

The 4th year George Brown College (GBC) Bachelor of Early Childhood Leadership (ECL) students offer the following responses to the Atkinson/McCuaig Open Letter “[A starting point for discussions on a new federal/provincial/territorial early childhood agreement](#)”:

We find the open letter to be an opportunity for us to engage in dialogue on a very important issue before us, and offer the following points for consideration:

The open letter focuses on what constitutes early years care and related policies (e.g., child care centres, school, parental leave). Further, the letter addresses what we do currently that needs to be improved, “...early childhood services are revealed as fragmented, of variable quality, and access is uneven”. These areas are pointed out as needing improvement in the early years’ sector and need to be addressed before Canada can move toward a fully functioning child care system/program.

We are in agreement that the Canadian provinces and territories are “fragmented, of variable quality, and access is uneven”. Although research has identified three features in early childhood systems to deliver their promise to children families, and society, it is felt that one of the most important features to deliver what is needed is through collaboration of services and the involvement of families in quality programming. *How does Learning Happen?* (2014) highlights this approach, as has earlier documents (Pascal, 2007).

It is felt that the statement “Evidence based decision-making must inform program development and delivery especially in years of financial austerity” highlights the volume of research that exists and the need to utilize this research as the foundation in programs in the true meaning of evidence-based learning and the quality of emergent curriculum. At the same time, this point pushed toward the need for funding for action research to further support the work that needs to be done in this area.

The point regarding male parental involvement in early year care poses the question of why so few fathers utilize parental leave and for such a short period of time outside of Quebec. The importance of the parental parent’s relationship with their children should be emphasized so that they are more inclined to take their parental leave and spend time with their child(ren) at this very crucial age. This would add to a stronger and more equitable gender role for both parents as they would hopefully, and ultimately, share household responsibilities as well as work outside of the home environment after the parental leave period. We also feel that guaranteeing significant others the opportunity to take a parental leave, without risk of financial disparity, is a proactive strategy in helping families develop early attachments needed for children, the economy, and society as a whole. The current policy in place for parental leave affects parents’ decision on whether to take full parental leave due to unaffordability and financial unpredictability, thus affecting the time spent creating the necessary attachment for optimal development.

Equally, the plans to address Canada’s cumulative early childhood deficit is an appropriate start, it will not eliminate the problem on its own. Investing and funding the early years will have a greater return of investment for the future, as has been shown in various ways. The recommendation of extending parental leave, including fathers and same-sex parents, is a strong start. This recommendation will go far in alleviating some of the stress of initial parenting. At the same time, the messaging regarding diversity includes same-sex parents having equal rights will

be added to the framework.

We acknowledge that this discussion focuses on a more neo-liberal approach of getting things right for children from the beginning (prenatally) versus an intervention perspective.

We feel that this letter suggests that the means that we use to measure quality of a child care environment, “creation of new child care sales or the size of financial transfers per child”, do not actually measure quality and are inefficient in predicting child outcomes. These realities will hopefully make the Ministry of Education and the Ontario government re-conceptualize how the sector of early childhood is viewed.

It is felt that more detail on the improvements and funding that Aboriginal Early Years Services will receive should be included in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Council published their recommendations and the needs of those communities were made explicitly clear.

It is also agreed upon that the building costs which form a barrier to the expansion of early childhood programs **apply to all sectors in the child care community** (school based, **non-profit community based** and in First Nations communities). We feel that it is necessary that our leaders in positions of power be challenged to raise the bar for early childhood education programs and strive to meet the needs to the level of other OECD countries. One of the barriers for the expansion of early childhood programs has been the lack of funding for building new sites and maintaining existing programs. Childcares struggle to keep cost affordable, but this is done at the expense of parents’ personal budgets. One recommendation would be to have all non-profit early childhood programs have access to the Capital Infrastructure Fund, so that buildings are maintained on a regular, and necessary, basis.

We recommend adding a piece regarding the fact that public funding for Canadian child care has always been below the international benchmark (UNICEF, 2008). Affordable child care will not only provide access to many Canadian families but will have an impact on moving these families out of poverty. Poverty reduction strategies from reputable and not-for-profit organizations (i.e., Campaign 2000) have been pushing for affordable child care. For instance, Quebec shows that employment rates can increase and poverty rates can decline (Statistics Canada, 2013). When viewing this issue from a women’s equality standpoint, we can see that an affordable child care policy in Quebec moved over 104,000 single mothers and their children out of poverty (Statistics Canada, 2013).

We thank you for the opportunity to dialogue with you, in this manner. We look forward to a continued discussion.

Sincerely,

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