

A helping hand for our kids: A banker and a professor outline the benefits to the economy and society of giving kids a head start through quality child care [CA-ON] ^[1]

Author: Pascal, Charles and Coffey, Charles

Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 15 Oct 2002

AVAILABILITY

See text below.

EXCERPTS

A banker and a professor coming together for more than a mortgage, we are pleased with Ontario Liberal Leader Dalton McGuinty's recent commitment to rebuilding and modernizing Ontario's child-care system and to integrating child care into public schools.

Historically child care has long been positioned as a "woman's issue." We think child care is a human issue.

The banker talks of the importance of human capital as key to the equation of a successful economy.

The banker sees integrated early years programming as the best investment a society can make, not as a narrowly construed annualized cost. To avoid the opportunity to commit to this investment is to mortgage our future, says the banker.

The professor speaks to the science we know and the role the early years play in human development. As an educator, he underlines the remarkable head start on learning through play that high quality child care brings about and the school readiness gains that integrated early-years programming foster.

We both bemoan the false starts and exploitation that seems to have characterized the child-care issue over the past number of years. Even well intended governments that come and go seemed to tinker away, avoiding a long-term and sustainable plan to enable our country to catch up to other more enlightened kids and family-oriented countries.

And there have been those who have likened child care to glorified babysitting as an apparent ideological weapon against non-parental care. Ozzie and Harriet should be the domain of late night reruns rather than a proxy for modern policy making.

While popular to say our children are our future, we wonder:

Why have we allowed child poverty to more than double during the past decade?

Why have we allowed child care programs to be squeezed?

If early childhood education is so important, then why do early childhood education professionals get paid so poorly?

Why isn't all day junior and senior kindergarten available to all families in Canada?

Why is testing used as a public relations weapon rather than a tool for improvement?

McGuinty's notion of integrating enriched non-parental care, children's services, and elementary schooling is the kind of vision that will pay huge dividends for our future, especially if he gives strengthened, non-profit, school-based centres a leadership role as the hub for nearby regulated home-based child care.

When the banker and professor hear someone say "government can't do it alone" we agree. But that familiar mantra should not be used as an excuse not to lead at all. Governments must lead. They must provide the policy frameworks, programming, and funding to make this happen.

The roles of others?

The banker believes employers should strive to be a family and child-friendly employer; to provide enriched child care that connects to elementary schools where appropriate; to have policies that are sensitive to the involvement of their employees in the education of their children; and to be bold and creative regarding the importance of parental leave for new parents.

And the professor believes that all parents and guardians need to lead as the key teacher in any child's life by being a positive, effective, and loving presence. And all parents require the supports necessary to fulfil this challenging role.

They need coaching when necessary. They require the provision of non-parental care to either work and/or to ensure the kind of socialization necessary to develop a healthy start on citizenship. They require early diagnosis and intervention to prevent loss of esteem or opportunity for those children with developmental challenges.

And when our children enter the formal system of learning, they need class sizes small enough to allow skilled teachers to adapt to their individual differences in order to enable all children to meet high standards.

When it comes to making progress in Canada, ensuring that the future is healthier, safer, more just, more prosperous for all citizens, we all need to think early childhood education.

We would hope, for example, that Roy Romanow would include a section on "the context for a healthier nation" in his upcoming report on the future of universal health care, with at least a paragraph or two on the importance of investing in the early years as a huge leg up on health promotion.

In the meantime, McGuinty's approach provides a timely and useful map for change. If it sees the light of day and has the sustaining support it requires, our nation's prospects will be a brighter indeed. You can bank on it!

-Charles Pascal is a U of T professor, former Ontario deputy minister of education, and executive director of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. Charles Coffey is a children's advocate, a senior executive of a Canadian bank, and co-author of the recent report of the City of Toronto's Commission on Child Care.

-Reprinted from The Toronto Star

Region: Ontario ^[2]

Tags: child development ^[3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/03/07/helping-hand-our-kids-banker-and-professor-outline-benefits-economy>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/03/07/helping-hand-our-kids-banker-and-professor-outline-benefits-economy> [2]

<https://childcarecanada.org/taxonomy/term/7856> [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/child-development>