15, children who attended at least two years of formal preschool are outperforming those of their classmates who did not.

Which is why the Labor announcement on Thursday that they would extend preschool funding to three-year-olds, giving children an extra year of free or subsidised schooling, was so refreshing.

It shows that politicians are beginning to have an understanding and respect for education, and, importantly, a willingness to listen to the experts in determining policy.

Yet views like the one espoused by Parnell McGuinness on ABC's The Drum on Thursday, suggesting that it is by virtue of being middle class that parents are somehow imbued with the skills to teach their children equally as well as trained experts, still permeate.

McGuinness argued that because of this parental ability, the funded preschool years should be means tested. This is a fundamental lack of understanding of education and its place in our society (not to mention the slap to working class parents).

Let me be quite clear: education is not about parents. Education is the right of every Australian child. And you cannot means test three-year-olds because, unless you count all the change they seem to find around the house, they don't have an income to be tested.

Politicians seem to be finally understanding and respecting our early childhood teachers and their students. I am so glad every child will potentially get the chance to develop their curious little minds, with the expert guidance of teachers and the loving care of their parents.

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Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[3]

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