

Canada doesn't practise what it preaches in early childhood care and education [CA] ^[1]

Author: McQuigge, Michelle

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EXCERPTS

Countries around the world need to make early childhood education a higher priority according to a United Nations report released Thursday, and child advocates say Canada is no exception.

In its annual report on education in developing nations, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) found the majority of countries need to focus their efforts on policies that address the needs of an age group that is often overlooked.

Louise Zimanyi, co-director of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, says Canada's track record in this area is particularly poor given the vast resources available throughout the country.

She said Canada lacks any sort of cohesive early childhood policy and blames the Conservative government for undermining plans that would have set the country on the right track.

"A national childcare plan was developed, there were federal/provincial agreements, and Harper came into leadership and scrapped that," she said in an interview from New York.

Zimanyi expressed contempt for the government's Individual Cash Payment program through which all families with children under the age of six receive \$1,200 a year per child.

She scoffed at the sum of money, saying it was barely enough to cover one month's worth of childcare expenses, let alone establish programs that benefit young children in the long run.

"It costs a lot to raise a child," she said. "I'm not sure why they think that's valuable."

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While Burnett said pre-primary childcare programs are more readily available in most developed nations, Zimanyi cited a report by the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development which placed Canada last out of 14 industrialized countries in terms of funding for early childhood programs.

She was particularly disappointed in the finding in light of Canada's international reputation for research into such fields, as well as the considerable teaching resources.

"We're extremely good advocates, we're just not taking our own good advice," she said.

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- reprinted from the Canadian Press

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