

Give early child educators their due^[1]

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Source: The Chronicle Herald

Format: Article

Publication Date: 15 Nov 2013

EXCERPTS:

Tommy Douglas's great principle of "humanity first" was put on the backburner by the 2009-11 Nova Scotia NDP government. Mr. Douglas was premier of Saskatchewan for 17 years and won four back-to-back elections on the cardinal rule: people first, corporate handouts second.

Daycare, where 95 per cent of workers are women and are the lowest paid in Canada, was the sector most neglected by the former NDP government. The new Liberal government can help these educators in the following ways, some of which don't even cost money. Let us hope it has the will.

1. Revisit the Child Care Act of 2010 which has devalued early childhood education (ECE) training and the ECE profession. Now one can work in a daycare centre after taking a couple of ECE courses.
2. Change surplus schools into child care, family care and family health centres. Get pre-schoolers out of the basements of churches and apartment buildings.
3. Nova Scotia Community Colleges at Yarmouth and Kentville do an excellent job in quality ECE training. There are no such facilities at HRM campuses, leaving only private training options in Halifax and Truro. The department of child care and youth at Mount Saint Vincent University has expressed doubts about the quality of training these business models provide.
4. Due to a Department of Community Services cap on funding, salaries of thousands of daycare teachers are extremely low: \$19,000 to \$23,000 a year. The funding formula should be revisited. For example, per-child funding at a daycare is \$15 per day, compared with \$185 per day for a Grade 1 child in school. No wonder school teachers' salaries are double those of child-care workers.
5. The ministers of higher education, community services and education should all have direct dialogue with the stakeholders in ECE.
6. The Education Department should encourage the formation of one child-care association of Nova Scotia to consult with.
7. We should seriously look at the Quebec model of child care, which costs parents \$7 per child, per day.
8. Efforts to bring the NSCC model of ECE training to HRM should be made on an urgent basis.
9. Mount Saint Vincent University should be encouraged to restart its two-year ECE diploma program.

Other publicly funded universities should be asked to do the same. They are now busy producing Arts graduates who sometimes have difficulty finding a job. Universities should be asked to reframe their roles in offering job-oriented programs, such as special educators and counselling psychotherapists.

Dr. Sid Sodhi is a retired professor of education at Dalhousie University and a registered psychologist.

-reprinted from the Chronicle Herald

Region: Newfoundland^[2]

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