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What kids need

Last week in Ontario, Charles Pascal released his report on implementing all-day kindergarten for 3-to 5-year-olds. In B.C., Clyde Hertzman, World Bank consultant and director of the Human Early Learning Partnership, continues to steer the government's secretive all-day kindergarten scheme despite affordability concerns.

JOHN MACDOUGALL / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



Does early learning require this social mega-project? No. The hard peer-reviewed evidence — as opposed to the self-published papers churned out by ideologues — does not show lasting benefits from these mass systems for young children.

Hertzman himself has written for Statistics Canada, “Pro-social behaviour scores were lowest for children in licensed daycare and highest for children in unregulated home care and relative care.” Elsewhere his unpublicized research concludes: “[P]articipating in early childhood care and education programs and services ... had little direct association with children’s home and school outcomes in kindergarten.”

What Pascal and Hertzman are “implementing” is the oft-cited Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s “integration” agenda. It started at a 2001 OECD conference in Sweden and was established in Canada at the 2005 Integration Network’s symposium in Toronto.

“Integration”? It sounds innocuous, but the real translation is: Increase children’s time away from parents by merging daycare and school. Here are the sexy bits: The OECD wants us to move away from the “ideology of the family” and into “transition” to a “new order.” This “paradigm shift” includes “deep changes in societies in general and in the family’s structure in particular ... a review of the family-state relationship regarding the responsibility for the care and education of children.” A popular textbook for daycare staff describes programs in Leninist terms as “the vanguard in promoting” new values about family.

Unsurprisingly, this “new order” of old-style state-intervention is not marketable in a democracy. So Pascal, Hertzman and company cover up with spin. They cite “experts” promising, The more you spend the more you save! Every dollar “invested” may eventually save over \$17 on crime, welfare, health care, drug abuse, teen pregnancy — you name it. Pascal suggests \$7. Obama suggests a \$10 return per Universal PreKindergarten (UPK) buck.

But mass state-funded daycare, preschool, early kindergarten — call it what you want — has never saved any nation a penny, let alone delivered the spin-doctorates’ utopia. These claims derive from experimental projects dating back to 1962. The Perry Preschool and the Abecedarian projects targeted underprivileged African-American children and their mothers and provided the inflated investment return evidence.

By adulthood, Perry participants had somewhat fewer arrests, higherpaying jobs and more cars, fuelling the claim that \$17.07 was saved by age 40 for every \$1 spent. But key factors go unmentioned: 1 Calculations ignore huge capital,

bureaucracy and training costs of mass systems. 2 Classroom programs have not produced lasting benefits. Criminologists state: "Single-component models, such as those that address only educational factors, have not been shown to demonstrate significant results." 3 Mothers without full-time jobs were key. (Dads are conspicuously absent.) RAND Corporation data shows that only programs which intensely (even exclusively) involved mothers produced lasting benefits. Perry mums were home for teachers' visits and meetings. They were not at workfare McJobs. "Welfare reform" altered the socio-economic context undergirding the projects. RAND admits as much.

But these experiments distract us. What about outcomes from real mass systems?

Economists Kevin Milligan and Michael Baker won the 2009 Purvis Prize for their study published in the prestigious Journal of Political Economy finding increased illness and behaviour problems in Quebec since the program was spawned there. Hertzman turned bully, calling the authors "zombies" conducting "statistical malpractice," causing "much confusion and mischief." His World Bank colleague, Fraser Mustard, called the report "chicken shit" and the authors "screwed up" in Senate hearings.

Yet even supporters admit the Quebec system is not of high quality. Christa Japel of the Université de Montréal found 73% of daycare children in "minimal" or worse care. After over 40 years of Head Start preschool in the United States, no one is claiming improved outcomes for the target population of innercity blacks there. Over £3-billion of Sure Start in the U.K. resulted in worse outcomes for the target population of children of low-income single mothers, according to the £20million assessment. And for fulfilled promises of improved "social cohesion," don't look to race-riot prone France where over 90% of children attend state programs.

What about Sweden? The OECD says that system is the model, yet reports a "problem of quality." The Swedish government says there are "unintended consequences": too few staff, adverse effects on learning, "inadequate" facilities. And that's at \$27,000 per child. Worse, after over a generation of universal daycare, Swedish women have not achieved promised equality: Instead they experience increased domestic violence and are concentrated in low-pay jobs.

Rather than seeing improved "human capital" and reduced crime, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare warns "that psychological problems are increasing among young people and women Violence is also an increasing problem." The nation was shocked recently by the gang rape of a 17-year-old boy at

a party. Youth suicide has “risen dramatically.” Academically, in Programme for International Student Assessment tests, Swedish 15-year-olds averaged a score of 503, well below the 534 score for Canadians.

Want bang for the invested early learning bucks? Forget full-day kindergarten and fund families instead.

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