

## **KIDS FIRST COMMENTARY**

### **Yet Another Study by an Education Prof Lumps Apples and Oranges together to Call for More \$ for Institutional 'ECEC'**

The study: "How Does Early Childhood Care and Education Affect Cognitive Development? An International Review of the Effects of Early Interventions for Children from Different Social Backgrounds" 2010

By: Kaspar Burger, Department of Educational Sciences, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

<http://www.unifr.ch/pedg/staff/burger/earlyinterventions.pdf>

This pseudo-scholarly paper was mentioned in a recent Maclean's article on negative effects of Quebec daycare on children's cognitive abilities. As with all studies daycare lobbyists cite, the trick is to read the whole thing, not just the fore-gone conclusions and policy recommendations conveniently tacked on. Kaspar Burger's study of studies of "early childhood education and care" is yet another useless junk science effort comparing apples and oranges being used to push for more funding for institutional settings for little children.

Burger lumps together research on participation in almost any kind of program for young children EXCEPT standard daycare. Studies included had to be studies of programs aimed at "helping them to acquire social and cognitive skills". Included are studies of programs from North America, Europe and even Vietnam involving library visits, therapies, legal aid, transportation, mother-child drop-ins, "playgroups", a few hours of preschool, nutrition help, Sunday School, arts & language classes, intensive support for mothers, and special targeted daycare programs. Omitted are studies of the cognitive effects of standard daycare centres.

Moreover Burger's failure to make distinctions for the amount of TIME each day and week children spent in centres away from parents is a clear standard indicator of bias in the design and purpose of his study. Full day, part day, drop in, and occasional programs are all lumped together.

How long any cognitive benefits lasted and what actually produced lasting benefits is not at issue for Burger, though it is for everyone with children.

This study's methodology – like many others – means that no meaningful conclusions or recommendations for policy can be made. In short, it is useless. Yet of course it does make conclusions and policy recommendations, no doubt intended to be used in the continuing propaganda battle for more funds for institutional child care. Burger advises: "the findings considered here do not allow conceiving of early education and care of children – especially of children from socio-economically disadvantaged families that provide only poor learning conditions – as a purely private matter." No one thinks child-rearing is "purely private" whatever that means. He continues, "in countries where

attitudes towards early childhood and family policy have traditionally been underpinned by an ideology that places a high value on individual responsibility and by a philosophy of limiting government interventions in matters related to family ... policy makers should consider encouraging tax policies that allow families to make use of preschool arrangements which might otherwise remain inaccessible to them for economic reasons.”

If Burger and the rest of the daycare lobby were truly concerned about children’s economic “disadvantage” they would seek tax polices that address this by redistributing wealth and power towards families, and away from institutions, bureaucrats, and researchers.

From p 16-17

### ***Program Characteristics and Research Designs***

“It should be noted that the programs reviewed were all center-based and child-focused. Their common overall goal was to serve children by helping them to acquire social and cognitive skills. However, given the number of programs reviewed, they differed in some points: some included special kinds of supports, and three of them included parent involvement,.... In the according studies, differences in cognitive outcomes between program participants and comparison groups must not be attributed exclusively to the influence of the programs carried out in the centers but may be affected by parenting strategies which can work as multipliers of center-based effects. .... However, program breadth appears to have an influence on child outcomes: Programs that adopt a multifaceted approach and provide **more wide-ranging services including health and social services, transportation, neurodevelopmental therapies as needed, parent services and training, and a strong educational program for the children, usually produce larger developmental gains** .... Their results will therefore need to be weighed in the conclusions.”