

Margaret McCain Speaking Notes

Early Years Study 3 report launch
November 22, 2011, Toronto

In his introduction to this edition Fraser credits the many great thinkers who helped shaped his understanding of early human development. I—as many of you—was a student at the college of Fraser Mustard and a beneficiary of his learnings. This is a day of mixed emotions for everyone particularly Cheryl Mooney and Dorothy McKinnon who worked with Fraser at Founders' Network and supported the development of this study, as they did the first two.

Fraser was not only a renowned researcher; he was immensely clever at gathering and distilling work across disciplines to reach profound conclusions. In his view, this was how education should be organized—not in silos but with a multidisciplinary perspective, anchored by at least a basic knowledge of human development. The Institute for Human Development which he inspired at this university is but one of his many legacies that reflects this thinking.

Fraser gathered from biologists, geneticists, social scientists, physicians, educators and economists to document how conditions in early childhood get under the skin to shape the architecture of the developing brain, influencing learning, health and behavior with life-long consequences for the individual and for society.

He took this complex science and distilled it into two enduring concepts that have permeated the popular culture: the years before five last a lifetime and pay now or pay later. He took these messages into boardrooms and government offices, to health, education and justice officials, not only in Canada but also to international forums from the Aga Khan foundation to the World Bank.

Many retrospectives of Fraser have labeled him cantankerous. They are right. This is how he expressed his impatience with the brain drain that occurs every time a child is denied the conditions that allow her to thrive. He understood that in modern society the clan has been replaced by smaller and smaller families who no longer have the capacity to bear the full weight of child rearing. They require support—policies that allow parents to balance earning a living and raising a family, that keep families out of poverty, and that promote the first phase of learning that occurs during early childhood.

It is this last challenge that a group of foundations has coalesced around. The Atkinson, Chagnon, Hallman, Lawson, McConnell, Muttart, Pratt and McCain foundations have pooled our efforts around a goal that is ambitious, promising and fundamentally progressive: to expand publicly funded early childhood education and care to all 2- to 5-year-olds. It would be available, affordable, top-quality and voluntary. For some this marks a new direction; not for others. The Lawson Foundation has been a partner of Fraser since the founding of CIFAR over 2 decades ago whose work inspired the first *Early Years Study*. Others like that Atkinson Foundation have made early education a centerpiece of their work, inspiring the rest of us.

Universal early education is not a utopian fantasy. With less effort than starting a whole new social program from scratch, education can expand to bridge the gap between parental leave and formal schooling. By including the option of extended-day activities, Canada can have its long-demanded early learning and child care program.

Early childhood education for all cannot happen without substantial public investment and public oversight. *Early Years Study 3* provides the social, scientific and economic rationale for this position.

It introduces the Early Childhood Education Index, a tool to monitor progress in early education province by province. The first results tell a promising story. Since the OECD exposed Canada as a laggard, coming last in spending and supports for young children, the provinces have been busy. Even the termination of the federal/provincial child care agreements in 2007 did not stall progress.

Across Canada over 50% of 2 – 4-year-olds regularly attend an early education program—up from 20% in 2004. In 2004, Canada devoted \$3.5-billion to early education, today it's \$7.5-billion, a more than 100% increase! But the index isn't about looking backwards. It creates a baseline to chart the progress provinces are taking to strengthen early education by rationalizing oversight, improving program quality and increasing wages for early childhood educators. Despite budget challenges policymakers have clearly decided to prioritize young children.

As Fraser note only a few short weeks ago when the Early Years team was last together—the glass isn't just half full; it's filling up nicely. Our co-author, Kerry McCuaig, will tell you more about it.