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Helen Ward

The Biggest Investment Scam: All-Day Kindergarten

Charles Pascal, Ontario's Special Adviser for all-day kindergarten, is soon to release his report on implementing this social mega-project.

In BC, Clyde Hertzman, World Bank consultant and now Director of the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), steers the government's push for all-day kindergarten for ages 3 to 5. Although politicians endorse Hertzman, the "bold vision" will have to wait. They say we can't afford it during this recession.

However, Pascal, Hertzman and all true believers insist we can't *not* afford it—it's an 'investment.' They promise: the more you spend the more you save! For every dollar 'invested' we 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 Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) buck.

Meanwhile, investigative journalist John Stossel recently called UPK schemes a "scam" on ABC's 20/20. He exposed the flakiness of the doctored evidence supporting the miraculous savings.

Stossel is right.

Mass state-funded daycare, preschool, early kindergarten—call it what you want—has never saved any nation a penny, let alone delivered the Utopia promised by spin-doctorates.

UPK speculators, from CUPE and UNICEF to the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Cooperation, base their claims on intervention experiments dating back to 1962. The Perry Preschool and the Abecedarian projects, which targeted underprivileged African-American children and their mothers, provide the fantastical investment return evidence.

By adulthood, programme participants had on average fewer arrests, higher-paying jobs, and more cars than control group children. These and other factors led to the claim \$17.07 was saved by age 40 for every \$1 spent on the Perry program.

But Pascal and company fail to mention key factors:

- 1- Arithmetic: calculations ignore the huge capital, bureaucracy, research and training costs of mass systems.

2- These were not preschool programmes. 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 from the studies.) RAND Corporation data shows only programmes which intensely—even exclusively—involved mothers—produced lasting benefits. Mums could do potlucks, be home for teachers’ visits, and attend meetings because they were not at workfare McJobs. For better or worse, “welfare reform” altered the socio-economic context under-girding the projects. RAND admits as much.

But these “hot house” social experiments distract us from examining evidence from real mass systems of institutional child care.

After over forty years of Head Start preschool in the US, no one is claiming improved outcomes for the target population of inner-city African Americans.

Over £3 billion of Sure Start in the UK resulted in worse outcomes for the target population of children of low-income single mothers, according to the £20 million assessment.

And for fulfilled promises of improved “social cohesion,” don’t look to race-riot prone France where over 90 percent of children attend state preschool.

Here, Quebec’s programme is admitted to be neither universal nor high quality. Christa Japel of the Universite de Montreal found 71 percent of daycare children in “minimal” or worse care, yet she still clings to the promises.

Canadian economists Kevin Milligan and Michael Baker dared to report increased illness and behaviour problems in Quebec since the programme was spawned. Their report provoked some aggressive behaviour in BC’s UPK guru, Hertzman, causing him to publicly decry his fellow academics as “zombies” conducting “statistical malpractice.”

But what about Sweden, daycare Nirvana?

The OECD says their system is the model for all, despite observing a “problem of quality.” A government report details “unintended consequences”: too many children per staff, adverse effects on learning, “inadequate” facilities—and that’s at nearly \$27,000 per child.

Worse, after over a generation of daycare policy, rather than promised equality, Swedish women experience increased domestic violence and one of the most highly sex-segregated workforces in the OECD, with women concentrated in low-pay jobs.

Rather than 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... with roughly one in ten residents having been subject to some sort of violence.” 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 scored an average of 503, well below 534 for...Canadians.

The UPK ideologues—the OECD hacks, Hertzman’s HELPers, Pascal, et al—will scam on until we banish them from the public trough. For bang for the invested buck, transfer the money saved—and all other preferential funding of non-parental child care—to parents.

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