

Globe misses facts on Full-day Kindergarten

Kerry McCuaig

Re: “Full-day Kindergarten academic benefits fade by end of Grade 1: Study” (Globe and Mail, March 28, 2014)

Atkinson Centre faculty took aim at the slanted manner applied to reporting on the impact of full-day kindergarten for 4- and 5-year olds in Ontario. The article ignores the significant benefits of full-day kindergarten to zero in on the flat lining of reading, writing and numeracy skills for one group in the study.

In her continuing longitudinal study of 520 youngsters in Peel Region, Dr. Janette Pelletier found strong vocabulary and self-regulation benefits for *all* children attending two years of full-day kindergarten. “These are the cornerstones for life-long benefits of early childhood programs including better education and mental health,” Pelletier notes.

Indeed these are the so-called “soft-skills” that Nobel-winning economist James Heckman says delivers the cost-benefits of early education. These factors are better predictors than the 3 Rs of whether a person will graduate college, smoke, be a teen parent, or have conflicts with the criminal justice system, says his website posts.

York University psychologist Stuart Shanker, author of *Calm, Alert and Learning: Classroom Strategies for Self-Regulation*, cites research showing that self-regulation may be far more important than IQ in determining the grades children achieve in school, how often they go to class, how much time they spend on homework, how aggressive they are and even how vulnerable they are to risky behaviour in adolescence.

These concepts are often interpreted as being too “fuzzy” to quantify, and under this assumption, administrators and policymakers, and in this case a *Globe and Mail* journalist, place little attention on the role expression, impulse control and the ability to focus can play in predicting success in life.

Related benefits, including how full day kindergarten reduces family stress, were not mentioned by the *Globe* yet are worth highlighting. The more harried parents are, the less likely they are able to engage positively with their children. Chronic parental stress ‘drips down’ on children affecting not only their academics but also their social, emotional and physical development.

As for the fade out in FDK’s academic advantages Pelletier and her colleagues suggest further examination of the curriculum in the primary grades. “Principals and educators tell us children leave FDK curious and excited to learn due to the play-based, developmental approach to learning they experience in kindergarten, only to have that quashed by a succession of worksheets in the early grades,” says Dr. Zeenat Janmohamed, who is leading a review of full day kindergarten implementation.



Perhaps the article could have noted Pelletier's conclusions. FDK is such a new program, "it is still too early to determine long range effects" in reading, writing and numeracy. "Nevertheless, given the results on vocabulary and the strong performance on self-regulation it can be stated that children have benefitted from their time in FDK".

"Cherry picking to create a negative impression regarding positive research results is not helpful to the public discourse about something as important as early childhood education," Pelletier wrote in a letter to the Globe's editor.

"The negative misrepresentation of Dr. Pelletier's research ... is either a function of a reporter unable to apply simple math to understanding research or is intentional. Not good either way," chided Dr. Charles Pascal, whose 2009 report provided a blueprint for full day kindergarten in Ontario.

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