

The benefits of early learning [CA-ON]^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Something interesting turned up when the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada measured the reading, math and science skills of 13 year olds.

Overall, Canadian 13 year olds scored well, especially in reading in which 88 per cent of all students were at expected levels for their age or better.

But, while all Canadian 13 year olds performed respectably, those from Quebec did exceptionally well, ranking first in both reading and math. Which has many asking what Quebec is doing right.

One possible answer is Quebec's investment in early childhood learning. Quebec is the only Canadian province with a form of universal childcare.

Education ministers might want to pay attention. It is well worth exploring how making early childhood education available to most Quebec children, not just those whose parents can afford it, has played into its students' above average literacy and math skills.

Quebec introduced a new family policy in the late 1990s which included universal child care. The program is beloved by some and reviled by others, including those who say low-income children are disproportionately under represented, the quality is uneven and program costs have skyrocketed.

Still, the Council of Ministers of Education test results offer the possibility that the system, although imperfect, is valuable.

A growing body of research supports the concept that investment in early learning pays off years later in the education system and, eventually, the workforce.

Studies of early childhood programs for disadvantaged children in the U.S. show children who took part in preschool programs were more likely than those who did not to graduate from high school and find jobs, to stay off welfare and out of jail. Several U.S. studies and one that looked at the Quebec program concluded that the benefits to children - cognitive, academic and health - and their families, far outweighed the costs. The Quebec study concluded that incremental benefits to children, their families and society are twice as great as the cost of early education programs.

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A University of California study found that children who attend day care or play groups are about 30-per-cent less likely than other children to develop leukemia.

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The fact that early childhood education and day care might have benefits beyond the obvious does not mean all young children should be in care. Mothers (and fathers) at home with their young children can also provide excellent early learning opportunities and exposure to regular social situations (and germs), not to mention love and nurturing.

But not everyone has good choices. Investments in early learning would pay off in the long run, especially for those children.

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Region: Canada^[2]

Quebec^[3]

Tags: curricula and pedagogy^[4]

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/08/05/benefits-early-learning-ca> [2] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7864> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7855> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/curricula-and-pedagogy>