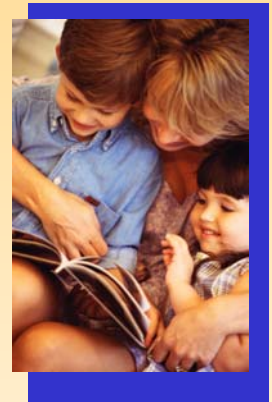
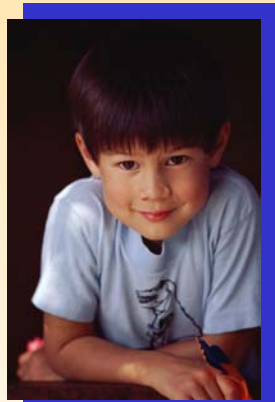


Effective Programs for Children Ages 3 to 5: Implications for Policy and Program Planning

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**What is the Current Policy
Context in Canada and Alberta?**

**What are the Policy Implications
of Parent Training and Child Care
Quality Research?**

What's Next?

Early Childhood Development

- We know that:
“... the early years of development from conception to age six ... set the base for competence and coping skills that will affect learning, behavior, and health throughout life”
(McCain and Mustard, *The Early Years Study*)



Historic Focus on Children's Issues at the First Ministers' Level

National Children's Agenda (NCA) 1999

- **Vision:** A country where all children thrive ... given the opportunity to develop their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual capacities to their fullest...
- Children will become tomorrow's successful and enthusiastic parents, caregivers, workers and citizens.

Early Childhood Development Initiative (2000)

- All First Ministers agreed to improve and expand the supports available to young children and their families.
 - Key Areas for Action:
 - Promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy
 - Improve parenting and family supports
 - Strengthen early childhood development, learning, and care
 - Strengthen community supports

Early Learning and Child Care Initiative

- All Ministers Responsible for Social Services, and more particularly, Children's Services, have agreed last week (March, 2003) to enhance the quality and availability of regulated child care options.
- Governments have agreed to develop an evaluation framework to examine the outcomes and effectiveness of early learning and child care initiatives
- Time of policy renewal and program enhancement across the country – opportunities to collaborate

Children's Policy

Context in Alberta

- Government-wide goal focused on the well-being of children
- Strong voice at the Cabinet table – Minister of Children's Services, Minister Iris Evans, the only such post in Canada
- Alberta Child & Youth Initiative through which seven Ministries work together on common goals to improve child well-being
- One of their key priorities is Early Childhood Development
- Strong focus on improving the well-being of Aboriginal children

Alberta's ECD Priorities



- **Enhanced services to expectant parents, new parents and infants**
- **Enhanced parenting supports and parenting skills programs**
- **Enhanced quality childcare and childcare options**
- **Community capacity-building to effectively plan with government and non government partners – working together to build on existing partnerships and to promote integration in program and service delivery.**

Alberta's New Initiatives

- Developing Alberta's Promise – to involve people, communities, and business and community leaders from across the province in partnership to ensure that our young people receive the attention and support that they need to succeed
- New Child Welfare legislation, new Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act
- New Child, Family & Community Research Centre
- Introducing Child Care Accreditation – recognizing exemplary Centres, and providing financial recognition to child care professionals who have completed different levels of training

Complexity of Children's Policy

- Cross-Jurisdictional: Initiatives like the federal Employment Insurance maternity/parental benefits & Provincial parental leave provisions interact to provide longer paid leaves for many new parents
- Cross- Ministry: Many Ministries within each jurisdiction affect Children's Policy
- Paradigm Shift: Parental Responsibility, Building Community Capacity, Society's Investment in Children, Gender Equality, Fairness to Two Earner, Single Earner, and Single Parent Families
- Reality of Multi-problem Families: Receiving services from many systems

How Can Research Help? : Parenting Skills are Critical

“The major providers of early childhood experience are parents. Programs to support and strengthen the family will increase the likelihood of optimal childhood experiences. ”

(Bruce Perry In *How Nurture Becomes Nature: The Influence of Social Structures on Brain Development*)

Parent Training: What Are the Implications?

- **Good News** – There are now a range of effective interventions, with manuals, outcome indicators, proven efficacy with a variety of groups and intensities
- **Really, Really Good News** – there are cost-effective programs that have been used over time in full scale community settings with excellent results

Parent Training: What Are the Implications?

- **Bad News** – Only a minority of those offered the opportunity took the training, many families have multiple problems, many barriers, different preferences – but solutions are on offer

Parent Training: What Outcomes Can We Expect?

- ***Enhanced Parenting Skills***
 - ***Reduction in Coercive Strategies***
 - ***Increase in Positive Strategies***
- ***Reduction in Child Behavior Problems***
 - ***Improved Parental Confidence***

Charles Cunningham's Roadmap for Success in Parent Training

- **Family Centred Services** – understanding needs and preferences of different client groups and designing services to attract and serve each
- **Increased Variety and Availability** – offering 1, 3, or 8 session workshops, Parenting Tune Up Workshops, and Workshops on Specific Topics – Bedtime, Homework, Promoting Success in Sports
- **Reducing Barriers** – timing, community location, transportation, on-site child care

Charles Cunningham's Roadmap for Success in Parent Training

- **Outreach** – reaching out in appropriate ways to each target group and to the community at large
- **Recognizing Your Clients** – although low-income families have a higher rate of parenting problems, the majority of children experiencing problems will be from middle or upper income homes
- **Continuous Improvement** – study utilization and outcomes (and compare to community needs)

Overall Implications:

- Interesting implications for the Universal versus Targeted debate – looks like the emerging solution is some of each –
 - General information to refute broadly held misperceptions;
 - Tune-Ups for those with specific skill deficits;
 - More intensive and expensive interventions could be targeted to those most needing that level of intervention and likely to benefit

Why is Child Care Quality Critical?

- Most 3 to 5 year old children spend a proportion of their days in some form of non-parental care
- The highest quality care has shown benefits to the child, the mother, and to society as a whole
- No interventions at later ages have shown the return on investment to society that has been demonstrated by top quality child care interventions such as the High/Scope Perry Preschool, Abecedarian, and Chicago studies

What are the Critical Effective Components of the Exemplary Programs?

- Teacher Education, Teacher Compensation, Small Classes, Strong Supervision, and High Broad Standards of Learning
- Still many unanswered questions – Do programs that encourage higher levels of self-directed constructive behaviour lead to higher later levels of voluntarism, sports participation, and higher educational aspirations?

Increasing Quality in Child Care: What Are the Implications?

- Good News – Classroom quality can be improved; classroom quality is related to:
 - Receptive language
 - Book Knowledge & Awareness
 - Math skills & Counting
- The very highest quality programs are those that show the best long-term outcomes.
- The children with the highest needs benefit the most.

Increasing Quality in Child Care: What Are the Implications?

- Bad News – some child care does not necessarily impact the child's social skills, or problem behaviours. The most effective option is the most expensive one – Preschool programs for ages 3 to 5 have higher quality ratings than Head Start programs, which have higher ratings than Family Home Child Care.

Roadmap for Success in Increasing Quality in Child Care

- Leadership – Clear definition and focus on quality, friendly competition, building on existing strengths
- Strategic approach- monitor progress, linked activities, show logic of change

Roadmap for Success in Increasing Quality in Child Care

- Education and professional development – work with colleges and universities, recognizing the importance of the role, and of keeping up to date, train on exemplary models
- Financial recognition – Bonuses for educational achievement, higher subsidies for exemplary Centres.

Roadmap for Success in Increasing Quality in Child Care

- Back-Up Resources - Customized in-person technical assistance (Supervision in exemplary models)
- Resource Sharing - Allow community collaboration and resource sharing across sectors e.g. pre-kindergarten, Head Start, Family Literacy initiatives
- Incremental Development – recognizing community leaders and building more quality into existing initiatives is likely more cost-effective than starting over

Overall Implications:

- The economic arguments should give credence to the benefits of investing in high quality pre-school programs
- Strong information for Program Design, and Outcome Measures
- Emphasizes the importance of including information on client needs and preferences in program design and program evaluations
- Suggests that multi-faceted programs will have more promise - intervening with the child as well as the parent is more effective than parent training alone, and vice versa.

Overall Implications:

- For those with greatest needs – suggests that combined programs might be the best – finding the right mix of quality child care, parenting skills, parent supports, and specific intervention to reduce the child’s problem behaviours and improve the child’s positive skills.

Where Next: How Much is Enough?

- Fraser Mustard suggests that the cost per child for a quality Early Childhood Development and Parenting Centre would be about the same as the cost for a year of schooling in the educational system.

Components of Fraser Mustard's proposed, Early Childhood Development and Parenting Centres:

- Parent support (including non-parental care arrangements), parent education & skills
- Play-based learning guided by early educators and parents
- Toy & resource libraries, family events
- Prenatal and postnatal supports
- Nutrition programs, information and referral

Where Next: Partnerships?

Emphasizes the need and potential benefits of collaborations between researchers, policy developers, and program specialists –

- to find better ways to identify the best intervention mix for different families,
- to identify the effective ingredients of the intervention,
- to address staff selection, training, supervision, and intervention fidelity issues,
- to develop more long-term follow-up data
- to dialogue on system design and development