

The Early Years Last a Lifetime
Proceedings Report
Long-term impact of Childhood Education
Ramada Hotel, St. John's, NL
September 25, 2014

Introduction

Under the auspices of the Jimmy Pratt Foundation, and in collaboration with the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation, and the Leslie Harris Centre of Regional Policy and Development, Memorial University of Newfoundland, a day-long symposium was held to explore longitudinal studies on the impact of early child education (ECE) and Full-day Kindergarten (FDK).

This was the fourth and final session in the series on Early Childhood Education (ECE) in Newfoundland and Labrador organized by the Pratt Foundation. There were approximately 110 participants in attendance including individuals involved and/or interested in early childhood development, education, learning, and care and the future it holds in the province.

There were two guest speakers:

1. Dr. Ted Melhuish, Professor Oxford University (UK) and former Director of the Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues at Birbeck – University of London.
2. Jane Bertrand, Program Director, Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation and former Professor of Early Child Education at George Brown College.

The symposium was also streamed live on the Internet with the support of the Harris Centre.

Guest speakers and their presentations

Kathy Pratt-LeGrow, chair, Jimmy Pratt Foundation, welcomed participants and guest speakers and provided the background and context for the event, situating it in the symposium series.

Session 1: Ted Melhuish

Dr. Melhuish presented his research on the long-term impact of ECE and FDK. His presentation, titled *Early Childhood Education and Care Improves Well-being Throughout Life*, summarized his findings of a longitudinal study which tracked over 4000 children, over 16 years. He also spoke to the policy context as it relates to social well-being.

Highlights of his presentation included:

- ECE has positive moral and economic well-being of society. Early experiences are critical to this. It is morally wrong to ignore the data and a poor economic decision for governments. Investing in ECE brings positive community benefits.
- Working population will decrease, demand for skilled workers will go up in the years ahead. Demographic changes requires optimal skill training in both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. ECE is the foundation for this.
- Multiple sources of research all conclude similar findings for ECE:

- 20% of OECD population do not achieve basic minimal skills. This rate doubles for marginalized groups. Underachievement in a population has a significant impact on a societies sustainability.
- Brain development occurs most rapidly in the first few years. 60% of nutrition is used for brain development in the first year, decreasing to 30% by age 3. By age 3 80% of synaptic development occurs. Early experiences are critical to brain development which sets the trajectory for a persons life.
- Language development occurs between 9 months and 4 years, again, setting the trajectory for a person’s life. A child with poor language is at significant risk for long-term delays. Children in marginalized environments have less exposure to positive language experiences, raising the risk higher.
- Survey of 17000 American middle class adults identify that negative early child experiences increases the chances of developmental disorders. Ensuring positive early child experiences lessens the chance of long-term developmental disorders.
- Achievement lags begin early for children in marginalized environments.
- There is a link between the policy direction government’s take on ensuring positive ECE and the long-term development of the society itself
- Canada spends the least in ECE among OECD countries
- A number of longitudinal studies identify that quality ECE increases achievement, decreases special ed placement, lowers crime, substance abuse and raises economic development. The combination of quality and quantity of positive early years experiences is critical. Where early care is more stable it allows for greater quality.
- These studies conclude that the investment in quality and quantity of ECE yields a dramatic benefit because of lowered social expenses across a child’s lifespan and their economic contribution as engaged citizens.
- Melhuish followed a large group of children across 16 years, exploring the impact of ECE and quality schooling, concluding
 - Literacy is positively impacted by high quality and quantity of ECE. This held for numeracy, language and social functioning issues at the start of school.
 - Children with high needs are more positively affected by the quality of their school experiences than high ability children. ECE is more critical for high needs children.
 - Multiple determinants of literacy and numeracy identify that mother’s education and quality of early learning environment have the biggest impact. The quality of learning development is almost as critical as maternal education.
 - These findings held into early adulthood. The impact of maternal literacy and quality of early learning environment has a lasting impact. Investing in quality ECE has a lasting impact.
 - Exposing children to quality early learning inoculates children from poor quality schooling. The children learn to learn and do well anyway. Children who are exposed to both quality and quantity pre school and school do well, but investing in ECE ensures protective factors for adverse later experiences.
 - Trajectory patterns for numeracy identify the same themes for importance of quality and quantity of ECE and schooling. However, the preschool experiences are critical to impacting numeracy skills, having more impact than later experiences. If we want to raise PISA scores in math we must start in the early years.
 - A second study in Ireland which tracked the kids to age 11 found the same - children who attended high quality ECE were 2.4 times more likely to do well in English and 3.4 times more likely to do well in Math.

- Melhuish matches his studies with international evidence that concludes ECE is a critical part of the infra-structure for optimizing the well-being of a society.
- Norway's decision to provide free quality ECE, creating a huge impact on educational levels, employment prospects and income.
- France did a similar thing and found the same results, adding that it reduces social supports costs
- Denmark followed suit and identified five indicators of quality ECE: staff-child ratio, % of male staff, training of staff, % of non-native staff, stability of staff. Controlling for those factors lead to better educational outcomes into the senior high school.
- He then presented similar studies in less developed countries, finding the same results – that literacy and numeracy levels follow the countries investment in ECE. PISA results show a similar trend – countries who invest in ECE do better. 15 year olds who attended ECE are at least a year ahead than those who didn't.

Following a nutrition break Dr. Melhuish continued his presentation.

- The Nordic countries have been most successful in closing the gap between parental attainment and children's outcomes. Socio-economic status (SES) of parents and its impact on child development is less dramatic because of the provision of high quality ECE. Countries with the widest gap between SES and children's outcomes spend the least on ECE.
- While quality ECE helps close the gap for all children it has the greatest impact on children from marginalized homes, lowering obesity, substance abuse, crime, unemployment, etc.
- Universal interventions (available to the whole population) have greater cost savings than targeted interventions (those aimed only at high risk children). Govt's save more in the long – term by providing quality to all children, even though it costs more in the initial years. It takes about 7 years from initial investment to see the return but then the growth of that return becomes exponential. Politicians don't want to make a big investment whose return will be later than their term of office!
- Changing policy on ECE is easier than changing parent skills. The most effective way to intervene for high-risk families is to develop strong policies on ECE – where children are exposed to healthy learning environments and parents see healthy child raising practices modeled for them.
- Pre-service training is important but in-service professional development has a stronger impact. Providing high quality, on-going training is critical. The knowledge of child development among ECE's is pretty poor.
- What drives quality ECE is the cumulative impact of providing high quality interactions and experiences, in a language rich environment. Staff must know how critical their interactions with the child are and how much impact it is having.
- Children in quality ECE are at profoundly less risk of placement in special education. The bulk of Special Education kids are there because of behavioral or language lags. Social skills, self-regulation and language development are the biggest benefit of ECE and therefore provide the greatest protective benefits against developmental issues later in life.
- The Scandinavian countries provide free quality ECE from birth to 5, however few take it in the first year because of parental leave. Most parents opt to stay home for the year, excepting highly paid mothers who can't risk career-interruption.
- People having children are young families, early in their career who can't afford to pay ECE – government support is crucial. Labor market demands need these young workers. Economies can't afford for parents to not work.

- Countries with long-term economic plans make the biggest investment in ECE. They know that parental involvement in the work force is critical to growth and they also know the developmental advantage children get from ECE and it's impact on optimizing and sustaining economic growth. China is a powerful example of this.

Session 2: Jane Bertrand

Jane continued the conversation with a presentation on the Early Child Report (formerly the Index, initially developed in Early Years Study 3), which will be updated in November 2014. Highlights included:

- Early Years Study 3 was heavily informed by the research of Dr. Melhuish and the longitudinal studies that he referenced.
- The Report is influenced by the OECD environmental standards for ECE (2006) which identify the benchmarks that define quality early learning in developed countries. It was informed by international policy research of over 20 countries.
- The report has 5 categories, presenting 19 different benchmarks.
- She then presented each of the categories and spoke to each benchmark. (The Index can be found at <http://www.earlyyearsstudy3.com>)
- Jane presented the 2011 Index, showing NL's standing and outlined the changes that NL has made in ECE since the last report which will be released on November 12th.

Session 3: Marie Ryan

Following Jane's presentation Marie Ryan facilitated a small group/ feedback exercise to discuss NL's priorities in moving forward toward quality ECE in NL. The group was asked to identify, using the ECE Report the priorities for our province.

The intention of this session was to conclude the day's event but also conclude the year-long discussion which The Early Years Last a lifetime initiated exactly one year ago. The intention of that paper was to create an informed debate in NL on what quality ECE could look like in NL. It was informed by this series of seminars which today's was the fourth and final.

Following the session with Marie, a summary document will be developed and published – outlining the priorities for moving this province toward a quality model of ECE for our children, as identified during.