

**Focus Group Summary and Analysis:
Public Perceptions of Early Learning and Child Care**

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I. QUICK VIEW SUMMARY

i. Introduction

In Spring 2011, several charitable foundations joined forces to secure the services of Environics Research to conduct a series of focus group sessions across Canada. The sessions were considered to be exploratory – designed to get a clearer picture of what Canadians thought about early learning and child care, in hopes of informing future efforts to influence public opinion on this issue. The objective of this series of focus groups was to gain a clearer understanding of Canadians’ attitudes towards early learning and child care options currently available to them; to test receptivity to a broader vision for early learning and/or identify the barriers to widespread receptivity; to understand which elements of the broader vision for early learning are most attractive to Canadians.

This ‘quick view’ section allows readers a chance to go straight to the conclusions from the focus group sessions, and ensuing recommendations, though we recommend reading both documents in order to gain the most from this process of discovery.

A full summary of the focus group findings, including methodology and written transcripts of the sessions, follows. The fuller summary document provides a detailed analysis of what participants said they wanted out of early learning and child care. It provides an assessment of ‘ways of talking’ about this issue that resonates. And it offers an assessment of participants’ responses to an early learning written handout (which reflects how advocates currently message the subject) and a video (which illustrates how early learning works in Sweden).

ii. Terminology

While advocates often use the terminology ‘early learning and child care’, the focus group series made clear the fact that most participants do not use this terminology. They talk about daycare, child care, home daycare – but not early learning. This ‘quick view’ document and the fuller analytical document employ the advocates’ terminology, but it should be noted it is not a reflection of the language currently in vogue. Much of the terminology to describe early learning and child care services is imbued with weighted meanings – we found no single ‘winning’ term that was universally seen as positive and desirable. Daycare or child care tended to be the most universally used terminology – it’s what parents know. In this report, we use the terminology ‘early learning and child care’ but provide no recommendation for possible other wording. We simply flag that terminology is informed by personal experience, and words unconsciously trigger a set of emotional reactions. This is worth further consideration.

iii. Executive summary

First, it's important to recognize that the daily challenges parents face in accessing affordable and acceptable early learning child care options help distract parents from considering the deeper dimensions of a new, innovative early learning program. This was a theme that ran through every province, even in Quebec where there are more options.

Affordability is a primary concern for most parents. As a result, parents were more readily impressed with Quebec's \$7 a day child care price tag than they were with the notion of an early learning system they struggled to visualize. Given the pressure to balance work and family responsibilities – combined with a perceived shortage of affordable and flexible options – the value of early learning opportunities, while appreciated, came second to utilitarian considerations. The early learning vision, while appealing to those who felt they understood it, was vulnerable to 'pipe dream' dismissal – partly because participants had trouble imagining a practical affordable program without real examples.

While this may be information early learning advocates feel they already know, it's important to note the focus group experience pointed squarely at this reality: parents' search for suitable, practical *options* to accommodate their needs eclipses a consideration of quality early learning programs for children before formal school age and probably makes them receptive to a message of 'choice' when it comes to child care.

However, parents do hope their children will learn something in daycare; they hope daycare will be more than "just babysitting". But there is a clear limitation to participants' understanding of early learning. That, combined with limited expectations of government to implement big new programs and a disposition toward wanting to keep taxation levels down, prevents them from embracing a national early learning and child care plan as an urgent public policy priority.

When it comes to assessing the desirability of an early learning program, participants have trouble visualizing something that doesn't have an institutional (ie, school-like) feel to it. And once they think institutional, it triggers nostalgia for simpler times, when mom stayed at home and children weren't dropped off at daycare every day. This helps participants to disconnect from the idea of introducing a new national program focused on early learning.

We feel it's crucial to point out the lack of awareness among participants that early learning is an important, critical requirement for a child's development. Most participants view early learning programs as a socialization opportunity and assume a child's developmental needs will get filled, eventually, once they're in school. Daycare programs that offer an element of early learning are considered a welcome bonus but not a requirement.

Most parents consider good parenting to be the most important early intervention a child care receive. However, the focus group participants also showed us where there is

receptivity to a new program. For instance, once participants read a list of services that could be provided in one location, offering flexible hours at an affordable rate, they warmed to the idea of having access to such *services*. Though they struggled to understand the details, they responded favourably to the provision of services such as special needs and family supports – services they could visualize, services that filled a need of theirs.

Once participants watched a short video illustrating Sweden’s early learning model, the majority of participants proved to be very open to having this sort of option available for their children. The video was instrumental to helping participants visualize the program.

The findings suggest affordability and quality of services rank higher in priority to participants than early learning. This may be due, in part, to the fact that participants have trouble imagining a system they haven’t experienced. Participants are likely to reference something closer to their own experience of formal learning, which so tightly bound with the idea of grade school that they struggle to conceive of a different approach to early learning.

They do, however, talk about the value of a play group or a play-based program that expands a child’s socialization opportunities (as opposed to improving their literacy skills). The good news is that these are elements of an early learning program that can, and should be communicated to parents in order to help them embrace the idea.

Most parents say they use early learning and child care programs out of necessity – to be able to work, to deal with a child’s special needs, or to get a break and socialize. The interrelationship between provincial economic conditions, the availability of jobs, and the availability of affordable child care options combine to help shape participants’ views about embracing an all-encompassing early learning and child care program.

But, also, the knowledge that one province has a service that participants would like (such as affordable child care like they have in Quebec) had a powerful impact on the receptivity to new early learning and child care programs. This finding suggests a ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ approach to new policies and programs – this province has this service, why don’t we? -- could provide an inroad for gaining support from province to province.

iv. Recommendations:

1. Any public outreach campaign to prime Canadians for a new early learning and child care program would yield the quickest results by appealing to parents’ more immediate need for *options*: affordable, accessible, flexible *services*, preferably in one convenient location.
2. Using a ‘keeping up with the Joneses’ approach could help raise parents’ expectations. For instance, most parents are not aware that Quebec offers \$7 a day child care. Once they learn about it, they’re more likely to demand something

similar in their province, almost in a spirit of competition and a ‘race to the top’.

3. Any public outreach campaign that starts from an early learning perspective would have to be more educational in nature, since participants displayed little understanding of how a good early learning program is different from grade school or from what kids currently learn in some of the better daycares. The success of the Swedish video suggests a ‘show don’t tell’ approach would be more effective – make it visual rather than written words.
4. Since parents use the language they know, it’s difficult to move beyond sometimes loaded terms such as child care and daycare – especially since parents don’t have a ready understanding of early learning pedagogy. Working toward language that feels less clinical and more service-oriented would likely be a more accessible approach.
5. Since parents like the list of services they read in the one-page handout, it’s important to highlight the meat-and-potato aspect of an early learning program from a *service* perspective, presenting them as *options*.
6. Since some parents express a sense of guilt for not being with their children all day, and quickly revert to a nostalgic view of their own childhoods when mom stayed home, it’s important to ensure early language messages don’t inadvertently reinforce those feelings. A message that shows the services exist to support parents’ efforts to raise their children and balance work/family responsibilities would remain sensitive to this issue. A message that inadvertently suggests early learning programs are better for children than what they get at home would likely be seen as patronizing and would likely yield a defensive response.
7. Since the current conservative frame for early learning and child care is ‘choice’, a word that lets governments off the hook in terms of creating new public programs, a reframe is in order. Parents regularly used the word ‘options’, and lamented a lack of options for their families. The options frame should be considered as a counterpunch to the choice frame and leads to a discussion about services and better opportunities for children.
8. While there were regional and provincial differences, participants’ receptiveness to cheaper and more flexible -- but quality -- programs had no boundaries. It’s what every parent seeks, so why not meet parents where they’re at? A communications campaign that attempts to connect with parents’ everyday lived reality; that reflects the story of their struggle to find quality, affordable services for their children and their family, will find a receptive audience.
9. In terms of province-specific campaigns, the local economic reality shapes job opportunities and affordability concerns, so taking that into consideration can help inform a provincial campaign. But, generally speaking, since parents everywhere sought similar service supports, the message would not have to shift radically.

10. Since we only held two focus groups in each province, the sample size is far too small to make in-depth provincial campaign recommendations. More focus group research, and potentially a poll to quantify results, would be recommended before proceeding in any specific province.

II. Focus Group Analysis: Detailed findings

i. Methodology

In March and April 2011, Environics Research conducted a series of 10 focus groups in five cities (St. John's, Fredericton, Montreal, Edmonton, and Vancouver) on behalf of a group of charitable foundations interested in advancing the early learning agenda in Canada. Environics conducted a preliminary sequence of four focus groups in February 2011 in Ontario (one set in Toronto, one set in Kitchener-Waterloo) for The Atkinson Charitable Foundation. Those sessions had a much broader focus and were based on a different discussion guide. The report from those sessions is also attached as an Appendix to this report.

Each session lasted two hours long. Derek Leebosh, Vice President, Public Affairs of Environics Research, was the focus group facilitator for all sessions and he posed a series of open-ended questions to the participants in each session. The two sessions in Montreal were conducted in French and all the other sessions were conducted in English. The discussion guide that was used in the focus groups is also appended to this report.

Each focus group consisted of 7-9 participants between the ages of 20 and 50, segmented by gender. The participants were recruited in such a way as to represent local diversity based on income and other demographics. Most participants were parents and in each session there was some representation of parents of children six years of age or younger. Non-parents were also represented in the groups. Focus group participants were randomly recruited by Environics after being asked a series of screening questions. The recruitment screener is appended to this report. For each focus group, nine people were recruited, with an expectation that each group would have approximately eight participants. Recruiting guidelines specified:

- All participants between the ages of 20 and 50
- 4 or 5 out of 9 recruits must have children living with them who are under the age of 12
- Some visible minority group representation in larger centres.
- All must be at least somewhat interested in current affairs and public policy issues
- Those working in child care or education were excluded.

The times dates and composition of each session is described in the table below

Location	Date and Time	Group Composition
Fredericton	March 30, 5:30pm	Women – 20-50 years of age
Fredericton	March 30, 8:00pm	Men – 20-50 years of age
St. John’s	March 31, 5:30pm	Women – 20-50 years of age
St. John’s	March 31, 8:00pm	Men – 20-50 years of age
Montreal	April 2, 11:30am	Women – 20-50 years of age
Montreal	April 2, 2:00pm	Men – 20-50 years of age
Edmonton	April 6, 5:30pm	Women – 20-50 years of age
Edmonton	April 6, 8:00pm	Men – 20-50 years of age
Vancouver	April 7, 5:30pm	Women – 20-50 years of age
Vancouver	April 7, 8:00pm	Men – 20-50 years of age

Statement of limitations – qualitative research

All qualitative research work was conducted in accordance with the professional standards established by the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA – previously the Professional Market Research Society and the Canadian Association of Market Research Organizations).

The objectives of this research initiative are exploratory and therefore best addressed qualitatively. Such research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population, rather than the weights of the opinions held, as would be measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as indicative rather than projective.

Focus group research is a form of qualitative research. It offers rich, detailed data on public perceptions, the level of public awareness of the issues, and clues to language that ‘works’. Focus group research can be especially helpful at the beginning of a process, to understand where people are ‘at’ or to inform questions for a public opinion poll, or at the end of a process, to test reaction to creative materials.

ii. Findings, by thematic breakdown, including analysis:

Child care: A utilitarian consideration

The ability to find affordable and available early learning and child care services is a key driver in the choices parents make for their children. For most parents, child care is a necessity.

Most cannot afford to stay at home even if they want to – though some do stay home because they are working at such low paying jobs that their earnings would be less than what it would cost to secure child care (parents refer to it as “working to pay for child care”).

In some cases, the dearth of affordable and available formal child care options in the community has helped to flatten parents’ expectation of government-run universal programs.

Parents struggle to balance work and family responsibilities. They seek more flexible services. They also exercise creative and resourceful strategies – often toggling between public and private services -- to try to make things work.

Since so many families struggle to balance work and family responsibilities under a cloud of affordability worries, many look to the world of early learning and child care through a utilitarian lens: They must work, and therefore they need reliable, safe, affordable programs for their children.

Though this utilitarian requirement is in the foreground for parents, it is also intertwined with deep emotions such as wanting the best for their child, having guilt and worry about leaving their child with someone else, feeling that parents and/or extended family are the first choice for early learning and care.

But there also exists a desire to give their child more than they themselves have to offer. For many parents, that expresses as a desire to spend as much time as possible with their young children because they want to – they like the contact and they believe they are a positive influence on their own children, so much so that a formal government-run program is considered a second best option, regardless of its quality.

This jumble of values, emotions, and practical considerations compete with and complement each other as parents try to make sense of a new, more comprehensive system of early learning and care.

But address the need – affordable care so parents can work – and you create an opening for all of the other considerations: better early learning opportunities (especially parents’ desire for their children to be exposed to new experiences, socialization opportunities, and special needs supports).

Shortage of options: It’s a common refrain

The most common finding in the focus group research is this: no matter where they live, parents across Canada struggle to find care for their pre-school children.

They express a lack of options in most provinces, though the degree and range of options vary widely from province to province.

In provinces such as New Brunswick, where it would seem from participants' comments that child care options are more limited than the other cities we visited, many parents rely on extended family, private child care providers and babysitters. However, this reliance on friends and family is common throughout the provinces we visited.

Even in Quebec, where there exist a greater range of options and better access to affordable child care, waiting lists are long and many parents make do with options that wouldn't be their first choice.

Everywhere in Canada, parents engage in a social and financial calculus to determine whether one of them stays home instead of working 'to pay for daycare', whether they work opposite shifts so that one parent is always home and to yield cost efficiencies, or whether they wade through a range of possibilities – from having grandma look after the children to placing the child on a child care waiting list immediately upon conception.

Parents in the focus groups display a tenacious resourcefulness, often patching together services and supports with limited means to pay for them. It's like they perform quiet acts of heroism, day in and day out. This is a struggle early learning and child care advocates would be wise to tap into.

In political circles we often hear child care framed as 'choice', but we heard parents talk about the desire for more 'options' – especially since there is such a strong perception of a dearth of affordable, available options.

Though parents' expectation of a Swedish-style state-sponsored early learning program is dampened by a pragmatic view of the cost to citizens (higher taxes), they also appreciate the economic benefits of having more options for parents who need to work and for children who would benefit from socialization opportunities.

So, perhaps 'options' is the framing alternative to 'choice', which has been used by conservative governments to justify not acting on a universal early learning and child care program. "Choice" reinforces parents' sense of individual responsibility to figure out the best way forward. Parents are grateful for the \$100 children's bonus they receive from the federal government, but they are still searching for local "options" that are flexible, affordable, and accessible (ie nearby and no three-year waiting lists).

Affordability concerns: The top of mind issue

While parents want to know their child is in a safe, nurturing and stimulating environment, the top of mind challenge is to find affordable services.

Many parents lamented the high cost of child care. Many described creative solutions to the cost problem by having one parent stay home, by working different shifts, by taking other children into their own home to earn money and to stay at home with their own children, by partnering with other parents to hire an in-home nanny or taking turns picking children up from child care so they don't have to miss work.

Many parents with lower incomes felt they had no option but to give up work and subsist on a much lower household income because they found the cost of child care was the same or more than what they could earn from their job.

Until they are told about things like the Quebec model, parents are resigned to having to do it all by themselves – they don't feel entitled to early learning and child care in the way they feel entitled to primary and secondary school for their kids. However, we noticed participants with recent European roots who had experienced some form of universal child care were much more likely to view it as an entitlement.

Flexibility concerns: The underlying issue

Many parents expressed a struggle to find flexible care hours and would be open to more options, especially if they're affordable.

Participants liked the idea of having early learning/child care options available starting at 7 am until 6 pm. In fact, some participants went further, pointing out that many parents work shifts that are overnight or beyond the 7 am-6 pm window.

On the other hand, some participants misunderstood the flexible nature of the open hours and worried about children experiencing such a long day outside the home. A few worried that parents would take advantage of longer hours to avoid the responsibility of parenting.

Nonetheless, they appreciated the utility of being able to have access to more flexible hours of service. In fact, the lack of flexible hours is part of what forces many parents to turn to babysitters or extended family for help.

Parents talked about the difficulty of balancing work and family commitments. They talked about lunch hours spent shuttling children to and from daycare, taking shifts for pick up and drop off of children.

Parents who found child care services they trust but are also flexible were very happy with that option. Parents who couldn't find it often made sacrifices related to work and household income. Even parents who stay home with their children were open to programs that help support them – from help for post-partum depression to play groups.

Early learning: it's relative

When it comes to early learning and child care, people tend to only know what they've experienced. They have trouble imagining something different or new. Their reference point for new information is to balance it against what they know.

When it comes to 'early learning' as a concept, we found parents had no top-of-mind understanding of what early learning is and weren't clear about its importance. Their

main concern is to secure a safe place to leave their kids while they work. If the experience comes with good learning opportunities, especially socialization opportunities, that's considered a nice bonus.

The concern about early learning tends to centre around three issues:

(1) people tend to equate early learning with school – which some think their children will get enough of in their lifetime while others worry about starting a child's formal learning process too early in life;

(2) there is an institutional feel to early learning that prevents parents from seeing it as desirable;

(3) many parents harken back nostalgically to their own youth, when mom was at home and they didn't have access to formal early learning programs and think: "We turned out fine, didn't we?"

Early learning that feels too institutional, too structured, too much like grade school elicits critical thoughts in most participants and makes them nostalgic for the days when one parent (mom) could afford to stay home with the children. Men, in particular, expressed a nostalgia about their own childhoods and tended to worry about kids getting too regimented at too early an age. Parents frequently advanced the notion that kids should be free "to be kids".

Individual responsibility: AKA ... it's up to you

While parents would like to see more flexible, affordable, high quality early learning and care options – and many reference the popular saying 'it takes a village to raise a child' -- there is no culture of entitlement or expectation for this.

Many simply accept the idea that the burden of responsibility lies at the feet of parents. In fact, guilt can be a strong emotion at play for parents when it comes to the decisions they make for their children. On the other hand, many parents were 'unapologetic' about the choices they made around daycare and choosing not to stay home full-time with their children. The audience on this issue is mixed, and information is processed in a highly personal manner.

Also, some participants expressed concern about the cost of a new program that included every service they would dare to want or need. They expressed resistance to high individual cost and taxpayer cost. Some also worried about 'pipe dream' programs. Canadians, in general, are very pragmatic in their expectations of public programs.

The deep value associated with early learning and child care is individual responsibility.

Parents feel very responsible for making the best choices for their child – so much so that they feel guilt when they choose full-day early learning and child care options over

staying at home. With the exception of Quebec, where the state offers a wide array of early learning and child care options, there is no sense of expectation in Canada for such a universal program.

As for the distinction between an early learning program and child care, parents in Quebec see the services at their disposal as “daycare”, not “early learning”. While parents might be receptive to early learning programs in future, it’s not within their current set of expectations – nor do Quebec parents express a clear understanding of how an early learning program could be different from the services they already have.

Also, there seemed to be receptiveness to the idea of supports for families – even those who choose to stay home with their kids talk about feeling isolated, needing supports and programs to take their children to for socialization, stimulation, and addressing special needs – for parents (especially in the case of post-partum depression) as well as children. Which means that another value, social responsibility, may also be at play in the Canadian psyche.

We don’t see beyond provincial and national borders

Canadians aren’t familiar with early learning and child care services and supports that are provided in other provinces, let alone other countries.

Even provinces bordering Quebec aren’t familiar with Quebec’s child care program.

When participants learn Quebec offers \$7 a day child care, *it changes the conversation*. They wonder why their province doesn’t offer something similar.

When they see what’s offered in Sweden, there is unanimous agreement that Canadian children would benefit from a similar program here. In fact, once parents saw a sample of the Swedish program on video, some parents bordered on indignation that we didn’t have such programming in Canada – though participants also point to the high tax level in Sweden.

Learning about where they sit in relation to other provinces and countries helps to inform, and possibly alter, parents’ expectations. Competition can be good.

As one participant said: “When you see it’s already working somewhere else, you think: ‘Why couldn’t it?’”

Loaded terminology: A lack of ‘winning words’

There are a wide variety of words Canadians use to describe care and learning supports for their children.

These are the words we heard participants use when they described programs they turned to for support: Child care, early learning, full-day kindergarten, preschool, daycare, home daycare, centre-based daycare, resource centres, playgroups, Montessori, Y programs, recreation programs, babysitters.

The most prominent word for it is: daycare.

Some of these terms are weighted with meaning – sometimes specific to a city/province, sometimes specific to a parent’s personal experience with a given service, sometimes a result of general stereotypes (for instance, child care is sometimes referred to as ‘glorified babysitting’).

Some words invite confusion and speculation. For some parents, for instance, the word ‘structure’ is a positive, for others it’s a negative – too constrictive. The difference between home-based and centre-based child care also yields confusion and varying assessments.

No single terminology emerged that seemed to cut across stereotypes and regions.

The concept of early learning is interpreted differently by many parents. If early learning is associated with being led by an educator in a school/classroom, it triggers notions of a child learning their ABCs or 123s.

If early learning is mentioned within the context of a child care or resource centre/playgroup setting, it triggers notions of socialization – children playing with and learning from other children, as well as supports/relief for parents who otherwise might feel isolated.

Participants readily acknowledged that children’s brains ‘are like sponges’ and so kids are ready to learn at a very young age. But their main concern is that children learn to socialize before they become school age – literacy (reading and writing) is expected to happen naturally once children are in school.

Parents want to expose their children to educational experiences, but they still want to ‘let kids be kids’. In fact many parents, especially men, spoke fondly of their own childhoods, when they felt free to play and basking in the nurturing and care that they feel only parents can give.

However, when they saw a list of potential program supports, such as special needs and parent resource centres, they were more open to the notion of early learning. Programs that ‘let kids be kids’ help soothe their concerns about formal early learning services.

Once they saw a video of early learning in Sweden – and saw it to be something different from what they’d imagined before watching the video – they wanted that kind of learning opportunity for their children too. To be fair, there wasn’t much ‘learning’ shown in the video, so it’s possible participants were reacting positively to the images of children

thriving in an obviously safe, homey, nurturing atmosphere where they were learning to share, do chores, and other acts of socialization. Participants certainly liked the aspect of socialization presented in this video.

In short, parents are receptive to a progressive early learning and care system that broadens a child's socialization opportunities, but they have trouble envisioning and understanding the nuts and bolts of such a radically new system.

Parents feel that it is important that children start to learn at as early an age as possible and they are enthusiastic about child care programs that incorporate educational elements, but they don't want it to feel too much like school. Some parents view Sesame Street and talking to their children as important early learning, so there is a limit to what they imagine on the early learning front.

The bottom line: parents want a system that helps them manage, but they like to think that it's also about what's best for the child. Soothing this tension could be core to connecting with the broad public in a campaign promoting better early learning opportunities.

Any hint that formal early learning is better for children than what they could get at home from their parents yields resistance.

The challenge remains for this sector to attempt to break the stereotypes, or educate the public about a certain term, or develop new language that taps into a deep frame.

Early learning has to be promoted as something that complements and enhances what parents are doing with their children at home, as opposed to casting early learning programs as a superior substitute.

The Economy: It shapes perceptions and expectations

Economic arguments proved to be a potent force in the discussions. Even participants who self-described as small 'c' conservatives saw universal child care as a potential boon to the Canadian economy. They understood it as a service that would enable parents to work and contribute to the local economy and, in turn, contribute to the tax base.

Each focus group was rooted in a discussion about the economy, revealing important distinctions in each province.

Fredericton participants reflected a dismal economic state, one that goes deeper than the recent recession – perhaps best epitomized by their citing call centre jobs as the 'good jobs' on offer (and noting there are no child care supports available during typical call centre hours).

A number of Montreal participants referred to a city that used to be international in stature but now felt like it was a city in decline.

Edmonton participants talked about a boom/bust economy that is so volatile, they've come to expect it – making the most of a boom when it happens, exercising resourcefulness during the downturns.

Vancouverites struggled with affordability issues, especially given the high cost of housing in that city.

Only in St. John's did participants refer glowingly to a prosperous economy, speaking with pride about Newfoundland and Labrador's rise from a have-not to a have province.

Regardless of the state of the economy, the focus group process showed how participants' experience with the labour market is deeply intertwined with the strategies they devise to balance work and family responsibilities.

In provinces where good-paying job opportunities are limited, it often impacts a parent's decision to stay home – especially if there is a lack of extended family to help.

While stay-at-home parents often cite the desire to be home when their children are young, the conversation about the economy tended to reveal market forces – as well as a shortage of affordable and/or high quality child care options -- were also a factor in this decision.

In an economy where it takes two income earners to maintain a middle class lifestyle in Canada, appreciating the link between the economy, family income levels, work opportunities, and child care options can be an important consideration when promoting early learning.

It's worth noting that regardless of whether participants thought their local economy was booming or not, the desire for child care is still very much alive. There are powerful arguments for a universal program both in the context of a booming economy and in the context of one in decline.

Gender split: They both want what's best for their children, but there is a difference

We detected a fundamental split between male and female participants on the subject of child care and this was amplified by our decision to conduct gender segregated sessions.

Women displayed a greater tendency to express guilt about leaving their children in the care of someone else. Even if they perceived the caregiver to be of high quality, women tended to struggle with the idea that they weren't the best option for their child's early formative years.

This affects women's perception of early learning and child care opportunities, making them less likely to opt for programs and services on the argument that it's 'better for the child' than being at home with mom.

Women were also quicker to acknowledge their struggle to deal with caring for children while trying to make a living. Some, though not all, men seemed oblivious to what mothers go through to make it work.

While many men expressed a preference that at least one parent be home with the child for as long as possible, their primary concern was that of financial provider. Men were very aware of the cost of child care and were active participants in the household decision to have one parent stay at home or to have both work and rely on outside child care options.

Perhaps because of this sensibility, men also appeared readier to make the links between public provision of more early learning and child care options (especially more affordable options) and the economic benefits in the short-term (people work and therefore contribute to the economy, pay taxes) and in the long-term (children grow up into contributing adults within a competitive global economy).

Considering households discuss solutions to the problem of affordable, quality child care, it's important to note the gender differences but, also, to note the more gender neutral commonality: Both men and women struggle to find the options they need to feel they are striking a work-life balance.

FEEDBACK: Testing our messages

In each focus group, we asked participants to read a one-page handout of the early learning vision and, later, to watch a short documentary video of Sweden's early learning program. We wanted to know how they would react when shown something concrete.

Generally speaking, participants responded favourably to the handout and video of early learning, but mostly from a utilitarian perspective. They like the practical advantages of child care that is free or affordable, safe and convenient. You can call it early learning and they're indifferent to the bigger idea; it's about services.

Participants tended to react favourably to services – such as special needs supports, prenatal services and play groups -- itemized in the one-page handout.

They like the idea of a range of services and programs *provided in one space* (convenience), and, for the most part, they like the idea of that happening in a school, though some worry children will end up spending too much of their life in a school setting.

Some get confused and think considerably older children will be in the same space as three-year-olds, which makes them worry about children getting bullied. Some are confused about the hours of available service and read it as a long day for a child. Once it's explained, they like the flexibility of hours.

They respond well to the words “transformed”, “vibrant”, “affordable”, and “continuum of learning”.

They like the idea of having a choice to enroll their child or not.

They appreciate the convenience of a one-stop shopping kind of service – they respond well to the “no ferrying kids back and forth” line.

They stumble over words like “burgeoning”.

They’re confused about 188 days and the starting age for these programs.

Some also struggle to imagine how this connects with regular school programming and they’re more open to the idea once they learn it’s not like starting Grade One at the age of two.

While they like the range of services in one place, they tend not to suggest quality early learning as a top of mind benefit but, rather, talk about the great socialization opportunities it would bring for their child.

Early learning from a pedagogical standpoint seems to get trumped by the utilitarian aspect of convenient, affordable supports they might need. Though this may be a reflection of the fact that the written handout devoted a lot of space to describing the practical elements of how the program would work and didn’t say much about what the ‘early learning’ would consist of, or how it would be different from existing pre-school programs.

The Swedish video helped participants imagine what the concept they’d read in the one-pager could actually look like – and it won practically unanimous approval. The video helped change the conversation about early learning, because suddenly they could visualize it, though it’s difficult to discern whether the positive response was to the idea of early learning or to the idea that their children would be in a nurturing, homey environment that helped them socialize to become contributing responsible citizens.

After watching the video, the conversation changed from a struggle to understand specifics of the program and a single-minded focus on utilitarian requirements from early learning and child care programs to a broader discussion about how such a program would be good for children, good for parents, good for society, and good for the economy.

Concerns included: cost of the program, potentially higher taxes, mixed reactions to seeing small children participate in chores, though reaction to chores was more positive than negative.

iii. Identifying barriers to a national early learning program:

The focus groups indicate parents are open to early learning opportunities but there are several barriers to making ‘early learning’ the key entry point into a new, government-run public program.

Government: To some degree, the idea of government-run, school-based early learning programs represents a barrier to parental buy-in. It triggers several dominant frames: government inefficiency, concerns about institutional settings, and, in some places, concerns about problems in the school system itself. On the flipside, a lot of participants also expressed having more confidence in a government-run program that has high standards and is tied in with the school system.

Parental pride: People would like to believe that parents are best placed to provide the caring, nurturing and early learning guidance for their children – rather than to trust that to outside experts. That said, most participants viewed a school-based program as a plus because it would be ‘under one umbrella’. There is also residual guilt among parents who opt for child care over staying at home. A strategy that played up the role of parents in early learning programs would assuage guilt and allay fears. It helps parents view the program as a support rather than a replacement.

Cost: While parents are hungry for quality affordable early learning and child care options, some participants were reluctant to endorse a system that will raise taxes on citizens. Others pointed to this kind of program as an example of something they would be willing to pay higher taxes for – a rare sentiment, indeed. Even non-parents understood this could be a ‘social good’. Informing this viewpoint is a quiet acceptance that well-off families can afford to give their children access to the best programs while the rest of Canadian families make do with what they have. A lot of participants liked the idea of everyone having equal access to early learning and child care, regardless of income. Several people said that of all the things government spends money on, this would be worth it.

Time: Regardless of their desire to offer the best for their children at an early age, when it comes to early learning, parents trust that time will take care of things. In time, children will learn to read and write. In time, they will learn how to be with other children, to be in large groups, etc. In other words, parents aren’t inclined to communicate the case for early learning and why it makes a difference, or why it’s better than the status quo. May parents take the view that since they did well in school and have good jobs without the benefit of early learning programs, it’s not essential for their children.

Education edge: The public is not yet educated about what children could learn in early learning programs and what the long-term benefits could be. It’s not clear about the difference between early learning articulated in the one-page handout and sending your kids to preschool or a program. Is it basically a matter of making what is now available to all people despite income or is it something different? And if so, what’s the curriculum? Some parents are concerned about pushing kids too hard at too young an age. On the

other hand, there remains an ‘untested hypothesis’ that new Canadians may be more ambitious about their children’s future and place a higher cultural value on early learning and formal education as a way for their children to get an educational edge.

iv. National consensus:

We asked participants for their advice in selling a national early learning program to other Canadians. Their responses might prove helpful in future messaging. There was consensus around promoting it as “affordable”, “accessible to everyone”, where “everyone seems equal”.

They understood that “kids would be reading at a higher level” but the lion’s share of their advice focused on utilitarian aspects. For instance, they really liked the idea of all services provided under one roof. “It’s 0 to 12 under one roof. One-stop shopping.” “Everything is in one place under one roof -- so the daycare, the school, the support. If you need another professional, whatever. So everything is here. One-stop shopping -- that’s important. It’s much more accommodating for parents.”

They also focused on the cost of the service. “You have to talk about cost -- that’s the bottom line.” And they stress the fact that it would be free or subsidized in such a way as to be universally accessible.

They offered terminology that might help parents understand the service: “Community care.” “A learning centre.” “Family focused learning centre.”

They liked that play separated early learning from grade school. “Should include play in the title.”

They understood the short-term and long-term economic benefits of such a program: “Parents would be able to work so they would spend more money.” “I think it would benefit the economy in the long run, when the kids have a better education at a younger age.”

And, while this wasn’t their starting point, their reaction to the Swedish video led them to believe such a program would be good for children. “You have to show that studies prove that early learning is better and that the child will progress much better, there’s a benefit for the child also.” “Yes, not just for the parent but also for the child, for their learning curve, for the future.” When they think of this service in terms of children, they think of it in terms of opportunities, as in: “More opportunities for your kids.”

Still, some parents resist the idea of mandatory early learning. They want the ability to opt out, for whatever reasons. “Also, propose that it’s a choice, that’s very important.” “Option of part-time and full-time.”

Finally, it was participants who noted that simply informing parents of existing programs elsewhere is the way into selling the idea: “This what we do in Sweden. This is what we

do in Alberta.” “Quebec has it. How come we don’t?” “It’s only one more province. If they got on board then everyone would.” Though it’s worth noting participants outside of Quebec have complex attitudes toward Quebec: some are jealous and resentful of their advanced social programs; other filled with admiration.

v. Provincial summaries, with limited but potential campaign suggestions

New Brunswick:

In Fredericton, the economy has been so depressed for so long, it affects participants’ ability to imagine new public programs.

Parents routinely face the dilemma of needing to work but not being able to find (a) affordable child care (b) child care beyond 9-5 hours – an issue, given night shift call centre jobs were characterized as most lucrative in Fredericton.

Given the perceived shortage of affordable child care options, parents turn to family, friends, and babysitters to try to make things work. The population in Fredericton is much less transient. More parents of young children there have extended family members living close by who can provide informal child care support.

Those who access child care tend to do so in home-based child care centres. Many decide that the least employable or lower income parent stay home with the children until they’re school ready.

There was little expectation of government to resolve the issue, though participants responded warmly to Quebec’s \$7 a day child care and to the Swedish early learning video.

They especially liked Quebec’s price point, noting that more affordable child care would enable them to work and contribute to their economy. They also felt a Quebec-style child care program in New Brunswick would lead to a ‘baby boom’, since it would remove a major factor that makes parents think twice about having children.

While they liked the Swedish model, they expressed reservations about formal early learning for two- and three-year-olds. Some participants dismissed the notion of formal early learning programs with a variation of “we didn’t have it growing up and we turned out fine”.

A campaign linking the need to find work, especially shift work, with an awareness campaign of Quebec’s \$7 a day child care program could strike a chord in New Brunswick, though they have little expectation of government leadership on this file and have individualized the responsibility of child care.

Newfoundland:

In St. John's, the economy is booming and prosperity is so new, participants seemed primed for a campaign that talks about new supports for parents and their children as a sign of progress – an 'it's time' campaign.

Parents talked about the difficulty of finding affordable child care, referring to it as "You're working just to pay child care." Parents who can rely on an intricate web of relationships to help meet their child care needs: "I kind of obviously, oh, it takes a village. A little bit of everything. Me, my boyfriend, take turns, his parents, my parents. It's just the way I was raised."

Many parents decide one should stay home to counter the high cost of child care. Those who work talked about having to rush during lunch hours, etc. to deal with child care needs. But lack of affordability was the common refrain.

Participants were very receptive to an expansion of affordable early learning and child care services that alleviate their child care needs, lighten the load on the household budget, give parents a break and give children more opportunities. There was a sense, watching the focus groups in St. John's, that there would be a warm reception to a campaign linking Newfoundland's newfound prosperity with the decision to invest in an affordable, universal early learning and child care program that gave children exposure to new opportunities at an early age and that helped parents balance their home and working duties.

Participants could clearly see the link between early learning/child care and the economy. They were especially surprised to learn about Quebec's \$7 a day child care program, and it got them thinking about the possibility of having something like that in Newfoundland.

Quebec:

In Montreal, where options are more readily available, participants expressed difficulty in being able to access their preferred child care space.

They talk of naming their children before they're even born, just to get on a waiting list. They also struggle to find reliable child care to accommodate shift work.

In many cases, they opt for a non-\$7 a day child care arrangement, paying more for a service that better fits their need. But, perhaps because they have more child care options than other provinces, participants in Montreal seemed readier to accept an early learning campaign, though they still need to be sold on the benefits of early learning for the child.

Participants struggled to grasp the concept of early learning.

Like in other provinces, their main view of child care is utilitarian: In today's economy, both parents need to work, and so they rely on child care. In both focus groups, but

especially during the men's, parents admitted guilt and remorse about leaving their children in a child care every day.

The men – who also lamented that Montreal was once a world-class city but they now had a sense that it was in decline -- worried about the values their children were learning, and seemed to yearn for simpler times when children could stay at home with their mothers – though they also recognized those days are over.

Once they saw the Swedish video, however, it helped assuage their concerns and they expressed strong support for it. Given the undercurrent of a city possibly in economic decline, and lament over changing family values and a changing way of life, it seemed an approach into early learning that is linked with an economic prosperity narrative combined with a narrative of helping families keep a good balance might tap into the emotional undercurrent.

In Montreal, we also showed the groups a video about Quebec and early learning, which participants responded favourably to, though it was difficult to discern whether participants connected the dots between the video and formal early learning. They tended to see it as a reminder to be better parents and teach their children more at home.

Many acknowledged they didn't know about early learning and that they'd found the video to be helpful.

Most participants also weren't aware that Quebec's \$7 a day child care program is unique in Canada. Given most people like to know if their province is leading the way rather than falling behind, an awareness campaign about Quebec's leadership on this file compared to other provinces might help build support for an early learning dimension.

But participants in Montreal were also receptive to programs that offer more family supports. This, too, can be an inroad for building greater expectations of the system that's already in place. It was very clear that any government that tries to get rid of the \$7 a day child care program will face mass resistance – a lesson for other provinces: build it and they will come.

Alberta:

In Edmonton, participants are so used to the ups and downs of a boom/bust economy, they've individualized the issue of child care. It's part of the crapshoot of life in a boom/bust economy – win some, lose some.

And, yet, struggle with work/family balance issues and affordability issues – especially during boom times. Much of the discussion focused on the need for child care to enable both parents to work, though many parents made the decision for one to stay home or to work shifts in order to make ends meet.

Affordability was a big concern, and given participants' flattened expectation of government leadership on child care, parents seemed to accept that the burden to balance child care and work needs was solely theirs to resolve.

Once they learned about Quebec's child care program, they could imagine one for themselves. In fact, some wondered why Alberta, such a rich province, didn't have something Quebec already had – before conceding Quebecers pay higher taxes.

One participant said: “Wow. Makes me disgusted, because we're in the richest province and we don't even have this kind of access. It's wrong.”

It's important to note that one of the responses to the Quebec program was a suspicion that the federal government was funding this in Quebec but not the rest of Canada for overt political motivations. Once we explained Quebecers make a political choice to pay for this as a province, and that it was not an Ottawa giveaway, shoulders relaxed.

Given how the boom/bust nature of the Alberta economy shapes participants' world view – buy your toys and spend your money in the good times, save and be resourceful in the lean times – a campaign that offered early learning and child care as a solution to help parents balance their needs might be an inroad in Alberta. A stable program, a safe affordable place under one roof, might be considered an antidote to an otherwise unstable boom/bust life cycle.

As one participant said: “It would just explode in this town. They're in the middle of a boom and they say we need workers and people say, ‘I wish I could work but the kids are young’.”

Also, the power of knowing Albertan parents don't enjoy the same level of service that Quebec parents have could help change expectations.

B.C.

In Vancouver, the high cost of living affects participants' sense of choice for child care. A program that alleviates affordability concerns would be welcome.

In all cases, the benefits of early learning help reinforce support for such a program, but the entry point is one of utility. They need supports that they can afford. In fact, many will travel to another part of the city just to find something affordable.

If the program happens to be good for the parent and the child, so much the better.

The B.C. focus groups appeared to have a readier understanding of the benefits of early learning and were warmly supportive of an early learning and child care program. Though, their main concern was finding care for their children to enable them to work and pay the bills.

Participants also seemed to have a higher expectation of government than in, say, Alberta or New Brunswick. This might help build receptivity to an early learning campaign in B.C.

But, given the very high cost of living in Vancouver, and parents' struggle to simply own a home, affordable, accessible early learning and child care is likely the entry point in this city.

Like Montrealers, participants in Vancouver also showed strong approval for a program that provides family supports. They're primed to want more 'than just daycare'.

APPENDIX: Provincial notes

Fredericton, NB March 30, 2011

Brief synopsis of Fredericton findings:

Participants generally described

Define the economy:

* Unstable * Stable * Slow * Debt * Sad * Downfall * Vulnerable * Recession * Not good * Acceptable *

“I’m worried about getting laid off.”

“People don’t have what they used to have. It is getting a lot worse.”

“I find it’s harder and I find you’re always worried you’re going to lose your job. A couple of years ago people thought if you’ve got a government job you’ve got it made. Not really.”

“Well I lost my job last year. And I couldn’t get hired at burger king or MacDonald’s. It was very discouraging for six months trying to struggle by on unemployment and prescription pills you couldn’t afford it. I would had [to] cold call ... I don’t now how many businesses. They weren’t hiring.”

“It didn’t really affect me that much that I noticed because I’ve always been on a fixed income. A lot of people were having a hard time finding a job even if they were well overqualified to have a job. Me myself I’m trying to get myself stable, now that my kids are old enough to stay home by themselves, it’s harder for me ... because nobody wants a stay-at-home mom for 12 years with no job. It’s like we don’t need you here.”

“It’s hard to gauge what’s the recession and what’s your own personal circumstance. I have a small business and my sales have gone down. It’s hard to find a job in Fredericton if you’re not bilingual. It is hard to find work but I personally have managed.”

“A lot of places have closed down. If you know somebody you’re ok. I want to change my resume and put down I did things I didn’t do just to get a job.”

“It seems like New Brunswick is in a constant recession.”

“We have the highest unemployment rate in Canada.”

Personal experiences taking care of younger children

The women ...

[Daughter has small children] “Sometimes it’s me, sometimes it’s the other Grammy, and sometimes it’s daycare. ... It’s actually pretty good. They do different programs. it’s through a centre but it’s not expensive. If they didn’t have two incomes she wouldn’t do it, there’s no possible way because they don’t give you any kind of supplement or subsidy.”

“I was registered in home daycare. It was in her house for 20 years I think.”

“When my kids were that young my husband was a student. We had no money at all and the kids never went to daycare. I would waitress when I could. We would do a thing where one person would look after three or four kids. We kind of juggled.”

“I was on income assistance for the first year. I looked after another little girl. And I put my daughter in daycare. Registered daycare. It was a daycare centre. Lots of kids, lots of biting, all that fun stuff. I paid \$22 a month. They subsidized me. It was pretty good back then. My business subsidized the daycare.”

“My fiancé just got back from overseas now he’s on parental and I’m trying to get my foot in the door to do something. There’s a military daycare but it’s a two-year waiting list. We’ll both be working. I’m going to school to get an education and so you can’t live off my income.”

“I did the babysitting. I had a lady up the road that took in kids. When she got to be two, she went into a daycare. We paid and I think it was \$30 a day. It was quite expensive.”

“I’ve been home with my kids from day one and I don’t know if I’m the only one that feels this way but I wanted to raise my kids, not the babysitter or daycare. However, my daughter, when she was three, she’s very advanced for her age -- she was enrolled in an enrichment child program until she started kindergarten. She was in school and my son was home with me.”

“I work from home so they’ve always had a parent home. It’s bad enough what the school is doing, I want to be the one to raise my kids. And I don’t take that for granted, I know I’m lucky.”

Do you call it daycare or child care?

“Child care could be everything, whereas daycare you take them somewhere to be looked after, an organized facility. Child care could be babysitting.”

Home setting versus centre-based?

“Centre would be lots of kids wouldn’t it?”

“There’s be more one on one at a home centre.”

“Well my fiancé’s sister she runs a daycare at her home you’re allowed six. At the RMC there’s eight kids.”

“I think that daycare, a facility, is a lot better. It’s monitored, for one, whereas the others are not. They could be doing anything but there’s no licensing. Anybody can have kids in their house.”

“Some in home child care facilities are monitored. My fiancé’s sister, she’s not allowed to have any alcohol or cigarettes on the property. She took schooling and everything.”

“I take the bus a lot and I see a lot of these facilities. They’re going out doing things, going on field trips. Whereas if they’re at a house there’s no structure.”

“There will be some people that are good but some will say, “Here’s some food, sit in front of the TV.”

Are you satisfied with the options at different stages of life?

“Depends where you live.”

“One of the biggest differences between the facilities based on home vs. publicly [provided child care], if you work past six o’clock, there’s nobody. Half this town is employed by call centres but we can’t accommodate them with daycare centres. If you’re a single mom and you have to call in sick at a shift because your babysitter cancelled, you’re losing money.”

Turn to a lot of different options?

“You always have to have a backup. Your kid’s got lice and nobody wants to go near your child. But your mother will. How many sick days do you want to use?”

“If I had the choice, which I guess I did, I’d rather have them at home ... they’re too young to be out there and if you can have them with you, it’s good for bonding.”

“I didn’t have family here so I was kind of stuck. When you give birth, you raise. She never left my side.”

“Babysitting was expensive, we could never afford babysitting.”

Barriers? How are we doing in New Brunswick?

“Availability in terms of child care costs. When you’re pregnant you’re signing up.”

“There’s always a cost to something, so what I do is I schedule my own activities and my kids enjoy my activities. I can’t afford my rent let alone a car.”

“When you look at it like that, you look at school as a free babysitter.”

How much young people can learn?

“They’re like a sponge, it’s when you *can* learn.”

“Their personality forms by the age of three.”

“That’s when they learn the most.”

Reaction to statement about early learning:

“My oldest daughter always had a stack of flash cards. That was fun for her. She’s an A+ student straight across the board. She’s driven. And my other one, I didn’t have as much time to spend with her and she’s kind of the goofball of the family. I didn’t sit down with her.”

“It’s not bad parents it’s busy parents. Or depressed.”

“Yeah, look at the stress.”

“Go watch TV -- there’s a lot of that.”

“Kids absolutely need all kinds of stimulation ... there’s other things besides ABCs, but we have this emphasis on you need to get them into kindergarten and get them to read.”

Is early learning something any parent can offer?

“When you have a baby, I was young, it would have been better having someone come in and help me.”

“I wanted my kid to be influenced by me.”

“Do you mean educationally though? Like, to an environment where I’m taking my kid to daycare?”

Could it be advantageous for a 2 or 3 year old to spend part of the day in an early learning program?

“If we had all the money in the world and didn’t have to put our kids in daycare, we could. Still...”

“We turned out fine, didn’t we?”

“It doesn’t need an early learning educator.”

“In this whole culture, we’re always turning to experts. We don’t trust ourselves. I think it just erodes people’s confidence.”

What early learning opportunities exist in other parts of Canada and the world?

“Ontario, they have kindergarten and preschool. My niece, she knew everything before she got to preschool. You don’t have to do it -- it’s optional.”

“Here, your income would have to be low [to get subsidies to be able to take part.]

“To get anything here you have to be on welfare to get in any program.”

“Quebec they get paid for having kids. It’s free daycare in Quebec, isn’t it?

“\$7 a day ... that’s pretty much free.”

Reaction to one-page handout on the early learning vision:

“Schools are underused as a physical space, so that’s a good idea. It sounds too good to be true, if it really was turned into a vibrant space. The idea of providing services to parents and kids in a community setting in the neighbourhood -- it makes sense. It would mean less running around from one place to another. It just sounds like you could also be with other people in your community if you had kids. It sounds more organized, cooperative.”

“I liked that it was a continuum. It sounds great on paper. If you really could get a vibrant family-focused thing going, that would be great.”

“I liked the word ‘transformed’. I like the very last thing ... one of the things we sorely lack is mental health services for kids.”

“I understand that the world’s a different place and both parents are working and I get that, that it’s not the same as when I was a kid. So things like this weren’t necessarily needed. There are people who have to pay for, services that I use that they’ll never use. It does sound good I guess, if you had kids it would be nice, but everything on paper sounds good. In practice, it’s a totally different thing. But it really just gives you an extra half an hour to drop your kid off?”

“You’re saying morning programs and after school?”

“I’m just wondering what it means when it says links to special treatments. I thought, well, if they had those resources right there in the daycare ... on the reserves they have their own health centres, so if Johnny’s sick at daycare we walk across the road. And we all have those struggles. It’s not just if you decide, it’s if you have time.”

“Even to be able to say, with the chicken pox, here’s a pamphlet, here’s what you can do. When I was a mom and didn’t know what I was doing, if someone can tell us and give us that information, it builds our confidence.”

“I think it would be amazing. It enables parents to more easily get a job or focus on their career as well. It just makes things a lot more stress-free. But if it did happen, would it be everywhere and what would happen to small daycares? Would it be put out of business?”

“It would force in home workers to reduce their price range.”

“I was only 18 when I had her, so if they could take them from point A to point B and I could actually stay at work ... or school ...”

“But you’d know where they are right there in one spot. They’re not like Suzie didn’t get on the bus where did Suzie go?”

“Parenting and family support programming ... first of all because ... we were young, I was just turning 19, I’m an only child, I never babysat, I knew nothing about children, it wasn’t a planned pregnancy, the family support programming it can help you along the way/some kind of networking.”

“Another thing I circled was the link to special needs. I didn’t know exactly what it means. I took it as special needs children. at my son’s school if your child has ADD or whatever there’s not a teacher that knows what to do.”

If something like this existed would parents want it?

Everyone says yes.

Mothers juggling lots of things but also benefit for child?

“It’s both. It’s convenience to both.”

“Maybe they’d get a chance to do an activity that they wouldn’t be able to try.”

“It also socializes them as well. I find with my grandson, he didn’t have a chance because where she lived there wasn’t a lot of kids her age.”

“They’re more structured.”

“They learn how to cope with personalities and different authority figures.”

“188 days year round?”

“It would become an issue between teachers and daycare workers. There would be some butting heads.”

“I think anything to do with child education should be free for everybody. It shouldn't be for the people who can afford those programs.”

“That's what I liked about it, because everyone -- rich or poor.”

Reaction to video

“The kids all seemed -- they're all good.” (laughter)

“It didn't seem all that different from the centres I've seen here .. they learn from clapping.”

“I also liked the responsibility the children were given.

“But they let them do more stuff there. Like, at home, you wouldn't let them.”

“For one thing people would have more babies. Because it's nothing they can't afford. Also different age kids. They would have to keep it a homey setting. Daycare is a square space -- that was the hardest thing about dropping off the kids. So where the kids would be more like they were at home. That seemed pretty neat actually.”

“It was good. I agree that children need to learn responsibility with helping out at home, but not at school. I don't think they should have the responsibility of mopping the floor. It doesn't give the parent a chance to be a parent and do things for your children like you should be doing things for your children.”

“It kind of takes the parent away but it maybe gives the kid an opportunity if they weren't handed a good parent. They also need a system where they don't give children responsibilities a parent wouldn't want.”

“I think it would enable parents to work and the more money people make in society the more money people put into the economy ... but then is it going to take jobs away?”

“If the kids were together, they learn from each other. If you have two kids the second child seems to learn faster because they learn from the other child.”

“It enables parents to have more education. If I had kids in daycare I would have been back in school. But I think what they're doing builds confidence in children. I think the cleaning teaches them self-respect for themselves and for the others around them.”

“You might see a raise in the population.”

“Less depression for sure.”

“Less stress.”

“We’d definitely have more kids.”

“It’s going to boost the economy.”

“It would definitely instill more confidence.”

How to sell it?

“Free.”

“Affordable.”

“Good for families.”

“Everyone seems equal.”

“Affordable, accessible to everyone.”

“It would grow the population of Canada and we need it.”

“The resources, once you’re past the money, it’s the resources that make it so valuable ... if you look at the future you’re not going to sell anybody.”

“I don’t think equalizer is the right word but we can’t all afford to put our kids in daycare.”

“And not feel guilty for it.”

“You’re going to hand your kids over to the state. It’s great if they have a great curriculum. As long as you let kids be kids and nurture them.”

The men ...

When your children were young what did you do with them?

“My two boys -- my girlfriend, she stayed home and I worked at the time. But the girl that I’m with now, she had child care for two of them.”

“For the first two years, my wife was off. And then after that it was under the table babysitting.”

“I worked, the mother stayed at home. When I was home from work that’s when I took over. My mother was close so she helped out a lot. I haven’t bothered with the daycare. I have a couple of younger cousins they come over and watch.”

“I was away from home a lot. Most of the babysitting and stuff came from family. Besides the fact that it’s cheaper, you know the people as well. We came from a large family so there’s always somebody handy. Family first, especially kids, eh, because that’s the only people you can trust first.”

“In New Brunswick there’s a subsidy we used. My wife went through some postpartum. She came here to clear her head and get over that. I came over. We got a job at the call centre. They got rid of me and 200 other people two months before my son was born. We got a subsidy. It made daycare cost \$30 or \$40 a week. Current daycare is \$400 a month per child if you don’t have subsidy.”

“The reason I don’t have a kid right now is I make \$10 an hour. I’m going to school next year for plumbing. God forbid if I had a family. I don’t know what I would do. I couldn’t support them.”

Daycare or child care?

Daycare.

Home or daycare?

“I guess they’re both good in a sense.”

“The daycare I was at, there were five or six different classes with different aged [children] and with a fire alarm it was way more hectic. With home, it’s smaller and easier to manage.”

“My son went to the north side daycare for a while. I sent my daughter originally to a centre ... it was just run by this lady and her husband. She’d try to do educational things but it seemed she didn’t learn that much. Then I took my daughter to the preschool and she started learning more.”

Is it a challenge if you’re working and having young children?

“If you’re both working, yeah. You have to schedule around to make sure somebody’s going to be there.”

“Inadvertently, my children were a main factor in me losing my job when my kids were sick. I’d call in and my boss would say why didn’t your wife watch them? I was doing a split shift. Then they took that away from me and it started causing problems.”

“If you can decide that you do want to find child care for them it is really hard finding it here in the city, every place is full and there are waiting lists. My eight-year-old, we had in daycare last year at the preschool centre. This year, every daycare centre around is saying we’ve got a waiting list. We want to put her in daycare.”

“My girlfriend has lots of family here where I have none, so I’m sure they would help. But my girlfriend’s cousin was saying the waiting list is insane.”

“A lot of people are offering to take people in the homes but you can’t just trust anybody.”

“I found with the child tax benefit and the new babysitting benefit it wasn’t that bad. But it’s been hard on the budget.”

How much young children can learn?

“Those are the most important years, the early years.

“I’ve been seeing things on the internet, You Tube, people teaching them to read by the time they’re three.”

“I guess I ... that would be the things my ex and the current girlfriend -- they would be at home reading about it. My current girlfriend, she’s signed up all the time on the Internet things you can do with your children. Over the March break they made silly putty, different experiments.”

“The home schooling in my family went along with the woman’s duty. That’s the way it goes sometimes.”

“I have read articles and it was like periods from when they’re 3 months old to be 2 .. their high learning points.”

Reaction to early learning statement:

“I’d say it’s true.”

“Kids pick up things.”

“I was raised good but I was taught right and wrong and I know other people that weren’t taught that and they’re different now then the people that were.”

Early learning opportunities ... can parents/families give them what they need?

“They have to have the ability first. Some kids have dyslexia and stuff and they can’t learn.”

“The major issue with me, I didn’t know people could learn by the time they’re three.”

“While I was (a volunteer) in the daycare the learning aspect is definitely important but I think the social aspect is almost just as important when you’re younger, just interacting with other kids. That translates to later years. A lot of my friends don’t like public speaking or working in groups ... some people’s careers are based on those types of things.”

Are there early learning opportunities here in New Brunswick?

“If you have money yes.”

“We had a lady coming in every two or three weeks, child development with my son, she would come in and have some fun with him.”

“There’s a place next to the university. It’s a daycare setting, but I know it’s very education oriented. I’ve never heard of this program stuff you’ve spoken of. I think it’s all about money.”

“If you’ve got help, yeah. Myself I can’t really afford to do too much. But if somebody’s ready to help, yeah.”

What exists elsewhere?

“There’s lots of places that don’t have nothing.”

“In Kitchener and Cambridge and Guelph they have a program called early years. It’s a mother and father group. You can take your kids in and play with other kids. They have certain games. They do moldings and stuff. Then there’s a mother’s group. There’s lots of stuff in Ontario.”

“In St. John's there’s a program, moms and tots. It’s for getting kids out of the house before they go to preschool.”

Do you know what they have in Quebec?

“They pay for your child care. The government helps you out.”

“It’s heavily subsidized. They also pay you to make babies too.”

They're informed Quebec has \$7 a day child care

"Even \$7 a day is expensive."

"Parents that can afford it shouldn't be getting it for \$7."

"Many years ago B.C. tried to do some sort of empowerment to say babysitters in B.C. should get minimum wage."

"Wouldn't taxes go up if I paid for kids to go to daycare? You're making \$100,000 a year and I'm paying you?"

Would it make a difference in lives?

"It would make things easier."

"It should make it easier for people to go out and work and not have to worry about the extra expenses for that and, if they're that qualified, then they should be able to start educating the children. It would be good for them to start school with more than other provinces."

"It would be great to have but, like, Darren -- why should he pay for my kids? This province is so backwards they could never pull it off anyway. They're so dependent in the east on social benefits. It's almost engrained in people. Quebec has worked for what they have and that was just good politics that brought that into play."

"I'd like to pay \$7 a day to have someone take my kid during the day. That would be a big burden off me."

Reaction to one pager

"I can see the daycares having a real problem with that."

"To put this into place would save me a lot of headache. Ferrying kids back and forth. I put my son into primary and Grade 1. Basically it's a daycare and, on the side, they teach a little bit of tai kwon do. Wednesday it closes at 12, a half day of school. Me and the wife are always stopping what we're doing or we have to change our lives."

"It says non-profit then the next line says fee based."

"I like the fact that it prepares the kids for their first years of school."

"I'd probably be working if I was living with my children. It would mainly help the woman out. A happy wife is a happy life right?"

“Continuum of learning, children’s and parent’s choice, links to special needs and treatments. It keeps everyone in the loop.”

“99% of it is positive. The most important thing is the title and it shows that it’s a national plan. No difference from what’s coming out in PEI or BC. That’s a big thing. The only negative is based on parental choice. There’s a lot of parents that are too lazy.”

“At least the school day [should be compulsory]. Makes it more accessible. Everyone would know where to find the resources ... or whatever this pipe dream would be facilitating.”

“It would prep the children. They would know where the school is.”

“It is good but I think that there are things that might not be good. Having that young children in school with children Kindergarten to Grade 5 -- kids their age, because kids will pick on kids. As long as they don’t have a whole lot of access to older children and full days for young children could overwhelm them at the age of 4. As long as it’s not constant drilling into their head.”

“If I was going to have kids I would like to have this. Accessible.”

“I especially like every four-year-old child gets learning. They have a good education going already. Just a full year -- that’s a long time. Those kids do need a break. A couple of weeks at the end of summer wouldn’t be so bad.”

“I was worried about if all the kids are together, are they doing it just to save money on schools? I didn’t understand full-year learning for kids under 4. What happens after that? How old does this start?”

“School till supper time. Till you get home.”

Would parents opt for it?

“If they’re smart. You want to give your offspring as much as possible.”

“Give single moms a chance to get out and above once a day.”

“They don’t have to worry about being there to pick their kids up after school.”

“A more regular schedule.”

“It’s going to weed out daycare centres because they’re pushing the limit on those daycare centres in Fredericton. Maybe not so many kids and more chance to be able to learn.”

“I think the daycares would have to step up their game.”

Would society benefit?

“It’s good for people to have an option. If you don’t want to use it that’s your business.”

“Somebody has to pay for it.”

“My aunt, she was really good with the girls. She did things with them all day long. My oldest daughter, she started reading with them at an early age. She was doing things with them. They may have benefited from being able to interact with other children but, the learning end of it? Maybe not.”

“A lot of them just throw them in front of the TV so they can have free time to themselves.”

Could this happen in New Brunswick?

“Sure it could.”

“With good government.”

“No, this government would fuck everything up.”

“If the federal government came in and wiped out all the debt and let them start fresh and there’d be the user fees.”

“I think it’s pretty hokey.”

“You want the people to take to it and support it.”

“New Brunswick is a small province. The provinces that get all the money are the largest provinces. They’re the provinces that get the big chunk of money and they would need a lot of funding to do this.”

“Nobody sees the necessity to it.”

Other benefits? Like economic benefits?

“Less stress, not so many sick days.”

“Smarter kids.”

“More money to spend elsewhere.”

Video reaction

“I knew they had a good system there in place I just didn’t know it went so young.”

“I think it’s good, because the kids are interacting with each other. Monkey see, monkey do kind of thing. It’s very educational for them.”

“I pictured a lot more kids per teacher. I pictured all these kids from (grades) 1-4 crammed in there. I see it a lot busier.”

“It seemed very well organized. I’m sure it costs a fortune. It’s costing somebody. It’s costing all of us, I guess. If it’s the government paying for it then we’re all paying for it.”

“Now that I’m thinking about it, before the government implemented that child subsidy they were going to implement subsidized child care centres. Was that what they were going to do?”

“I thought it looked good. For the children, the social aspect, being with a lot of children at a young age. And one of the parents said he was able to work through the day.”

“I think it gives the parents that can’t do stuff for their kids, that gives everyone a fair shot. That’s what I like about it.”

“It’s much different than reading this here [*reference to one-page handout*]. The ratio with five or six kids, teaching them, translating words and stuff.”

Impact on kids growing up?

“The learning was for them, it’s better for them when you get older, they learn young.”

“The more I think about this already exists, to some degree, for the French students. They have a doctor over there just for francophones. This is what they’re creating.”

“There’s a private school, it’s a Christian school. Education is supposed to be really good I guess.”

“So maybe this is being incorporated in the private sector first, for people who can afford them.”

How to sell this?

“Optional. Options.”

“Kids would be better educated, they’d start early, they may have a better career later in life; and there’d be more time for the family. Bad thing big program. Once it’s there it’s there to stay. There’s good and bad.”

“It would open up more jobs. It would have a positive role.”

“Kids would be reading at a higher level.”

“Parents would be able to work so they would spend more money.”

“It has its ups and downs. At first it’s going to take jobs away from other facilities that they have now but in the long run it gives parents a chance to get out and educate themselves and get jobs. It gives the kids the education.”

“I think it would benefit the economy in the long run, when the kids have a better education at a younger age.”

“If you were planning to have kids it would definitely make you think. But as far as I want six kids now instead of two kids, I don’t know.”

“We agreed the benefits for the kids are good. Theoretically you’d be looking 10 years down the road. Parents who can’t work, it would open up their availability to go to work. A lot more employees looking for an employer, doesn’t necessarily create more jobs. If you go for the kids, personally I was tired of school by Grade 10.”

“When they make those super schools? Are they going to change the rest of what’s out there?”

“It would have an effect on bonding with the parents. Taxes are an issue. A pro would be leveling the playing field. No matter what economic background you come from you have more opportunity. Lessening tuition for university would have a greater impact.”

An extra year of schooling when a child is four years old has more impact than an extra year of schooling later?

“That’s true when you’re talking about how well a person learns. But they’re going to ask you did you go to university?”

“Japan, how they’re crazy schooling their kids. You finish school and you have to study to write a test to apply to go to school.”

“I think that’s too young. What about the parents that take a couple of years off to spend time with their kids?”

If it was your job to promote this, what are the things that will be most attractive?

“The learning. The pre-learning to learning. How convenient it is for parents and for the children.”

“I’d focus on the last bullet, the links to the special needs treatment, etc. I’d focus on that.”

“Taking care of that hour or hour and a half before the school closes. Taking the burden off the parents’ shoulders.”

“If anybody wants to get themselves out of the hole, the best shot we’ve got is educate the kids. Might as well start with them and give them a better education. Give them the best tool you can I guess.”

“Almost everything in here is already in place privately right? Except you have to pay for it. You show how it benefits the kids and, by the way, the cost.”

“The no kid left behind policy in the states.”

“Educate all children and get them ready for the world.”

“Work ethics. Teaches them respect. Very beneficial for single parents.”

“The fact that it’s optional is good.”

“If, as children, we start learning at an early age, why don’t we start teaching at an early age? The thing I learned tonight is why do we think children should only start learning at the age of five?”

St. John’s focus groups March 31, 2011

The economy

* Flourishing * Not bad * Prosperous * Promising * Boom * Looking up * It sucks * Growing * About time * Volatile * Recovering * Healthy * Optimistic * OK

The women ...

One the economy

“10 years ago I always felt embarrassed to say I was from Newfoundland. I tried to make sure I spoke properly. But I felt very self-conscious about the fact that I was from Newfoundland and what were they going to think. I feel like the most recent premier did a lot of really good stuff in this province and I feel that we are actually part of the whole economy and the whole of Canada. It seems they used to always portray us as a fishing village.”

“I read in the newspaper recently that Newfoundland as a whole has had the highest number of new jobs come open compared to the rest of Canada. Yes there’s less jobs out there and there’s crap jobs.”

“I think it’s hard for everybody. I know myself, my husband -- I can’t afford to pay a mortgage.”

“Even the fact they have the Republic of Doyle here now – who would have ever thought they’d have a show here?”

“The only type of recession that ever affected myself or my family was the issue of the whole fishery. Other than that there was nothing for me directly.”

“I was without work for about a year. Luckily, I was able to get unemployment. Other than that it would have been very difficult. Even though there was lots of positions I was qualified for, you didn’t get called back.”

“It didn’t really affect me very much, other than the fact that food and bills going up and gas going up. I still had the same job.”

“It didn’t affect me at all. Because I was working, I’ve been working since I was 16. My husband worked offshore over in Egypt.”

“If anything, the recession in ’91 affected me more. I was working and a bunch of us lost our job in the family business. Then a bunch of groups came in the mainland and took a lot of groups out of business.”

What did you do or do you do with your children when they were young?

“With my daughter, I was a single mom, so I stayed at home till she was 2. Then I went to school and I met my husband and I had another child. My sister watched the little one. After I got married either his sister-in-law or my mother-in-law would be child care. I had a very bad experience at the daycare. I went over to pick up my daughter and there was a girl working there who was yelling at my child like something else. My son went to a planned learning centre. It was awesome. The teacher was amazing and my child came out of it learning more in the time he was there and he knew way more than my daughter going to this licensed daycare for a year.”

“But the whole premise of daycare is they want to make sure the child is not structured too much.”

“I’m lucky enough that my mother looks after him and she doesn’t charge me. I bring snacks for him. My husband works nights and so he takes care of him. If I had to put him in a daycare, I’d have to quit my job because I’d be working for daycare.”

“Some are \$40 or \$50.”

“Even to have someone come into your house it’s still expensive.”

“You’re working just to pay child care.”

“If you’re a single mother how do you do it? I have someone to help me out and we’re struggling.”

“My husband worked days and I worked nights. One of us was almost always home and we never had a babysitter.”

“I was artificially inseminated. Later I got married ... then we got divorced. Usually my mom will take her. I was depressed for six months. I had her in daycare because I was sick and depressed. I couldn’t go to work because you can only make so much. So then I was on the single parents program. So that’s been alright the past year or two.”

“When I had my first son I was very ill with postpartum depression. My mom would come over and when my husband came home she would go home. Then I felt better. A lot of people would say if you went through such a hard time why did you have more children? Years ago I just self-medicated. You just didn’t get mental health treatment back then. I got pregnant again and ended up being told I was pregnant with twins. We ended up with three children in three-and-a-half years. For me to go to work with the skills and education I had, I would have to pay to go to daycare and I was very anti-daycare. That ended up hurting my son immensely, because he was not properly socialized for kindergarten. I always thought I’d feel so happy that I didn’t have my child in daycare and what I realize, very harshly, is I went against the grain. I really did him an injustice. He had a terrible time in kindergarten and I seriously regretted not sitting down with him ahead of time. Now you’ve got to be Rhodes scholar.”

“My son just started kindergarten. He’s in kindergarten and they have homework.”

“In our household I’m sort of the breadwinner, so if I’m healthy enough I always thought I’d go back to work right away and have him stay home. He was unemployed for the longest time and he just recently got a job back in November.”

“My husband got laid off before Christmas and I was back at work the 26th of December and I think that’s what contributed to my postpartum depression.”

“I kind of obviously, oh, it takes a village. A little bit of everything. Me, my boyfriend, take turns, his parents, my parents. It’s just the way I was raised.”

“You have to be so picky as to where you go because they’re not regulated as well as they could be.”

“I found from the children that I know that are going through the at-home daycare, the stuff she does with them, the crafts, the activities and the learning... when you can sit down with your two-and-a-half year old and they can spell words, it’s like ‘oh my god’.”

Different stimulus and supports at different ages – enough options?

“They have the little gym now.”

“The little gym is outrageously expensive.”

“You have the Y, you have the dance studios, all the martial arts studios.”

“But it costs.”

“That’s why St. John's has the program that pays for children that are low income.”

“But it’s all being able to advocate for yourself though.”

Economy flourishing here ... how are we doing in Newfoundland in terms of having adequate services?

“When I saw what was expected I would hazard to guess probably not enough. There needs to be a lot more structure.”

“What about daycares at the workplace?”

“They don’t exist. They should be.”

“Yup.”

“I found up until he was four there was nothing available for him. They had to be five-years-old before they could go into anything like that.”

“You can concentrate more on your job and then you can during your lunch go and check on them.”

How much young children can learn?

“Isn’t it the most crucial part?”

“They pick up everything. I think that age is very important and very crucial. My sister, she and her husband were in the military. She had to move away from home. She had two babies. They drove across Canada. And two beagles. And they’d go to school and when her husband got off work, then she would go back on weekends. She said, ‘I’m not having my children dragged up I’m going to raise them up myself.’”

Reaction to studies about early experiences quotation:

“I liked it all except for the organized piece. It is very well known you can’t expect little kids two- or three-years-old.”

“I think it’s alright. My kids didn’t go to daycare. They never had a babysitter. And they’re bright, they’re smart or whatever. But they do have a bit of trouble with the kindergarten with socializing with other kids because they never had that.”

“They need to socialize.”

“My son is in school now. My parents are 73. So they were 67 when they started watching him. He basically hangs out with seniors. But now, being in school, he doesn’t understand you’ve got to keep your hands to yourself. He gets very excited very easily.”

Can any parent offer early learning opportunities?

“Parents can only do so much, especially in this age in society, where both parents are working. My husband, he’s on a completely different schedule from us. A little bit of structure but, not too much, because trying to get a five-year-old to focus.”

“Both need a break. It gives the mother a break and it gives the child a break. You’re expanding their environment and everything than just sitting in a house all day long.”

“It takes a village ... it’s everybody.”

To what extent does this exist?

“It’s very hard to find something at an early age. He was four when I found something that wasn’t a daycare. It was tough to find anything, even something where he would go out and meet some people. A lot of it it’s only seasonal, it’s not year round.”

“You’ve got to look for it or you find it out from somewhere else.”

Other parts of world/Canada?

“Doesn’t Quebec offer free daycare? I thought I heard the people in Quebec no matter what your income is it’s a very reasonable price if there’s a price at all.”

“What?”

“Crazy!”

“I’m going there!”

“That’s crazy. That blows my mind. Newfoundland has only become a part of the haves in the last couple of years. It seems unfair that you’re not giving everybody in Canada the same thing.”

“Imagine the peace of mind that would invoke in you. Especially you said you’re having such a rough go of it you’re having to live with your brother. Imagine what peace of mind that would give you.”

“How come it hasn’t brought here then?”

“Everybody in this province is struggling at some extent or another.”

Why in Quebec and nowhere else?

“If mom is happy everyone is happy.”

“Government.”

“It’s so positive.”

“Maybe they’re all moms.”

“It had to start somewhere.”

“How would you go about to even initiate that to the provincial government.”

“We all know what that does, nothing.”

Reaction to one pager

“7:30 that’s crazy.”

“Which is great because I’ve heard a lot of people say the daycare doesn’t open early enough.”

“I know as a stay at home mom there’s people that will abuse it.”

“I like the onsite at the school. It’s supportive from the prenatal stage. I think that’s awesome, because your children do form relationships with people. Just the fact having consistency there, that would be great too.”

“The education process, learning, the hours.”

“I like the idea it would be open later, but to who is it affordable? Disagree with preschool children in the same building with older kids.”

“To me, that’s setting up children for more bullying.”

“You’ve created a continuous learning system to adolescence.”

[they identify burgeoning as a problem word]

“Early intervention, this is what this says to me. Early intervention . Your last bullet -- that is huge, that’s the key one right there.”

“One thing that really caught my eye -- the first sentence ‘vibrant family focused learning centre’ -- it really caught my eye. Especially vibrant, because the (daycare), you walk in, it smells, it’s like hospital.”

“This is collaboration because all the different groups out there, they’re all doing the same thing and this sounds like a good plan because they all strive to collaborate.”

“How does it tie to the regular school system?”

“Christmas holidays ... if I have to work? It’s saying all year round.”

“You drop them off at 8 o’clock in the morning, they go to the daycare and the school.”

“I know three kids in my son’s kindergarten class whose parents are using their half hour lunch just to go to the school to pick them up.”

“Vibrant schools and the no ferrying back and forth. And I do like the fact that it would be open all year round.”

“Only the part, that 7:30 to 6 pm, because most people work till 8 pm ... and affordability, what is the price?”

[they love Quebec price]

“Parental choice.”

“Then they could get out to work.”

“I think there’s people that would take advantage of it as well.”

Good for economy?

“You’re creating more jobs.”

“Can go back to work.”

Video reaction

“It seems to be working over there.”

“I noticed when they said they’ve been together, same group.”

“My big thing was being in the same group.”

“I think it’s very positive. It seems a great learning structure too, because they make it fun. Another thing I like about it, it shows children sitting down together eating breakfast together. It would get my son to eat more food.”

“The fact that they would be together throughout all those years.”

“We wouldn’t have to worry.”

“To go to work and not have to worry about your child, it’s a big thing.”

[agreement all around]

Long term impact if this system existed?

“Low stress for both parents and children. It teaches the kids responsibility and that everything happens for a reason. It provides structure for the children. Ease of transition from a nursery-style school to grade school. Higher social interaction. There’s no differentiation between (social) classes.”

“There’s a lot of people on social services because they can’t afford to work because they can’t afford daycare.”

“You’re going to have more people out working.”

“More people paying taxes.”

“It will give the children a better education and more opportunities.”

“The social skills would be better.”

Is this daycare?

“No. The fact they mentioned the literacy rates. Because here in Newfoundland there’s a very high illiteracy rate. There are 50% of us who only have a reading comprehension of Grade 5 and if you can read ...”

“It’s not daycare, it’s a fun learning program. They’re getting education, they’re getting socializing, they’re getting structure -- a lot of things. There’s possibilities.”

“The word daycare is negative.”

“I had a babysitter and, god love her, she nurtured me the way I needed to be and she didn’t have an education. You have to have something, your background checks. But not everybody needs that.”

“Grade 1, they’re there to teach. If you’re there just to interact with them.”

“No more ferrying kids back and forth. Affordability. Peace of mind. You’ve got happy employees going back to work. It trickles down.”

“The economy has changed.”

“We need it.”

“The hours as well, open earlier and later.”

“Links to special needs treatment.”

“Everybody’s included.”

“Oh, you’re a have province now.”

“Until a child is 5 you’re responsible for everything that happens.”

“We can’t do it all by ourselves.”

“We should have options.”

“I think it does make a difference to have a parent at home but I wish I could have prepared them for the world the way it is now.”

The men ...

Impact of recession

“When things started to go south, he wasn’t sure things were going to work out. Unless you had substantial things to lose there was really no tangible impact. There were opportunities to be made.”

“Initially it was harder to find a job a few years ago but now it’s much easier. In my case recession I felt it directly. I was a financial planner you go to zero miles per hour. At that time clients ... my own personal financial investments tanked. The whole family. Even doing contractual work now even job opportunities today compared to maybe 12 months ago. There’s a lot more listings and postings and that’s a good sign of an economic recovery. Here you have to be willing to accept less. There’s a lot of hype and talk. Boots on the on ground.”

“The recession had no real effect on us, but perhaps the recent pickup in the economy had no effect on us. Pretty level all the way through. Probably had a bit more money before the recession than now, but that’s starting to change. Much easier to find employment now. My 15-year-old daughter went looking for work and she had her choice of jobs and, to me, that’s a foreign thing. To me, as somebody toiling inside the oil industry, the price of bread is [up] through the roof. I’m in the process of moving my mortgage from one financial institution to another and he says we don’t have to do an appraisal on your house. It’s insane to us. To me here personally, this is not downtown Toronto.”

“I got six jobs in the last month [plumber]. A lot of professionals I work with now, businesses are growing and growing.”

“It didn’t affect either one of us too badly but it was more the media. As far as I was concerned, work was steady.”

“The housing, the rental, gas, food, one way or another it’s hitting somebody somewhere in back of them. I’ve been in Toronto. I came back three years ago and I’ve seen a big difference dramatically.”

“Got to love Danny Williams. Newfoundland and Labrador -- he put it back on the map. He was the man.”

Experience raising children?

“We home schooled our kids so my wife was home with the oldest his first seven/eight years. My wife is just starting to go back to work and right now the grandparents will start taking care of him.”

“As far as daycare we didn’t have it because we work on opposite shift. I was on the midnight shift and she was on days. There was always someone at home. We used to take them to playgroups to the gym and my oldest does ballet and tae kwon do.”

“They stayed home most of the time. If she had to work she stayed with family members or whatever.”

“When our oldest was born, she’s almost 16 now, my wife was a nurse and she gave up a full-time position and worked part-time and I gave up teaching. And I worked from home. It was accommodated that way. We would never put the kids in daycare, not that there’s anything wrong with that.”

“My wife was home all the time with him. My youngest just turned five and so we found he wasn’t getting the same interaction with our kids. We put him in a playgroup sort of thing just to get him used to other things. So we have him in daycare for three part-time days a week.”

“At that time I was fortunate enough to have money to put her in daycare while I was working and she was working. She’s 22 now.”

“\$200 a week now for daycare, \$40 a day.”

“My wife just started a job and it just wasn’t feasible it’s just not worth it.”

“We’re both really family oriented and came from a household where we were shoved off to a nanny and we’re both really comfortable with that.”

Daycare or child care?

“Preschool vs. school age -- to me, they’re the same thing.”

Child care in home setting instead of centre?

“Depends on how many kids and location.”

“/Home care is based on the family.”

“Typically around here I think for the most part ... friends and family members that send their kids out, there’s probably four kids in a house where, in a daycare, it’s a hundred.”

“They’re not allowed to teach them. They’re not teachers and stuff.”

“I was raised by my mother. I didn’t do kindergarten. I started Grade 1. From the circle of friends that I have who do have children, there was a time when ... now what I see more of there’s both parents working, they’re farming their kids out to preschools or daycare but they’re looking for places that they can learn. They want it to be somewhat educational. My sister-in-law for many years ran the daycare from the basement in her house and that, to me, was more like babysitting.”

“You’ve got two people in the family. I work, she works. You’ve got kids. What are you going to do make ends meet? So we take [our child] to a daycare centre.”

“If I can get my kids started earlier, how do I do that?”

“They want a play and learn system.”

“What is the harm of teaching a child your ABCs or 123s -- most people now have two people working.”

“In some ways some of that depends on what it is you feel you require too. Some want their kids to be learning quicker and some are content to say well they’re three. We had a kid who was ahead of us in terms of wanting to, and when you see a kid who’s wanting to, we just had an opportunity. When you have a kid and he’s at a birthday party and he’s

reading the encyclopedia, you know this kid needs something else. I have heard they're not able to teach at the daycares."

How much children can learn?

"They learn more in the first five years."

"They pick up stuff through osmosis. My six year old, her teacher says she's doing fantastic. This day and age now it's almost impossible for kids not to pick up something."

"Even just the kids' TV programs."

"Their character is formed in the first five years."

"Depends on the parents."

"Nature/nurture."

"Depends on the stimulation."

Reaction to early learning statement

"True."

"The word 'organized' makes me nervous. I don't think pumping your kid through an institution at age four is good for them. You don't have to stick to one of these regimes."

"My wife was home from the beginning and all of my kids are excelling. You're talking about stimulation as opposed to non stimulation."

"Depends on what your personal expectations are as parents. We never made them do things they didn't want to be involved in."

"You could consider Sesame Street organized learning."

"It depends on your definition of organized learning. It could be four hours a week. As long as there's exposure to the appropriate level. It doesn't have to be structured."

"Our oldest fellow, he spoke early, walked early, did everything early. Our youngest guy was two before he could speak and we were almost worried about it."

Formal learning starts at age six or before?

"You can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink."

"I think some parents get caught up."

“It’s not like I lost out because I wasn’t in 600 things. Every morning we kicked around streets. Now sometimes we have such a high expectation on our kids before they go to school. In order to get in, the kids had to know how to fold their laundry and all these things for the preschool entrance.”

“Some parents, if you’re on welfare, they can’t afford stuff like that. And the people that can, surely they want the best for their kids.”

“I don’t think any kid is going to lose out if they don’t. I turned out fairly OK.”

“Higher income earners, they probably feel they’ll do better.”

Other parts of world/Canada?

“Quebec universal child care. It’s made available no matter what your income.”

“They have facilities. It’s not just strictly informational daycare.”

“The poor rich and the very rich.”

“Sweden and Norway, where they’re not let go until they’ve done their university education and their hair is cut the same way and they’re spit out in the end.”

Reaction to Quebec \$7 a day

“It would be nice if it existed here but it’s one of those, like, how do I put it? You’re looking at a completely different population. If it were here, with outputs and stuff, how do you provide?”

“Equalization.”

“We just started both dayshift, so we’ve been looking for that. \$40 a day, it’s \$800 a month.”

“Our economy has been growing and growing and growing and a lot of those programs have yet to catch up. You put more roads and not child care. Perhaps down the road here we’ll see that sort of thing. It’s a spinoff with the extra money. It’s probably the reason Alberta has better programs -- because you can afford it.”

“You get a chance to make a dollar here then everyone can jump on the bandwagon as far as I’m concerned.”

“At some point the government made it a priority because the demographic said it had to be. We really don’t have the demographic here right now. Government is not going to

make that a priority here until the roads and bridges are done. It's only recently that we have a child benefit for a \$100 a kid. There's no other political kickback."

"Newfoundland is the oldest population in Canada and we're getting older quicker so our needs are not in child care."

"If you did have a program, at least the price at \$7 a day, you'd see a much higher participation because we're going to see a reverse migration."

"If the price of daycare is a lot cheaper you'd see more parents working."

Reaction to one-pager

"Absolutely. The biggest thing for me was the family support. It's frustrating to have children and you're trying to find daycare and what are you going to do with them and early learning and everything. It was a headache. The effort of getting two kids ready to go and what's going on here. In today's society you have to be making big money if you want your wife to stay home. The 7:30 in the morning to 6 pm at night. For us they're closing at 5 o'clock."

"I was wondering where it was 10 years or so ago. If I recall correctly, it was promised in past campaigns. This is something that's been talked about forever and a day. It should be considered for all up to age 13."

"Early morning and late at night. And was family focused."

"I like the fact that it's family-focused learning available all year round. Providing helpful parenting information and accessible to everyone through the public education system. This, to me, puts it on a level with universal public health care. The fact that it's flexible. National standards, so as a child in Newfoundland as elsewhere."

"It's something I would avail of."

"If it's a free thing. I guess there are people who would go private if they can get better. You have a program like this, more people will access this. Different parents try to do different mutations of this in all sorts of ways here. It's almost like one stop shopping."

"I think it would have to be tightly integrated with the public school system because you'd run the risk of a division happening. There seems to be some services overlapping like pre-natal and post-natal supports. You can get that from your doctor's office. How much redundancy would it be creating? And I'm not knocking it."

"I think that's great."

Is this daycare?

“It’s something different. It’s more school-based than child care.”

“I put a question mark next to family focused. Grappling with how it would be family focused other than enabling the parents to have a little more freedom.”

“It is a different situation. Me and my wife have been through a hard time, a couple of years ago. When my mother calls and says ‘I’m going to take the kids for the weekend’ -- it’s almost like picnic.”

“It’s more like for parents to have more involvement. This seems more like a different way of learning and living.

“Family oriented, family focused environment.”

“A template like this, if your children have this opportunity, the societal problem on the other end -- people have all sorts of probation problems, whereas I think you reduce the risk of that if they have a much better learning environment.”

Growth a good time to aspire to push the envelope?

“If you have the option.”

“That was my next point. What’s the cost and who pays? You ask a 60-year-old or a 90-year-old? Do they pay taxes?”

“In the province of Newfoundland, now that you’re getting oil revenues, there’s better opportunity to try something like this.”

“It would attract people to come back to the province.”

“There’s still the same number of kids. You’re not making more.”

“It’s the next generation.”

Reaction to video

“It looks good on paper and in the video, but I’d like to see it in practice. It seems like kids love playing and I think my two-year-old doesn’t go to school but she plays.”

“I think kids learn just playing.”

“It presents a good optimum for kids to learn more at a younger age. The only thing I’d like to see is what happens after. the one bad feeling I had, it gives me that sense of

communal living. A negative connotation. In Newfoundland, there's a lot more family oriented living with the brothers and sisters learning from each other."

"If we had any opportunity to do that I think it would be a lot better for us."

"Too structured. there was some emphasis on play but this cleaning up the table and pushing the snacks cart..."

"I don't disagree with that."

"Our kids, they like helping. It kind of gives them that 'I'm doing what my dad usually does' when you get them to do certain things, you give them the trust. I wouldn't want to walk in the daycare and my kids have been mopping floors all day."

"If you can get them to do it, to mop the floor, I'd like to know the secret. I don't think kids care what you're doing. I was given every responsibility and it didn't hurt me."

"How the child feels about what they're doing is important."

"Children do learn because of things they enjoy, so it probably never hurts to give them some of those opportunities. Maybe not a regimented way of doing things but the opportunity."

"Daycare is the four-year-olds are in this room the five-year-olds are in that room and they don't mix. There's no learning."

"The biggest thing that jumped out for me from the video is continuous ... the same kids. We'd have to get our feet on the ground and see if it worked here."

Impact of this would be?

"It would help facilitate parents working. I think that's the big thing right now. If you have two or more kids in daycare, unless you both have high paying jobs I think it would help the kids in their education."

"There would probably be subtle differences. I guess you'd have to have some long-term outcomes."

"The only other thing we don't really know here is whether this is affordable or how affordable it actually is. It's a huge change in the family structure."

"I think that would be the deciding factor -- if it's affordable."

"It wouldn't mean a major difference. I'm sure there would be a lot more two-income salaries without the frustration of wondering if half my salary is going to child care."

“Today’s economy, if you want to have the nice car and the nice house and the trip down south every couple of years then ...”

“The home school, with me making minimum wage, it was personal choice. But if you want to keep up with the Joneses you need to have that two-parent income. It does depend on value system. 100 years ago, you got up in the morning, you went out in the fields.”

“I tend to come back to what would it cost and who would pay. It would pay for itself on a cost basis.”

“This whole program is built around the fact that kids have to learn more in a few crucial years. You want to make sure the people who are running the show so you’re not feeding the kids the wrong stuff.”

How to promote this and build public support

“Economic benefit.”

“I’d imagine there’s an awful lot of people where the mother doesn’t work because of the cost of daycare.”

“Immediate short-term benefits: reduced costs to parents. And, longer term, more educated society. It raises society. You have a higher success rate of graduates.”

“We don’t have to wait for results. You can see it. Look, it works over there.”

“If there’s a demand for it then it’s something that’s required.”

“All those things haven’t caught up with the societal changes. We’re still operating in the older system.”

Montreal focus groups April 2, 2011

The economy ...

* Difficult * Stable * Debt * Distrust * Bad *

The women ...

Economy/recession

“Gas prices. We live next to the refineries and it’s just so expensive. It makes no sense.”

“The clientele, I see people from youth centre, young kids, it’s difficult for them.”

“I have family in Europe and it’s much more precarious over there than here for me.”

“Money is just going everywhere – left, right and centre -- and I just think they’re not putting the money into the right places. The priorities are all wrong.”

“Distrust – because everybody’s revolted, everybody is wondering what’s happening. We should know where the money is going and it’s horrible how everything is hidden, the construction and the scandal. Things are hidden from the population.”

“I think (the economy) is very stable if you compare to other countries. I think we are spoiled when you compare Quebec and Canada to other countries.”

“Bad – the government, the economy, the company had to close down and they’re encouraging the large companies to carry on much more than the small Quebec companies.”

“It wasn’t my lifestyle habit to say that before I used to never talk about Quebec and all that and I try to encourage all the small businesses in Chambly ... but I spend \$200 and now I have to go to Maxi and save a little money and other places like that if I want to be able to respect my budget. This is something new that, really, I started looking at circulars and trying to save money. I’m looking at gas prices but I really have to think about my pocket now instead of encouraging my cute little shops that I used to love.”

“We made this choice in 2005. We had a family, we bought a less expensive home. So we were in that mode already when the recession came about. My children, they’re in their early 30s, so I had to support them in that.”

“I lost my job because they closed down some schools and they put all the children in one school and it was difficult economically. I use the coupons and we don’t always eat what we’d like to eat. No filet mignon that’s for sure.”

“Maybe I’m in the wrong group because we were not affected. The only impact: I didn’t get a raise last year like every year. I work in the food business, wedding cakes and birthday cakes. They’ll always buy a cake. And it’s not so expensive that you can do without.”

“In aeronautics ... the recession has touched my industry but I was lucky. I was not scarred. I think I was lucky, kept my job. I have started to watch what I’m buying at the supermarket. We were all fairly young. Some others left with a retirement package but that was good for us younger employees.”

“We weren’t affected.”

“I lost my job. My company closed down because of the recession. We had a shop and we were selling paint and decorative objects. So we had to close down. And, also, loans

and stuff. The banks are quite demanding. And my husband almost lost his job, so finally he was lucky too. He was able to keep his job.”

Recession over?

“I’d say a fairly long way to go.”

“Me too, I agree. Things are getting better slowly.”

What did you do with your kids?

“I was able to stay home with my two older kids back in the ’80s. For my 10-year-old, my spouse stayed home. I was working in a daycare centre, he was working with me. He was in his group and he’d come and see me because I was working in a daycare centre. Then I wanted to stay home. I don’t want to judge people who do that but I wanted his mother to be at home when he came home from school.”

“The two older ones, I went back to school after and my spouse was working too, and we couldn’t afford to not work. so my one-year-old baby, I started a process to be at home and keep kids at home. My spouse, he makes a bigger salary, so of course he’s going to be working. If you look at the price of gas, I’m not losing all that much. They went to part-time daycare, two days of daycare and then with my mother who lives downstairs.”

“I spent 10 years at home. My two last kids went to part-time daycare and that gave me a break because they’re sick. I stayed home and took care of all three. I was alone with the kids. I worked at home, not outside the home. Two sick kids, that’s difficult.”

“My daughter was eight when we got here and when we had my son he went to daycare, in-home daycare, because I went back to work when he was seven months. I would leave him at the daycare. Sure, he got all the bacteria. He caught everything. I had my spouse at home. He was a student at the time so I had to work. So my son always went to daycare. I went back to work and that was minimum wage. And I used to pay \$22.50 a day for the daycare centre but I had to get out. It was my choice. I could have stayed home and maybe even made more money but I had to get out and my son was with other children, not alone at home with me.”

“I stayed home. Until she went to pre-kindergarten. She went (to daycare) part-time.”

“I went back to work when my son was nine months. I didn’t have a choice. I needed the salary. He went to daycare. That was expensive. There was no room in the \$7 child care centres. So, you know, run around, grab your kid, go to work. It’s complicated. Lots of stress.”

“I know. It’s complicated to find a daycare centre for your children, so we can take a parental leave for a year, me and my spouse, and after that I’ll have to find a \$7 daycare

or the regular daycare. But there are waiting lists everywhere, so that'll be a challenge to find a space close to our home that is affordable.”

At home or centre?

“I think at home the woman has more time for each child.”

“I think home based is better. I've worked in institutional or home based and I think it's better there. The kids have many ages in the home based one, whereas in the other one you're always at a different age. It can be difficult to manage for the educator.”

“I would have preferred home based for my kids. It depends on the person but I withdrew him from that for a year-and-a-half, two years. He went to the hydro daycare and it was very good. And then they ran out of room for him. And then, until age 11, he went to the school daycare and the people there were great. It really depends on who's running it.”

“I think it differs from one child care centre to another. Some are specialized educators, so they're trained. But they're not mommy, you know. It's not the same thing.”

“I think that there are more possibilities in institutionalized daycare centres. I know they organize outings for the kids. But I don't think the home based child care can do that.”

“That's true and also they invite the parents and all that.”

Do kids need different stimulus and supports at different ages?

“Oh yes. And I forgot to tell you, when I had my daughter I was keeping kids at home. I had about four of them. It was informally -- these were people I knew and they babysat their kids.”

Look at different options to balance needs?

“Yes, Amelie went to the daycare centre twice a week and I took her to prekindergarten because at the daycare centre all they did was play. They would play together. She was very shy and I wanted her to develop her linguistic skills, so I put her in prekindergarten for one day a week to experience something different. And there was grandmother too.”

“I did work a daycare centre, so then automatically there's a place for your kids. That's the best of both years. And my spouse was working nights so we got organized like that and when he was sick my husband was able to take care of him.”

Adequate services or room for improvement?

“I think there's room for improvement. If I look around me, a lot of people work in hospitals and they work night shift, so you have to take a babysitter to sit all night, you

know, 14- or 15-year-old and on weekends too. Some mothers are single parents. They work all weekend and maybe the neighbour isn't equipped to take care of children."

"I think that things could be improved for weekends and things like that. My son is nine now but he can't stay home alone, he's too young. And there's no certified babysitters around me and I won't trust the neighbour's kid or something. There could be a place you could trust and send your kids to."

"They called me back three years later, there are waiting lists. He had been in a home-based home care and when they called me back, the institutional one, and I said look it's too late."

"I'm listening to everyone. My kid is older now, but the parents, there are waiting lists and there's so much stress, you know. Parents don't know what to do with their kids."

Is daycare affordable?

"I think so, because I was paying \$24.50 when I started out and then I found a system that was \$5 a day and that was like paradise. And it's very affordable now. Those who offer daycare centre where my son was, that was really very good for what I was paying. I never needed a babysitter because my daughter has a 10 year difference with my son. I thought it was A-OK. Now, I think it's a bit worse because I think things are changing, so really he doesn't need that anymore. But the people are saying things are tough right now and where it's affordable, there's a waiting list."

"Affordable yeah, but not accessible. I made a request and I could have a place in five years for my baby. And I have a babysitter. I pay her \$20 a day. And if you have shared custody and she can't pay \$7 a day, she has to pay \$25."

Do babies learn from moment they're born?

"I saw something at the supermarket, the guy has a baby in the pram and he shows him the colour of the food, I saw that and I was surprised. I really got it that you have to stimulate a child at a very early age."

"It develops their brain. You see kids playing and the mother is talking to the baby and sometimes I have a three-year-old in my daycare and a kid can't walk or talk at age three because they weren't stimulated."

"You have to stimulate not only the brain but the legs, the physical contact. Otherwise the child won't know what to do with it."

"My kid could speak French and Spanish at age two. The brain is like a sponge. They really learn fast."

Reaction to video

“They’re like a sponge. They can learn anything.”

“The idea is to feed them, stimulate them. You have to take care of them, play with them, otherwise they won’t learn anything -- they won’t develop.”

“They didn’t talk about love though.”

“Yes they did.”

“But they didn’t name love, the theme.”

“Everything you teach a child, he’ll assimilate it.”

“It was beautiful. My baby is 14 months now and it’s funny because what I see here, this is everything you can tell the child, they learn.”

“It proves what I thought. I’ve read that from 0 to 3 years is really what they learn and it’s an important time. My daughter speaks five languages. At age five we were on the plane and we spoke from one language to another.”

“My daughter, we went from Arabic to Ukrainian just like that.”

“I really don’t know enough about the topic yet. No kids. But that’s really interesting and I think that’s good for the future because I do want kids. The earlier you start a small baby you think he just has drinks and goes pee pee but to stimulate him.”

“Even in the mother’s womb the brain is developing. When I was pregnant I used to listen to a lot of music and I would play that music when he had colic and it soothed him.”

Kids need educator or parents do it?

“I think the child has to be with other children. They have to be able to interact with other children, learn to communicate with other kids.”

“I hope I’m answering this right. What I think is that, OK, my baby goes to daycare from 7 to 5 -- that’s a long time OK. He’s learning stuff and they’re playing with triangles and all that and my role gets lost and I feel a bit guilty because somebody else is doing that at the daycare centre. And when I come home from work, I have other stuff, too, and I can’t give him all the attention I’d want to.”

“I think that we can show them a lot but then maybe they have methods in these centres that we really don’t know. Because we know the basics, the colours, show me blue, show me red, but we’re not experts.”

“It depends on the parent. A lot of little girls now are very young. Can they offer the child this teaching? And when you’re single, there’s no time, so her experience can be limited to one thing. And it could only be beneficial for the child to get out to a centre.”

“I agree. For a child to get out there and see something different, that can only help the child.”

Does that exist here in Quebec? Is it just putting your child in daycare or do these daycares offer the early learning?

“I think they’re just being babysat mostly, because a daycare centre, it’s so that the parent can go out to work but not necessarily for a child to learn.”

“In Quebec’s organized daycare centre, they had little like a kitchen corner and a car repair corner to do like mommy, to do like daddy, so to learn stuff. It was simulation but noy reading, not counting. It was to imitate other people. It was simulation.”

“Ideally the child could learn something and get ready for the future. Now I’m just taking him to daycare so he can be cared for while I work.”

“I don’t want my child to go out and study I don’t agree with that under 5. I remember that age, I was having fun. Children are able to play together and get some learning out of that if they use their imaginations and, of course, that has to be stimulated. Like mommy what can I do? You know, read or play outside or something.”

“With remote controls and computers -- they’ve had computers since their birth. We used to go and play outside. Parents would look for us. Now they’re not socializing anymore and when they do socialize amongst themselves they have no respect. They don’t talk anymore.”

“I think it is important. My aunt has a child starting kindergarten and he never went to a daycare and he never saw other kids, so he doesn’t know how to interact with other kids, how to communicate his needs.”

Options in Quebec – anything unique about options here vs. rest of Canada?

“We don’t know what they have in other provinces.”

Because many parents in Quebec can access \$7 a day child Canada this is unique in Canada ... parents pay more ... they pay the full price ... does this system work well?

“I think the project is well implemented.”

“I’m paying full price but soon, yes, I’ll be able to access the \$7 program part-time if another parent goes part-time.”

“I think it’s not that accessible. As I was saying, three years later they called me that there was a place.”

“I really took advantage of the system and I was really thrilled with the system because it’s a big difference between the two. Maybe there’s not enough access, that’s true, but it does exist.”

“I was paying \$5 a day for two kids. I was really glad. So parents with two or three kids, yes they must be thrilled but these places are rare, so for \$7 you’re lucky -- especially for more than one child. It’s really worth it.”

Element of learning here?

“I think it differs from one place to another. It’s really not consistent. Especially a home based daycare. They have no obligations.”

“Yeah there is a difference between the two. You’ve got the home-based daycare and some of them are recognized by the province and they have certain obligations but you have the lady at the corner and she charges \$25 a day and the kids just play together. They’re not really \$7 either. All you have to do is put a want ad in the paper and there’s no learning opportunity, so this lady might be great with kids but she doesn’t teach anything.”

So why does this exist here and not the rest of the country?

“I think it’s just one thing the government tried to do to encourage people to have babies otherwise it was scary to have kids because it cost a lot of money.”

“There has been a baby boom but then there’s not enough room in daycare, that’s what happened.”

What if government removed it?

“Omigod.”

“There would be a revolution. Parents are working. Because, you know, nobody’s getting a raise. Everything is going up. If you lose that, forget it. Women couldn’t work anymore.”

Have you heard the expression early learning?

[they can’t answer so Derek explains]

So affordable and convenient for parents but also that it's good for the kids?

“People want something like that to be able to go to work easily, but of course you want your child to learn something and to take care of him. Not to be left in a corner. We all have a responsibility towards your children.”

“You would expect that a bit the fact that your child is going to daycare ... not all kids play together though, some kids are solitary. You expect the lady taking care of your child to do something with them, take out toys or games and play with your child.”

Important that they have training?

“I work as a technical assistant in a pharmacy lab and I made a request for \$7 daycare and I expect in my 45-hour training that they will propose or I could have an option to take other classes, so that when I sit down with the child I'll be able to do things with the kids if I do get the permit. I want the parents to say she's good with the child, my kid came home with something fun that he learned he can socialize with other kids.”

“My daughter never went to daycare, she was always with me and she was quite functional when she started going to school and she was the easiest one and she was a great learner. She's brilliant and she never went to daycare. With my two sons in daycare I don't see a difference and I guess it depends on the child. I took care of my kids. I didn't sit on the couch and smoke cigarettes all day. I took care of them.”

Reaction to one-pager

“It's not that clear to educate the baby to adolescence. Overall what they're trying to say is, this would give parents more flexibility, more resources under one roof and also you'd be getting nutritional advice and other supports. Sometimes parents don't have the right idea or just don't know, so I can't believe there would be enough money to run this optionally.”

“I think it's putting pressure on the kids when they say open all year, there's no room for the child to just open up and play,”

“I think this accommodates parents. One stop shopping under one roof.”

“Well, 0 to 17, if you put all that together with activities, that's a lot. Is it a good idea to mix teens into this?”

“My child is nine-years-old and sometimes the Grade 6 kids will sort of nag at the younger kids.”

“It doesn't mean your two-year-old child will be in the same place as the 12-year-old. It means these daycare centres which are early learning centres might be in the same building but not that they're all mixed up.”

“Everything in one building -- that means that your kids will spend all day, so it makes my life easier, but my kid will spend one day in the same place. I have trouble with that. I think kids have to see other environments, not only one. I wouldn't want to compare it to a prison but it's too much all in one place. I'm not sure I like that. It might be near but everything in the same building almost 12 hours in the same building, that's a lot.”

Would this accommodate parents?

“Oh certainly, but parents have to think about the child's needs too.”

“And maybe it's a big schedule for a child, I don't know.”

“You can't have everything without doing your part. Maybe some parents will take it to an extreme and keep their kids there for the 12 hours. It's too easy.”

Benefit for children?

“This is an improved version of what I experimented with my child, the school where my child went, there was a daycare and now he's doing sports and studies in the same place. The school was next door, so this was my one stop shopping. He was always happy to go to that daycare in that school. He loves his school. He goes to school at 8 o'clock in the morning and sometimes he comes back at 8 o'clock at night because he's got activities and he progresses.”

“Full-time learning for two years is that what I'm reading? Before grade one? Kids are kids, will they just be learning? They have to remain kids, they have to play. You're an adult for a long time. Remain a kid for as long as you can. And I think there's a lot of pressure put on kids these days.”

“Playing is good a child will always play. Anyway kids are kids.”

“I think kids spend a lot of time in school, then they go to college and they don't move around enough and I think kids from yesteryear were not so stupid and dumb.”

“Well, look, my son is teaching me now so, you know, you have to follow.”

“I'm not saying this is useless but I just want to say let your kids be kids, let them play also.”

If we want to convey this idea to people....

“Personally, I think that two years is a lot. Maybe one year before going to kindergarten. This is optional of course.”

“Two years is too long.”

“Mine went to pre-kindergarten for two years. It was only two days a week the first couple of years and that was fine because he was able to learn and play and do some activities. Here what I like is the last point, community resources. I see a lot of kids who have learning disabilities, so you have to get a psychologist in another town. Everything here would be under one roof. I think that would be a good thing. It could be many buildings maybe linked together, so everything is adapted, so the parent wouldn’t have to run around so much. Because it’s not pleasant. You have to get the file here and run around another place. One stop shopping. I like that. You could have different buildings in one space, very close like a mini community.”

“This is not for everyone, of course. This is perfect but if you don’t do it, you don’t do it. It’s not an obligation.”

“But some parents would really have a break.”

So is it necessary for parents to start thinking about early learning for small children because if we don’t take it seriously do you think they’re at a disadvantage when they start grade school?

“Some parents are not equipped to stimulate their child, and if we don’t give them an affordable way to do that, these kids will be behind at grade school and they’ll want to drop out in high school. So, of course, they’ll want to stimulate them when they’re early. You have stay-at-home moms who bake with the child and who love their children but concerning the rest, they don’t know how.

Countries in Europe system? Literacy

“My kids went to daycare, my two sons, and they do have learning problems, they have behavioural problems. My son is 16 and he’s in Grade 5, so that didn’t help him. And my daughter is in CGEP and she didn’t go to daycare. At home with me he did stuff and they learned how to cook and mommy was counting and doing stuff but he’s not good at school.”

“My son can barely read and I always tried to stimulate him he doesn’t want to read.”

“And you are making that effort.”

“Yes.”

“There’s a lot of pressure. If you’re not in the mould and you have to see the specialist, if the specialist can take you, because they’ve got quotas.”

Would it be a good thing if this became available? Not an obligation but all daycare centres should have a learning program

“Oh I agree.”

“Me too.”

“I’m starting out and I found I’m awaiting that permit and I waited for years and I was angry because I thought just anybody would open up a home-based daycare and Easter is coming and I built a scenario for my kids. But, you know, the bar is high for me because I don’t want a parent to put their kids in daycare and say he’s safe here. I want to play with him, learning.”

Good thing before Grade 1?

“Yes if they can have fun also, sure. I think that yes, ultimately, if they’re stimulated, of course it’s better.”

Early learning too?

“I think they must because then anybody would be like babysitters and they wouldn’t care.”

“If you look at one ad there’s one educational daycare and a home-based daycare. Most people will decide to choose the educational daycare.”

“It’s a choice if your child starts high school. You can go to private schools and you have choices. Does this correspond with what I want, what I expect? So, everybody’s different.”

“If I look at my youngest child at three-and-a-half, he was bored with daycare. It was too long for him. He would build jigsaw puzzles with 100 pieces and they told me don’t send him to ordinary school, send him to international school, and he was open to that. I think he would have been very happy with a notebook in front of him at age three and learning to write already. But my oldest son, he’s more manual, less intellectual, he wouldn’t have liked that. But, you know, he went to CGEP and he’s working.”

Reaction to video

“They integrated children according to age group and a child that feels involved, sure, they’ll give you everything. They’ll feel secure, important, and that’s very good and their learning method was fine. Uncomplicated. Very simple. Fun.”

“They talked about leading the same groups together and that’s what they have for my son at the international school, so they don’t have that anxiety and they’re like a family”

and they help one another. So I think that's a good thing, especially with high school looming."

"Mine always do great in school. I have kids from my daycare who were great in school, others less great in school."

"Already having this opportunity is good, so you can just choose it."

"What I saw is something like this where my kid used to go. I don't think it's really that different."

"In prekindergarten it was like that, but at the daycare, I'm not sure. At home-based daycare where I go, it's a multi-age daycare and the educator works with one-year-old, two-year-old and there are older kids and it's complicated."

"I didn't really understand it ... it's too bad I didn't understand the English. Seemed good."

"It did seem good. The kids seemed to have the fun, yet they're learning. All age groups did understand and learn and the older ones helped the younger ones so they felt involved."

"6 o'clock in the morning, long day."

"People have weird hours, you know, so it's not nine to five anymore. It's like 24 hours a day, so that's what you need. It's really practical if you can start really early. It should be five o'clock in the morning. Some parents start really early, like in shops and stuff."

"This seems pretty ideal and the important thing is the kids want to have fun, want to go there, but it has to be pleasant for the kids."

"Definitely, yes, there is a benefit. The more your kid is developed, they won't drop out as much, they'll have language skills. Absolutely."

"Kids have to be ready for the future because society evolving and they give them these tools."

How to sell it?

"It's 0 to 12 under one roof. One stop shopping."

"You have to talk about cost -- that's the bottom line."

"Also, propose that it's a choice, that's very important."

“You have to show that studies prove that early learning is better and that the child will progress much better, there’s a benefit for the child also.”

“Yes, not just for the parent but also for the child, for their learning curve, for the future.”

“Because the parents want the best for their children.”

“I don’t think parents are lazy it’s just life is too complicated.”

“This is convenient but if you’re giving the best to your child, it’s the best of both worlds.”

“A child is a sponge so they’ll want to learn more if they’re stimulated at a very young age.”

I get the feeling most people are not aware of the fact that early learning for preschoolers has an impact?

“I didn’t know that.”

The men ...

Impact of economy, recession

“(It’s) not well managed, because there are many cutbacks. Salaries are cut back, especially when they tell us the RAQ is going to disappear.”

“Pretty good if I compare with other countries. I was born in Mexico. And the salaries back there...”

“The more things are going, the more the economy is plummeting. There are cutbacks everywhere and now shareholders have all these ambitions and government has ambitions and it’s profit. And now they’re going to eliminate the middle class. Canada Post, they bought machines -- they’re cutting 30% of the staff, and in the meantime everything’s going up, so your buying power is going down from one year to another.”

“Not well managed and the money goes to the wrong places, which means it’s not well managed, when I compare to the other provinces, we pay so many taxes.”

“I think that Montréal for me is a welfare city. Look at the streets. The money doesn’t go to the right places. I can’t wait to get out of here. I’m self employed and I have a lot of work in Montréal for the moment. And, also, the fact we have the bridges. I don’t feel like commuting and I have to find a clientele somewhere else and I have to get out of here. Maybe I’m too strict saying a welfare city but Montréal used to be ... *[someone suggests declining]* Absolutely, a city in decline.”

“I would add something, not that I disagree. In other cities, go to Westmoun, and aha! the streets are better.”

“Yeah I agree with that.”

“They pay more taxes too, and the people who live there, they expect something, so they’re putting on pressure. So maybe they’re heavier than everybody else so they’re putting the pressure to get what they want.”

Economy and recession’s impact?

“You have to do more. Your employers always ask for more. That’s a condition. Things are always uncertain. I work in the public health field. Of course everybody is aging and that means more work always accumulating and my employer is not hiring, so I have to work harder for the same amount of money.”

“Absolutely. It’s like that everywhere. Where I work we were 80 and now we’re 30, so more than half are gone and they’re not hiring, so you have to work harder. So you’re tired. I’m always tired.”

“For me, about 15% of them lost their job where I work. Before the recession I was working overtime. And now we had to put a hold on that, so less income.”

“I have friends who lost their job.”

“No not for me. The bosses had a problem. We consultants did not really experience any cutbacks or lose their jobs or anything like that where I work.”

“I didn’t really feel the crunch, not really. We never lost work as self-employed people, but ... the price of everything has increased. Oil, materials, lumber. So you have to adjust. And we have to increase our prices, but that’s not the recession necessarily right? The prices are going up but I didn’t have less work or lose work or anything like that. You’d think I would stop renovating but there’s always a need. We’ve been working for 10 years together and in fact last year ... we were quiet for about a month and we have a workshop and it gave us a break to sort of clean up the workshop. In 10 years we never had to advertise and we always had to work. And it’s word of mouth, so people call us and a lot of people are renovating that’s for sure.”

“At Canada Post yes, we’re having problems right now. I’ve been there for 24 years and during the recession no matter what happened I got my salary. My wife worked for the feds and she was lucky too. Civil servants were protected, so we didn’t feel any crunch at all. In my wife’s family, one of them lost her job and she’s working elsewhere for half the salary.”

“I didn’t really feel anything directly but at the CN there were 20% in cutbacks. We deliver train cars and a lot of companies we deliver for, every week some of them closed down. But now things are picking up again. I think there’s an upswing.”

“One of my friends ... there was a lot of cutbacks.”

“They got many new employees. When I got hired, they hadn’t hired for 20 years and they hired me and many others, so I felt secure.”

“Things weren’t too good for me. I had a car -- I had to sell it. I had no money for insurance, gas and rent. Of course rent and food comes first. A mechanic without a car is pretty weird, I tell you. So now I hope to buy a car this summer. I was four months without a job. No unemployment insurance, so my kid went to his grandmother’s a lot. For three months during that time.”

Recession over?

“No. Boy, you go on the street and you see a lot of misery. It’s terrible. In my neighbourhood, there’s a lot of poor people and homeless.”

“It’s not just the expenses. The deficit -- it’s astronomical. I studied economics. You have to pay the deficit. You have to pay up. Look at Greece, they just went bankrupt. So we’re almost in the same situation as them. It’s quite alarming. So, for me, the recession is still going, it’s still going strong.”

What did you do with your children?

“We were both working, my wife and I, so we took him to the daycare ... when he was an infant. A Quebec daycare centre. The feeling of group support, it’s a personal choice. For us, it was the group effect. To have many educators under one roof who were able to support your child. It’s that idea that we liked instead of leaving the child with one person, like in a home-based centre. We were a bit leery of that. We didn’t know about quality. We had just bought a home, etc, in 2002. One salary was clearly not enough.”

“He went to a home based. I was working. It was \$20 a day back then. It was difficult. We tried that. It was OK and we were looking for a CPE but it was difficult.”

“Yeah, it’s a three-year wait.”

“So we were referred to ... the home based centre and things were good, but it was really tough financially. We have to work, the both of us.”

“I know that my wife, before getting pregnant, she had studied as an educator, so we decided that we’d buy a home and that she could start a home-based daycare instead of leaving kids with someone else. Might as well do it ourselves.”

“I have a 13-year-old son. So we decided, we were both working, to (take him to) a daycare -- a CPE --- because we knew the director and we trusted him. He was an acquaintance. We were familiar with it and my son was one-year-old, I think. That was young, after the first year of the maternity leave. My son is a group boy. He plays hockey, he likes sports and soccer, he likes groups. He’s an only child, so he’s not a loner, withdrawn. I think the daycare centre helped. I think it sort of shapes you for who you are. I didn’t agree in the beginning with the daycare centre. My wife wanted to work. We didn’t really have a choice. I thought, we have a child and others are taking care of him during the week. We’d take him out for supper and then he’d go to bed and we wouldn’t see him. They spend more time there than with us and we weren’t raising him. And what does he get from his parents if he’s raised by someone else? But, finally, it worked out well. We didn’t have a choice. And I saw that my choice, (he) integrated (into) the group. I think it’s a personal thing for me. I didn’t want to leave him there.”

“I have a son. So he’s in high school. He’s finishing next year. Pre-school, his grandmother took care of him. Three streets away. So she would cook and ... and then she died.”

“I’m curious. Currently in today’s society, what’s the percentage of parents who stay home to raise a child?”

“People have to work. I’m not judging anybody but I like what you said.”

[Moderator says more than 75% go to work]

“I agree with my friend here. Extremely, in fact. We had respect and everything. And our parents were raising us. And, as he said, if you can’t raise your child, very often he’ll get other values from other people at the daycare. The respect has changed everything. No more respect.”

“My friend keeps him she does stay home full time.”

“ You’re part of that 25% my friend.”

“Is it a family value of your country? Because we don’t have that anymore, so congratulations. And today men, women, I agree, that’s fine, we work and we have to work. When I was young, my father was the provider and you can’t do that anymore. You have to make a big salary.”

“I respect that but where is the family value?”

“It’s the cost of living, but it’s the needs we have. Before, there was no cable internet.”

“Maybe one day you’ll have children.”

“My wife, at six o’clock she takes the kids to daycare. She comes back at six at night. Her daughter spends all day there. To me, her daughter is more agitated at home than at the daycare centre because she’s with other children you socialize when you get home at night you’re tired you worked all day so who’s got the patience?”

“Without daycare what would you do? People have to work.”

“\$7 a day. When my kid was small, we were glad to have the \$5 a day thing. We couldn’t afford the \$20 a day thing for daycare, so we really took advantage of that. So we came to the decision: OK, we’ll send them there. So for \$5 that was really a good deal.”

“I know that my son his grandmother used to take care of him and she’d help him with homework every night and I think that’s why she’s pretty OK in school.”

“I believe that the less kids there are in the daycare the better. It is in a home-based one you’ve got less kids, so you can give more attention to the child. Where mine went, there were 15. We sent him to one CGE -- the lady went crazy. She couldn’t handle all those kids.”

“In my experience, my child became more independent and the lady would give him little tasks to do. Do this, do that, help with the lunches. He was older, so helping with the smaller kids, that was good.”

“Some home-based daycare centres -- they’re different. They’re not all the same. Some have educators, so they really educate the child. They have educational games and stuff. You don’t need a diploma, like an educator’s diploma, to have a home-based daycare. That’s why they’re not all the same.”

Is it to accommodate us as parents because we must work but also education?

“You decide to have a child, so do you decide to have a child to get him babysat? She’s pregnant and you’re looking for a place in the CGE. What is that? So if you have a child, one parent would have a home with that child. That’s my value. You want a child, you’re pregnant and you’re looking for daycare -- that’s not normal. I can’t wrap my brain around that.”

“If I had a choice, me or my wife, someone would stay home with the child.”

“Personally I saw the benefit that I’m talking about. My son integrates well. He’s a winner and all that.”

“Yeah, but if your wife had raised him at home he could have been just as good.”

Benefits?

“I think that it helps them learn a certain behaviour in society.”

“My mother took me to kindergarten when I was 5 and I remember that she put me in their hands -- and it was a shock. It was brutal. So, probably, I never thought about this but probably I think I wanted to send him to CPE. My father went out working. He'd worked on the ship and I was always cajoled by her and I was shy. I was the youngest one, so for me it was important that my kids should go to CPE, to be able to learn to break that wall. I trusted that they would take care of that [social education].”

Number of things that kids can learn at the very beginning of their life?

“Before age 6, that's when the child develops their identity. They're a sponge at that age. And if it's done later ... they shape their character.”

“Back to daycare, I think that daycare is much more to accommodate us as families. From 0 to 6, so he's in daycare. So what's that image he can receive? So you don't have the family values anymore and what about his personality it will be shaped by them not by mommy and daddy.”

“I think it depends on the type of daycare. Some places are just daycare but some people are educators and they learn really fast. My friend's grandson was 2 and he was learning faster than we did and it was incredible. They play educational games so that's what they do. Some daycares are superior in education and some others are just like a daycare.”

Makes a difference for the child?

“It's like anything in life. If you start younger, you'll be better. Once you get in school, of course, you'll learn easily. It gives you ease and it makes your mind evolve.”

“Maybe at the daycare he would learn more but then we can certainly stimulate him with games at home. Maybe it'll be more difficult once he gets in kindergarten. And he learns how to function around them. But here, of course, he's isolated. But then he's with family. I calculated. I did the math so for us. It's better if my wife just keeps him.”

“You're lucky enough to be able to do that because if you can't, you can't.”

Video reaction

“I didn't really know that -- that early, that fast.”

“This is stuff I knew more or less. I didn't know it was that early. Wow. It's a good video. It's a good execution. Makes you want to reflect and think about it. I would have liked to see this before.”

“It’s really well done, really a good execution. I knew this. You were saying -- they’re a sponge. For me, knowing that all moments are important. Then, in all of this, what importance and what time do you devote to all of this? Life is fast. There’s no time stopping at every little thing for your child. There’s no time. I didn’t see my child every day.”

“I’m not surprised by this. I couldn’t have given you the detail but basically I knew this. Like a sponge -- that’s a good summary.”

“It depends on the parent. Some parents don’t deserve to be parents, so it depends on the parent you are. And then those kids should really be in daycare.”

“I know that some kids learn very very fast, very early. It depends on the parent. Some kids cannot count from one to 10. I know one kid who knows how to count and knows the alphabet.”

“I know that my kids spoke Spanish and French at a very young age so ...”

If an infant’s brain is like a sponge, do you think that parents can give opportunities on their own?

“Not with today’s parents. You don’t have time.”

“If you had more time, certainly you would do that.”

“I think your child should be exposed to all types of experiences, and this tells me that even if I don’t necessarily agree with daycare for kids still, the more my child is exposed to different experiences the better it is for him.”

Are there supports in Montréal or at they babysitting?

“They do take it seriously but you have to choose your daycare.”

“I think the CPE. I’m not sure but I think that the CPE are all the same thing. That there is an educational component. But I can’t say more than that.”

“Kids are kids and then school starts with kindergarten, so from 0 to 5 I think they have to have fun they have to remain children having fun drawing playing games. They also have to learn group skills and they’re going to do it with games and stuff.”

“I think that in the CPE they make it interesting for children at that age.”

Options?

“Maybe with the upcoming election.”

“\$7 a day unique.”

“Oh really? Unique to Quebec.”

“OK my sister lives in Ontario and yeah she pays more for child care it’s not funded like here.”

“It takes two or three years. There’s a waiting list. You have to give your kids names before he’s born.”

“My sister waited three years.”

“We were lucky. There was a new daycare place and we were able to access it.”

“There are other types of daycare where my wife works. There’s a daycare on the premises and it’s really fantastic. It’s a CPE.”

“That’s wonderful. That’s really ideal.”

“So you arrive with the child and then leave with the child.”

“Most people need that, yes. For people who can’t afford the rest, someone who earns minimum wage, you can’t pay \$20 a day. Otherwise the kids won’t get education. You have to think about that.”

“Some people wouldn’t be able to afford having children. They couldn’t afford to pay \$20 a day.”

“Because you can have a better quality of life. That means you’re a better consumer.”

“It’s good for society, for the child’s education. Let’s say you don’t have any money and you can’t afford to send your child to daycare.”

“But once he gets older, if the wife is not working, that means one less person in the system.”

“If you want the economy to roll, people have to work, it’s a machine.”

“We’re poorer than the other provinces. We were the only province with a heavy duty sales tax QST.”

“I guess we’re innovative. Quebec’s always different from the others. We’re paying more taxes, so maybe it’s a spinoff from that phenomenon.”

“We’re a pretty socialistic system. Maybe that’s why it’s the mentality of Quebecers.”

If government decided to cancel the \$7 a day program?

“I don’t think they could do that.”

“If I give you filet mignon and all of a sudden I’m giving Gainsburgers, how would you react?”

“I think it is a necessity. Kids are the future. Just like you’re paying for health care. You have to put the priorities in the right places. Our priorities are all screwed up.”

Reaction to one pager

“What about the parents who are educating their kids at home? Are they encouraging families to send their kids there so you don’t have to worry anymore? They’ll take charge of your kids because they’ll have supports and all that. It looks good but ...”

“What I see here is family-based learning. A lot of kids go to school alone. The parents aren’t taking them to school or aren’t really involved.”

“I see how the schedules here, with school schedules, sometimes it’s difficult because it’s not the same schedule of what the parent would have. Your child stops school at 3, you’re still working at 3 o’clock. People work till five, so the schedule is interesting.”

“This is very accommodating and what is nice here is that, depending on your needs, it tends to be flexible for every different type of family.”

Accommodating to parents or richer program for child?

“I would say it’s both. It seems to be a richer program for kids and, also, they’re doing this because they know parents are having a hard time. It needs to change here. There’s something wrong with the system.”

“I say bravo. This is a definite improvement. They’re taking all the resources -- they’re giving you more for your money, better hours, better program for your kids, nutrition etc. Everything people don’t do, don’t know. And families are working. Everybody’s working so hard. Have you received nutritional information? This is wonderful.”

“I totally agree.”

“I think it is a good thing. The support to families and all. That it’s very complete.”

“The support family support, because a lot of people don’t have the knowledge or don’t know how to educate their child, you know. There’s stuff we should know about children not everybody does.”

One stop shopping?

“With the school, it’s perfect. They’re always with their friends. They’ll have a sense of belonging. Having good friends and following them -- it makes you want to learn even more.”

“Everything is in one place under one roof -- so the daycare, the school, the support. If you need another professional, whatever. So everything is here. One stop shopping -- that’s important. It’s much more accommodating for parents.”

“Let’s say that your child is in daycare. Then he goes to a school like kindergarten, then grade school, then high school. So here it’s the same continuum. You don’t switch from place to place.”

“It’s like following up on the child all along. It’s like a follow up.”

School open all year?

“That would be good.”

“This is the only thing I’m not certain about. I’m not sure it’s good for the child to always be at school. They need a break at someone point.”

“Yeah but it doesn’t mean your kid will never take a vacation. I think it will be less concentrated on the school year.”

“Well, it’s like my kid after school. He’s too old for daycare so he goes to the day program. So here he’ll stay in the same place.”

“So it’s not that school would be out all summer and you can pick and choose.”

“Could child graduate before age 16?”

“It won’t be summer school.”

“Would this be organized by the same institution? Wow!”

Some parents can educate their children but there are parents who don’t have the resources or maybe have social problems whatever and it would help instead of being home?

“That’s true.”

“Not all parents are good parents, so it could be good.”

“It’s a good thing because if kids have two parents on welfare and they go to a CPE and they frequent other kids there instead of ... they’ll see something else at the CPE. They’d see kids from a better walk of life, because some parents just don’t have the skills.”

“There’s one thing here. Before age 4 the child would have two years of a full-day early learning program. Before Grade 1, but this is pre-kindergarten.”

Is it necessary in today’s world that our kids start learning as early as possible or optional?

“It depends on the parents’ value. It’s a very interesting option.”

“I’m not a doctor or anything like that but there surely is a time for the kids to get the best learning and maybe we’re not respecting that. What does early mean -- how early is early? What does it really change for the child? What’s the objective? Does the society want this or the child or what?”

Two boys. One stays home, good mother etc. The other would be in a program like this, maybe even half of the time with an educator. Someone who is specialized in early learning. Who’s better off?

“There’s a lot of data there. They must do studies on that.”

“I want to know, what the objective? Is to make better kids or independent kids or kids that are better in school? What’s behind all this? What does society want with this? And the other thing, the values of the child -- maybe that would be different, so the kid that you’re training -- like what’s behind this? That’s what I’m wondering. Why can’t we come back to the families? Well, no, we don’t have a choice. When I was a kid my mother was there. Why can’t we go back to that?”

“Because we don’t want to lose our toys and our internet and our computers. Everything is materialistic. We’re invaded by things.”

Do you think your child would succeed better in school if had early learning?

“Yes but I wonder about the price.”

“And what would you have to sacrifice for that?”

“As a parent, don’t you want your child to have the best tools possible to succeed in life? I would have given them everything.”

“Next year you’ll still have poor people in neighbourhoods, even if it exists. Might they have a better chance at succeed?”

“It’ll be better for those kids if the parents have better values and you want to give those values to the kids then they’ll have a better chance than parents who have no values, screwed up.”

Reaction to video

“This really exists, right? So it changes my thoughts. “Of course this is very personal but when I see things like this I think it’s really great. It’s good for kids. I realize, but then there are five children per educator, now I don’t know who pays for that, so this is all good. It’s important to give a lot of time and attention to the child. This is a really good thing. Who pays for this? Government?”

[Moderator says government]

“That’s why they’re so advanced. No wonder. Education and values -- it’s as if I’m missing something. I didn’t see my kid grow up. He grew up in daycare and I don’t know what happened all day. But I think there were 15 and, at one point, she hurt my child because he was hyperactive.”

“In my case it’s similar. The woman who was keeping my kid had 8 children with her ... it’s perfect, really. And they’re cleaning and learning stuff. And that’s what happened to my child. He got tasks to do.”

“But it gives them that value. You’ll help, you’ll do this.”

“I don’t think everybody will agree with this but I think there’s a price to pay here and not everybody will be willing to pay more taxes to be able to fund this.”

“But we’re paying already and we’re getting \$7 a day daycare. The difference: I’ll pay for this one and I’ll pay for other people too. The Swedish know what they’re doing. In Europe, they know what they’re doing.”

“I think it’s a good thing and I mean I’d like to know where my tax money is going. The kids can be pretty independent because they’re doing all different things and be able to learn more things.”

“What struck me here is the child with the mop. I thought, “Wow, like, a child working!”

“For today’s society I think it is a necessary thing but, personally, for the child -- a young child, a toddler -- I don’t agree. I’d rather see a kid playing with blocks than mopping the floor.”

“But they make it look fun.”

“If everything is showed as a game; everything is showed as game for fun.”

“It’s just a feeling I got from the video, the kid mopping.”

“You know, families were larger and kids did participate, you know. Cooking and farming and everything. Of course now it’s very different. A lot of kids are spoiled today. They call them the child king.”

What was the most compelling thing that the kids were doing?

“I did like the smaller units. That’s what struck me. One educator for five kids. And I liked the continuity -- always the same group. Because there’s one thing I always found was ridiculous, when kids when to school there should have been a psychologist in the school. So the kid really fucked up at 14 and then they see they’ve murdered someone.”

How to sell it?

“The benefits in school. The learning versus just a daycare, where they’re not specialized.”

“I think early learning.”

“For the child, first of all, I would show this video put it on the air, show the results, also the child is taken care of, followed and the fact the groups are smaller to me that’s very important.”

“It’s really early it starts early in good hands and I think the results it’s different than what we have here in this province I would show the system now has its limits and that it can change.”

“We have more and more dropouts and now you need diplomas.”

“I think it’s the political parties that would have to be convinced.”

“You have to see that there’s a result there is a demand, we all see that the system is sick, there’s something wrong with the system.”

Edmonton early learning focus groups April 6 2011

*Rising * Booming * Busy * Steady * Drowning * Slower * Rebound

The Women ...

“I think anybody can do it. If you’re a parent home alone, teaching them colour or ... all those things help.”

“I think they can get more now. There’s so many games and resources for young kids to learn things but it is important to have young professionals and teachers as well because they have maybe more experience.”

“I just think it’s maybe good to get away from mom so they know it’s not just mom I have to listen to or dad.”

“I know my one daughter did struggle with math. If they don’t get it at home it affects their self-esteem at school.”

“You make a lot of a child when the child is at home and stuff. Especially when you’re going through daily routines. Obviously, you’re not going to go through math equations and stuff.”

“It does matter because the children that aren’t getting help at home. And when you do go to school and you have children that haven’t had preschool or some kind of learning, they’re holding the rest of the children back. And the kids that are smart that have those learning opportunities, they’re really bored at class.”

“In Grade 3 you were learning something but now they’re teaching that sort of thing in kindergarten, so you want your child to be prepared for that.”

“They’re in school for so many years as it is.”

An extra year of education at age 2 or 3 bigger impact?

“Yes I’ve heard that.”

“In school they expect more out of kids. Expectations from the kids are greater, so if you can prepare more for that.”

“You have to have money. Preschool, they’re very expensive.”

“We went to Montessori school and that was \$1,000 a month and I was shaking and wondering how the heck am I going to do it? My family lasted two days in there because it was so strict and so regimental. And it was just two days. And I saw another lady, her kid was crying and I thought what am I doing ... he’ll really dislike school.”

“I heard Quebec has better for child care. Like, they’re not paying as much.”

“They pay higher taxes.”

“Our head office is in Toronto and it seems like there’s a facility for a child care. And they have that in Calgary, but not in Edmonton.”

Quebec \$7 a day...

“Wow. Makes me disgusted, because we’re in the richest province and we don’t even have this kind of access. It’s wrong.”

“It’s too late now for me. It would have been nice, that’s for sure.”

“It should be the same all throughout if they’re going to have standards and hire the right people for it. Don’t just hire some schmuck off the street.”

Want it here?

“Definitely.” *[everyone says yes]*

“I’d like for my children.”

“Absolutely. That would be beneficial for lots of people.”

Would you be willing to pay more tax for it?

[laughter]

Why do they have it in Quebec?

“How long have they had that?”

[Moderator says since 1998]

“Have they done studies? Is it better education for the kids?”

“If they improve the child care policies in Alberta we wouldn’t have a staffing shortage. Because females cannot find child care for their children.”

“At work and stuff, I work with three members in our department – ladies, who, because of this reason have to work different hours.”

“They seem to have a different philosophy of the family.”

“Maybe they’re just trying to increase productivity in Quebec and bringing more into the province.”

“I think that’s the way of increasing the population so that they can overtake all of us.”

“I didn’t have another kid because I wasn’t willing to pay daycare.”

“I’ve got nothing against newcomers coming to our country because we’re all here to share, but to treat each of us differently -- that’s where I get a little bit frustrated.”

Reaction to handout

“It’s pretty good. Some of these things I thought, ‘Wow, I wish I would have had this’. The reason I’m in a pickle now is because I didn’t have the opportunity to work full-time, having two kids close together. I’m 43, so for the last 13 years it’s the last one-and-a-half years I’ve been working full time. So, for years, I worked part-time and worked around the husband’s schedule and kids schedule to save money. It would help a lot of families.”

“Two days of full-day learning before Grade 1. Prenatal and postnatal for people going through depression.”

“Cost. Full-day learning. Full day and full year.”

“My son’s in Grade 7 now and he’s really bored. He doesn’t like to go to school anymore. It’s not interesting.”

“You just go to the same place for everything.”

“I’ve got a different opinion about that. Younger kids, when they come into Grade 5, they can become very mean. Think really hard about that when you go to send your children there.”

“When I read it, that wasn’t the first thing that came to mind. I pictured them staying with their own age group.”

“My daughter goes to school from 1-9 and I love it. The older kids are like buddies to them and they’re really nice. As long as you interact the two.”

“When I was younger I remember there’d be girl guides in the school and it would be nice if they had those things in the school.”

“Family focused no more ferrying kids back and forth.”

How would this change your life?

“I think especially my oldest daughter, she’d be happier. She’s getting tired with child care. Structured activities after school and with their friends.”

“That’s great. I think it’d make more money for the families to spend elsewhere and not feel so tight all the time.”

“It would be better for my sister because she’s actually going through ferrying kids back and forth. My niece has ringette and the coach says we need to practice 7 days a week so

it's pretty stressful. A lot of kids don't have that and they're always on their own. Affordable, on site, after school activities for the children."

"Especially for people who have more than one child."

"Especially that your kids are together. Supports a lot of people who are pregnant. They don't know where to go."

"I thought it would be a good idea. I'm just wondering where the extra money for all these people are going to come from."

"Taxes."

How to prioritize in our society? Is this an example of what government should be doing or is it your responsibility?

"No it's the government. The government is going to getting taxes off of our children. Our children are the future. It takes a community to raise a child and you cannot do it on your own. I depend on my neighbours. It's the education that we're lacking here in this country. Our children are doing without. What's wrong?"

"Special needs treatment. On the other side, for people who don't want to have kids, I don't see them as being as open to something like this because they don't feel it affects them."

"A lot of this stuff already exists in the city. It's just centralizing it. A lot of this is already being paid for. When my kids were born I knew we had that health link number."

Impact if something like this exists?

"My daughter's schools they're not enough room."

"I'd like to know how they would do it when there's so many cutbacks now in education."

Would parents opt for it?

"Yes. If they knew about it."

"Because it's easier when everything is all together and you can get all the information you need and everything is all under one roof."

"Trying to find a spot for two kids and..."

Would your child benefit?

“I just don’t think the full days for a 3 or 4 year old -- it’s too much. Unless part of it’s just fun.”

“You learn more too with play based.”

“I’d rather have them at school or playing basketball than breaking into my car .”

“Year round?”

“It’s wonderful for people who have jobs. You don’t have to take time off and look for a day home for two months of the year.”

“Or sometimes my in-laws will take the kids, and sometimes you only need a few weeks in the summer. And it’s nice to have that.”

“Maybe the crime rate will go down.”

Could we have it in Alberta?

“I don’t think to the full extent of this, but most of it.”

“I think that it could. Another thing that would maybe worry me is making sure the teachers would be paid more for something like that. Because if you want to put your focus on the younger kids, you want to make sure people are getting paid enough for something like that.”

“Yeah unless it turns into a daycare and they just jam them into a gym.”

Different than daycare?

Yes.

Daycare negative?

“Yes.”

“I find daycares are more there to structure them and help them grow. At a daycare, it’s more hands off. If I take my kids to a friend, she’s going to teach them.”

“My child care provider says she treats my kids like her kids.”

“My friends that I had who were in the daycare it seemed they misbehaved more. It didn’t seem like a good place to be.”

Reaction to video?

“I thought it was good except one point that bothers me: they said they have the same classmates as they get older. I dislike that because you never get to meet anybody.”

“Being able to just drop them off and they were good to go.”

“I like the early times. They said 7 o’clock, when they had to work. And that they had to do things for themselves.”

“Positive. The fact ... the lady with the five kids.”

“I like the fact that a lot of it was play and they seemed to have a lot of hands on. And the kids were very hands on.”

“Kids love helping.”

“Parents obviously want the best for their children.”

“It was pretty positive, and I wished they had that kind of school when I was growing up. It helps the children with their self-esteem. They feel they’ve in a very safe environment.”

Impact 10 years from now?

“Not missing work and feeling stressed.”

“It’s a good thing, but it’s going to take time to fix things in our system. Like, we need more schools.”

“Also, we’re multicultural.”

“It’s not because this program isn’t awesome but, realistically, where’s the funding going to come from? It’s a very expensive project. Example: when health care became free other things went up, for example, Blue Cross.”

“This is ideal but where’s the funding going to come from? Are taxes going to go up significantly?”

“If we had something like that, it would be exactly what I want, even if I do have to pay a fee. I wouldn’t mind paying that.”

“Stronger knowledge at a very young age. You’ll have parents who are stress free, who can be more family-oriented. Stronger family structure.”

“I thought crime rates would go down among adolescents because they had a better childhood. And more jobs, people working in the centre, and more parents able to work as well.”

“And, on the flipside, of that, all I thought about a year or two ago when no one could find a job -- where’s all those jobs going to come from? And what about the daycares? Are they out of a job?”

“I find children learn better from other people.”

“But not every day home provider is a teacher.”

“I had a day home when my kids were small ... but to me that’s more regulated.”

What would you call this?

“Community care.”

“A learning centre.”

“Family focused learning centre.”

“Should include play in the title.”

How to sell this?

“When you see it’s already working somewhere else, you think: ‘Why couldn’t it?’”

“I think it sells itself.”

“Option of part-time and full-time.”

“More opportunities for your kids.”

“Your child will have a basis.”

“I think this would be awesome but what also has to be emphasized is fairness in the system. People are going to say. ‘What’s going to happen to what’s happening already?’”

“The teachers are volunteering already. The system is broken.”

The men ...

The economy, the recession

“Busy making money or busy trying to figure out where to spend the money. It’s a slowing down time for us.”

“Everything’s suddenly back online. You see cranes everywhere. My business is in the US. There were companies in my channel that have gone under. I miss the bonus cheques I used to get in US dollars.”

“Whatever we’re earning, we’re paying off more every damn week.”

“We had the boom like two years ago and it’s slowed down since then. I tie it to the real estate market.”

“We’ve just come out of a bit of a lull and it’s just starting to lilt again.”

How did the recession affect you?

“The workforce and the company I work for, a lot of guys lost their jobs, and not a lot of them have been replaced. I had a job before I found this one and I always figured there’s nothing wrong with my hands. I can always do something.”

“Jobs went to different countries, and what’s to say that can’t happen a couple of years down the road? Companies get bought out.”

“My job got shipped to China. When you work for companies nowadays, there’s no loyalty, there’s no people working for a company for 30 years. Most of my friends were laid off and they were working at other places. Even my brother was making houses, and then one day he’s not working anymore. And my sister is working two jobs to cope.”

“Government budget came out, there wasn’t enough money for education. When I graduated it was difficult to get a job. I had to scramble and take what I could get.”

“I managed to ride out the recession pretty well up until two years ago when I got laid off. Hence, I do everything now. I’m a tradesman, I’ve got a Grade 12 education.”

“We’re still on a hiring freeze.”

“Me and my wife both have great jobs. There’s nowhere that’s really stable. I feel we’re stable.”

“I was working for [a gas company] and there was talk amongst the department that, with the recession, there’s no more proposed projects. They had no money for us to make gas for so, in a way, I was worried about my job. I thought OK, if the recession is affecting

the economy ... I went back to school a couple of years later. I went to school while the recession was on and I have a job now. Me, representing the Aboriginals, there's this joke -- natives are always in recession. Where I come from jobs were hard to get because reserves were so small."

Experience with children?

"My wife's a stay home mom. She was trained in education as well but I took mat leave and she's raising our daughter. She's a teacher so."

"Daycare. It was literally cheaper for her to stay home rather than daycare operation. We number crunched and it was cheaper for her [to stay home]."

"They're in daycare. It's super expensive for us. Last year it cost us \$1,200. We both have pensions, we both want to retire early. It was tough but..."

"I was in a bracket where there was no assistance to funding and we were doing full funding and it was over \$3,000 a year. We didn't have any family here and for her to go in on entry level, it didn't make sense."

"My mom, she's taken care of all of us. When I was looking ahead, my mom was still working. I didn't want that."

"My wife, we both work with jobs from 8 to 4:30, so our kids would always be in daycare at our school. We have a daycare on reserve, the normal procedure is we drop the young one off at the school and daycare was at the school. It was accommodating. It was a lot cheaper than what we would pay anywhere. We would probably stay home too, paying the cost in the city."

"My wife wasn't working until about Grade 1, then she went back to the workforce and she wasn't highly educated or anything like that. I came from a family where mom stayed at home. Now that you have kids, it's the almighty dollar. Everybody has to be at work."

"You're seeing more and more of that. More of us have decided to have a stay at home parent. One couple I know would trade parental leave. They were just playing off the benefits."

"They went to a day home. It was about \$1,500 a month and we were just like, you know, you couldn't stay at home because that cost and, at the end of the day, we just said, 'Ah forget it, we make a lot more money'. When you have a stay at home mom, nowadays even with a good salary it's a compromise in living. It's a compromise in lifestyle. You're not going on trips."

"My story is complicated. My wife was home for the first year when my daughter was born and she just about lost her mind. They almost lose their identities and turn into little tot mommies. She couldn't handle that. We auditioned a lot of day homes and it took a

lot. If we got a greasy vibe or whatever. Or someone who seemed to be more about the money than the kids \$600 a month. My wife and I both worked and at the same time I decided to be a stay at home parent. Having that sort of level of support and understanding -- it worked. Before, she wasn't talking at all."

"What happened with us, because we're kind of a mixed family -- my oldest sons are from a previous relationship -- how it's worked for us it was the same thing. When the two younger ones came along it just didn't make sense to pay \$700 per kid per month. We said stay home for a bit. When the youngest was old enough to fend for himself for a bit she opened a day home."

Day home and day care centre?

"A formal day care centre is more like a school. A day home, a day home provider is only allowed to have a certain amount of kids."

"The qualifications of the people are different."

"And there's an over and under 1."

"We took ours to the day home, but there's one person, she's sick, people have lives.... When she's sick you have to take off work. Daycare, if they're sick, I drop them off no problem."

"It depends on the day home."

"I've had friend where they ran the day home, where they were actually kindergarten teachers. You build relationships."

"I think the daycare is worse because I think those people are working for minimum wage and they really don't have incentive to teach your kids any more. They're just punching in and punching out. The daycare home is the closest thing the kids have to their mom. There were substitute houses you could take your kids to."

"My daycare, they go on field trips and I like the idea there's five people watching that one lady too."

"With my grandson they've gone through an agency. The woman is supposed to be watching them and she's not there, there's a guy there and he's got a record and I call the cops."

"Even at a day home it all depends on who's running it and how motivated they are to teach your kid."

Enough options?

“They all seem just like another daycare.”

“I hope it’s happening in daycare but, more than anything, I want the kids fed, I want them safe and I want them to be happy.”

“We went through a few stages when we were looking. And we went to Montessori and it’s supposed to be education. Some have higher education within them but the turnaround is your paying twice as much.”

“Because my wife was a day home, people with lower incomes couldn’t qualify for subsidies using her and at daycare they could.”

“Subsidies: people work the system.”

How young kids learn?

“75% of your embryo, how you process your learning, they get taught more of a functional learning. Some people taught by learning and music.”

“Never underestimate them. Never think they’ll never get that or, no, they’ll never get up there. Both my kids can work my phone better than I can.”

“My four year old knows how to type in Mario on the computer.”

Does it make a difference in early life? Or just a time for play?

“That’s what I think. Parents try to pack all this knowledge in the kid’s head. Why not let a kid be a kid?”

“It’s good for kids to play up until five, but we can also help them play in ways that will help them with creativity, maybe where they’re designing something.”

“When I was a kid, when we played it wasn’t a computer game, it wasn’t a TV, it was hands on stuff and you learned to build things.”

Studies tell us our early experiences tell us how we learn ... Moderator reads quote

There’s this productivity bias, shove them into schools and inject them in the workforce. They came from kindergarten and then ... institutionalized boxed and packaged.”

“You might want to take those opportunities to have the child excel in school but, at the same time, you’re putting a lot of pressure on children to learn at an early age. It’s ridiculous.”

Can children benefit from organized early learning?

“Maybe if it’s things they have interest in and they have aptitude. People trying to raise little Spartans. It’s not fun for the kids anymore.”

“We don’t have organized learning at our house but my kids read a lot and they get just as excited about that.”

“We had a neighbour they were always doing extra homework all through school.”

“I don’t buy it. I think it’s dumb. People are marketing all this crap. People are, like, people are making little geniuses. It has nothing to do about their early education than what their economic standing is.”

“What does a kid really have to learn by the time they’re 5? Who’s grading the children?”

Can any parent offer their child all the early learning opportunities they need or to children also have to be in an environment?

“They socialize. Their social aptitudes, if you’re shy.”

“I agree with what you’re saying, with the social aspect. I think that’s really important, because you can get into the trendy stuff -- the baby Einstein -- and, most of that, you can throw in the trash. The most important thing, and I found this with my oldest ... at home by himself -- just him and mom -- he didn’t have much to play off of other than her. He really didn’t have a bar to go by. If he was with friends of ours who had kids the same age -- they would play off each other. My kid would come back and pick something up.”

In the world that we live in, is it enough for a child to be at home with his or her parents until they’re five? Or do children need to start being in some program with other kids with early childhood educators that are play-based activities?

“At preschool, you want to pre-educate your kid.”

“Can a parent do the same job as an educator? I think that the parent can.”

“I don’t think so.”

“Well, my wife, she takes our daughter out every day. My daughter is always interacting with people and I’m pretty sure my wife can teach my daughter.”

“Every parent have the ability -- maybe not the time.”

“They may have the desire, but then they may not have the selflessness to teach.”

What options exist?

“It all depends on the place.”

“If they’re both working, are they working at MacDonald’s or corporate?”

“If they’ve got modest income, they can’t afford anything. They make just enough money they don’t qualify for anything.”

What exists in terms of early learning opportunities elsewhere?

“I think in Eastern Canada they subsidize daycare a lot more. I don’t really know for sure.”

“Just off the top of my head, I found out about a lot of programs that my kids could have done. Alberta health for shots. Why couldn’t there be a follow through in the education of our kids?”

Quebec \$7 a day

“From our transfer payments no doubt.”

“Put a lot more emphasis on play for the kids to be able to do, and for us to be able to do.”

“And when you do the math, one of you is paying for someone else to raise your kid.”

“The first 14 years of my kids’ life I never took a holiday.”

“That’s the plight of the man.”

“I have very limited experiences of Quebec and none of it is very good. For some reason it doesn’t surprise me.”

Quebec \$7 fee?

“I paid over \$1,200 last year.”

“I’d be all for that.”

“You’re paying for kids’ education till you die. Eventually somebody’s got to pay. Nothing’s coming for free.”

“It sounds like it’s raising the bar too. More education.”

“That’s how they sell it.”

“Assurance of quality.”

“I’m just trying to put myself in. I represent the aboriginals, our lifestyle is different. If I had to pay \$1,200 a year, I’d have to stay home instead. It doesn’t make sense for us. I’d rather spend my time at home with my kids. It doesn’t make sense for me.”

Alberta wealthier than Quebec ... why can’t have it here?

“Exactly. Why can’t we have that here?”

“Waste their own money on child care.”

“You’re going to spend it on other services anyways.”

“You’ve got a larger population in Quebec. A 5% tax would go a heck of a lot further in Quebec.”

“It’s a pretty regular drumbeat in the media that the public is fed up with child care.”

“And the quality.”

Reaction to one page handout

“I think it makes sense.”

“A structure like this is going to require a lot of personnel. The organizational structure of needing administrators all the way down -- a whole third wing of child care.”

“Education.”

“Who’s going to pay for it and what’s it going to cost?”

“And is it even likely?”

“It looks like it’s a dream. The thing I kind of wonder about in Alberta, such a large part of the population being in rural places. They talk about ferrying kids. I was wondering how it would work for a lot of people. It would be interesting.”

“In my old school, growing up the bus route is still one-and-a-half hours. You going to put a four year old on a bus?”

“Economic -- the advantage would be, like, instead of spending \$1,500 a month, it’s a huge bonus. That puts so much money back into the economy. Right now, to be a parent, it’s a compromise.”

“The expense of daycare. Depending on how many kids you might have, [people] might have more children.”

“It would be good for the single mom who doesn’t have the time to do a lot of that early development for kids. And, also, the parent who plops their kid in front of the TV they might as well be there with an early child educator.”

“A lot of teachers would take those jobs in a heartbeat.”

“You have to go to multiple different places.”

More or less peace of mind knowing it was part of the education system?

“This seems more regulated. I think I’d be more at ease. It’s more structured by the government for someone.”

“It would just explode in this town. They’re in the middle of a boom and they say we need workers and people say, ‘I wish I could work but the kids are young’.”

“Over and over again.”

“You’ve got that opportunity for your kids to play. Within this program you do play education, hard core education.”

“I think it would take time to absorb. There are too many people here that have been looking at the government saying what the hell are they doing for so long.”

“The entire education system needs to be rebuilt and if they started it at ... they all say the same thing ... it’s broke.”

Reaction to video?

“It was nice but, basically, they were kind of like factory families. They keep them all together from very young. You make them work. It’s kind of what they would do at home. Kids are not, as a society, we’re encouraging kids to speak to people they don’t know.”

“What I saw was in line with other examples of early childhood education that seemed to work. That consistency and that focus on structure -- not so much the learning per se -- and kids will basically rise to the occasion you set for them. They want to be useful.”

“It was pretty impressive. We don’t have anything like that. They’ve spent a lot of money doing the trials and errors and it obviously works.”

“There was peace of mind.”

“It fostered a sense of independent at an early age.”

“I never thought of that as learning. This text is terrible.”

“If they can read at a higher level than other countries they’re going to absorb more information.”

“The best thing I saw in there I never saw a TV.”

“Too good to be true. But once you start seeing first generation coming out into the workforce, there were be a huge increase in knowledge.”

“I think it would change a lot of things. You’d have more people in the workforce. You’d have more people on the go. And the taxes are captured from there.”

“It’s hard for me to get my head around but it might be better for work ethic. You might get better work ethic than from the kids.”

“There will be a lot of people involved in crime.”

How to sell it?

“This what we do in Sweden. This is what we do in Alberta.”

“Quebec has it. How come we don’t?”

“It’s only one more province. If they got on board then everyone would.”

“The federal government, their responsibility is protecting the country, collecting some taxes and the sovereignty of the provinces. Is the reason people of Quebec feel they have their own country? It would really make sense to roll it out per province.”

[Moderator talks about how provinces came on to health care]

“If it’s sold the right way people will jump on board.”

“Especially if someone in the west did it.”

Vancouver early learning focus groups April 7 2011

Economy

* Skewed * Challenging * Medieval * Moderate * Denial * Expensive * Fortunate * Two economies * Fine * Polarized *

The women ...

“There’s a lot of economic activity and opportunity but I don’t have any access to it. I just feel like local government is here to support business and not families.”

“Everyone I know is strained right now financially. [A panhandler] he says can’t even get pennies anymore.”

“It’s a challenging marketplace, a challenging economy. It’s very channeled. [When fundraising] the people that you ask if there’s something in it for them, they have no problem giving.”

“It just seems ... the people who are seen to have the biggest amount of say, it doesn’t really seem like the system they’re using is working anymore. There is no adaptation. I live on the east side and there’s so many people around me, you give them an extra \$100 a month and they could contribute so much more to the community. It’s cruel.”

“The economy right now seems to be quite unsteady, especially with jobs.”

“I feel that we’re in recession very much so on the one hand, but on the other hand, I feel that people are still overspending. Not real money spending.”

Impact of recession?

“How hard it is to find work. And then you’re trying to make ends meet in between work.”

“I actually got laid off. I worked for a gutter company. Because people were not building homes. Some businesses closed.”

“[Participant] was saying how her whole family changed how they spend money. They won’t spend anything unless they have it in cash.”

“We’ve always lived like that but the recession, I was more aware that cash is the king. Nobody in my immediate family but at work we had a major downsizing. We basically cut the whole top layer of our company. All the directors were laid off.”

“She went on maternity leave and then the recession happened and when she came back ... she ended up giving up her job because the hours they were offering her were the same as before.”

“I know so many people that are looking for work in the public sector and the government hiring freeze.”

“At the time I was managing a business and when the recession hit, it was right before Christmas. The recession came, we made no money all through the fourth quarter, so in February when no one buys anything and we’re just scraping by and I have to make sales goals as a manager in order to pay my people ... or I have to cut hours. It was extraordinarily stressful because we were so far behind our goals that I could not afford to pay myself. Because my wage took up more than two-thirds of my allotted money to pay for staff and I wasn’t allowed to cut my own hours. In February I laid off a third of my staff. Every store in the country laid off staff. And for the rest of the time that I was with that company my performance was considered not acceptable.”

“I didn’t really feel it that much.”

“We were in the same boat. It didn’t really touch us personally. I know friends whose partners, they lost jobs and they had to find new work but, really, it was just the cost of living.”

“I made about three times more money because of it. When they’re worried, they tend to get more gluttonous ... [worked in the sex trade].”

“I was affected to some degree but, then again, I was already in my own mini recession anyway. Single mom. I was already entered into that zone of being a have not, so I’d gone from the capitalist world and making money and then I had a child and being a single mom and having to get social assistance. So when the recession came on I was ready for it. I cut up all my credit cards. I started paying cash. Ended up with bad credit. I’ve had to learn to beat the system.”

“I think I need to talk to you.” *[everyone laughs]*

“We’re very much in recession right now.”

“I’ve lived in third world countries and it’s all about your attitude. When you get to a point where you realize the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer and the gap is widening, you have to sit on one side of the fence. My parents are wealthy and they absolutely didn’t get it when I had my daughter and became a single mother.”

What child care arrangements did you do?

“I was home with my daughter and son till my daughter was four and he was two. That helped a lot. I dropped them off at a daycare. For both it was \$1,150 a month and I paid

\$200. It's based on how much you make. Then you become the working poor. Next thing you know they say she's making more money."

"You want to make sure they're going to have fun, you can get there."

"I have twins. I'm home. I work part-time and do a little contract work when I can get it. It just didn't make sense for me to put my kids in daycare. Between me and my husband it would just bankrupt us, literally. So I stayed home with my girls. During the day, we live in the west end, which is such a densely populated area. We have a lot of free programming for kids, so during our week we go to the library for free story time. And we go to the various community centres. They have playtime where there are lots of toys and drop in. I get to meet moms, so I'm not totally isolated. And I use a lot of the parks. Of course I want to stay home but having my children at 35 and working very hard at university to be able to ... I grew up, my mom, we were raised on welfare. So it was very important for me to take care of myself. For me not to work because I can't afford daycare, the needs of women are just not supported by the state."

"I have a four-and-a-half year old and one to come. I was with [my daughter] until she turned one and then my mom was with her for the following year and a half, and that was really great. We were very lucky to have both grandmas here. I did support my mom to do that, she took an early pension. Now she's been in preschool across the street but first she was there Tuesdays and Thursdays. And when she turned three we started full time because she just wanted to be with more kids and our preschool is like full time preschool. You can drop her off at 8 and pick her up at 6. There's no waiting list. We're very lucky. It's still a lot of money, but when you think we can both go to work and drop her off and pay \$700 and she's there all day and she has amazing teachers, it's a really great value for us. And we don't qualify for subsidies."

"I think there's something special about mom being with the children."

"Absolutely."

"My son's five and we didn't qualify for any subsidies and it wasn't the plan for me to stay home, but I would just be paying for daycare. And then there would be your transportation costs. And it just didn't make sense that I would be dropping off for someone else to be raising [him] during the days. And we live on one income and it's been really right down to the penny. There's not money for any extras and we have to live off of cash. The problem we had was finding the child care, because it doesn't seem like there's anything out there. Or you'd have to get a nanny."

"My kids were from three different countries. Russia ... there was no welfare system or anything. You don't work, you don't eat. So everybody worked. When my son was born, it was getting worse. There was not much food. My second kid was born in the U.S. Pre-kindergarten program, which you can send your kid to [for] free. My understanding is child care is cheaper there (U.S.). It's not heavily subsidized, so nobody charges as much. Third child. I did many different things. I was living in Kitts when he was two and the

price was ... it was ridiculous. I thought, 'I'm still not going to pay for daycare'. I found a daycare in a Filipino home. I started feeling my son's adopted by this Filipino woman. He got the nurturing that he needed and then I got to work but then I realized I wasn't seeing my child. And it wasn't rewarding. I thought, 'I'll try opening a daycare in my place' and I tried it out for a year. I tried lots of different things, then I moved. Too expensive. Then I put him in a church daycare and that was more affordable. [I] applied for a daycare subsidy. I still have it. The reason I got it was I kept trying to work and as a single parent."

Struggle to balance finding a place for your child?

"I remember I couldn't go back to work full time because I would be so exhausted. On the other hand the wait lists are high. Unless you're really lucky or smart and you sign up way in advance. You're just kind of left on your own."

"A lot of the wait list starts the day of conception. They felt like they had no choice, they had to stay because of the daycare situation. It was a luxury. They had to because they couldn't afford the daycare."

"My sister-in-law, she ran a daycare and had 6 to 8 others stay with her. I think what's really nice for my brother David. They've got four children and she's a stay home mom and it's good for the nurturing of the children."

"If I made the decision to have a child I would definitely want to be in a position that I would have the amount of money to get a nanny to come into my house or something like that. Obviously in my position right now that's not. But it would definitely be very rational decision to have a child."

How much young kids learn before school?

"80%."

"Mathematics you can get your kids to read."

"You know, I have to say, my family is Swedish, so I do know they delay everything and children learn through play. When the brain's ready to learn it will just pick it up. Just being nurtured and doing things that are stimulating."

"I know they learn a lot during the first two years."

"I heard that the cutoff is three years for learning languages."

Reaction to quote about early learning

"I believe the beginning of it. I think that definitely children learn much faster than the rest of us. When you come into the world you don't know anything. You can't think in

words. Your brain... But I don't believe organized learning experiences are necessary for that. I have a friend who, her only structured learning is, she spent Sundays studying math with her dad. She is incredibly functional and independent and mature. And she's one of the healthiest people that I know."

"The key word is influence."

"What you're reading, what comes to mind for me is not just educational -- because everything is intertwined at that age. Everything that happens in a child's life is education. When the child is born, the brain is a sponge. So how do you define education vs. just life?"

"I was just thinking about organized knowledge. To me, that looks like some kind of classroom setting, but the group setting, the teacher explaining something, instructing them, do this puzzle. It's more organized, as opposed to ... everything we do, we talk to our child, we go have dinner in a restaurant, how to behave, that's also learning."

"I don't believe in extremes. For our daughter, she has a certain personality, but I think learning in many different ways is very useful. And then the child finds more unstructured or structured ways. But everything should be provided to a child in moderation."

"But when you have your baby, as parents we're all educators."

Is it something that any parent can offer their child on their own?

"They need to learn from other people the same ages."

"I think it's good families get support from other families in the community because some parents don't have the skills. It's just true. But as long as it's just play and made fun I think that would be really beneficial."

"There was some time there when I was very isolated. Go crazy. And it's not fun anymore."

"And you just can't do it everyday."

"But sometimes you just don't have the choice. Sometimes there is nothing there."

"That's why I like the play. We exchange information. I get a break. I take my kids to a safe environment that's been planned for children's play. I think some very important learning opportunities occur in this environment. They learn the norms of play. They may not learn if I just take them to the park. They have to learn how to interact with other children. They also learn how to transition from activity to activity."

To what extent does that exist?

“I talked to a lot of suburban moms. Although living in the west end is very expensive, the fact is, because we live in a densely populated area there’s more funding for those outreach programs. In a week we go to two libraries, we go to the Gordon house which is a public private facility. Supported by the Salvation Army. Cole harbour. And that’s all within 20 minutes walking distance.”

“Strong start. There are just programs to get kids, it’s almost like preschool. but it’s to get kids. Quite a high percentage of children aren’t prepared.”

“They offer it through the elementary schools. They have it at my son’s school.”

“There’s not one in my neighborhood.”

“There aren’t any on the west side of Vancouver.”

Other places?

“France. It’s all inclusive. It’s just an accepted thing.”

“Germany, Sweden. More of a full-time care with food and education. I was born in Bosnia. You have full cafeteria breakfast lunch, warm meals, everything. And it’s subsidized heavily.”

Quebec?

“I believe it’s superior to our system and it’s modeled on the French system.”

“\$8 a day [*corrected* \$7] it’s a full day.”

“It’s affordable.”

“It’s not considered a luxury.”

“We don’t have a choice here. And many of us are also priced out of it. Do I like staying at home? But it’s literally like work.”

“Most moms I know at home your mental health suffers.”

“I should have moved there in the first place.”

“Why don’t we have this here? Why is it so upside down? And it’s not just daycare. It’s arts and other things.”

“I think capitalism has run rampant here. There’s so many poverty pimps and people who are willing to take advantage of any situation.”

“There’s people making a lot of money off the fact that we need daycare. Do you have any idea how much they’re making? They are absolutely cleaning up right now. Let’s open daycare centres and let’s exploit ...”

“They have Roman Catholic roots. I do believe that has something to do with it.”

“Pure greed.”

“We’re talking about between the money that comes from Ottawa into Quebec ... for politicians. We don’t have good choices.”

“I’ve found the community can put as much pressure as they want and it doesn’t make much of a difference.”

Reaction to one pager?

“It was the flexibility. 7:30 till 6 all year round. There’s such limited spaces for before and after school. Parents have a choice, options. And families are supported.”

“Two thirds of this document talks about flexibility, which is great. And 7:30 to 6. It’s more cost effective. I had questions about the last points. Pre-, post-natal supports -- it’s a little bit vague. What exactly is this child care program? What about the learning? What do they mean by links to special needs treatment?”

“I thought that was very vague.”

“Isn’t that often what you get when you think you’re getting support? They go I’m glad you came, here’s a computer.”

“When I read this it seemed to me a very holistic approach to supporting children and their families. Or if the family needs support, there would be professionals who would assess what the needs are. When you’re dealing with schools and stuff, you’ve got teachers who are so overloaded, even if they suspect if there’s an issue they can’t do anything about it. They teach to the portion of the population in the classroom that does succeed.”

“What it would do for me? It would enable me to be a more effective parent. In that, as a woman, I feel it’s really important for my girls to have a model of someone who works and can be self-sufficient. My husband and I are having problems, so it’s not like we’ll continue on together. It’s nice to be able to work and provide them with structured learning opportunities. It does fulfill a certain part of me, but it’s not the be all end all.”

“The flexibility. It’s nice. You can drop your kid off but I had to laugh at fee based extended day, because you’re not paying enough as it is already. Maybe I misunderstood it then. I did like language services and employment training services. The area I live in, I’m in the minority now. This would have been great. The daycare I went to she was really good.”

“I think this is great but my question is what happens after? It seems for primary school but what happens after? You need this to continue. For it to be cut off all of a sudden -- children still need to be cared for. Continuous learning, like, over the summer, because work doesn’t stop unless you work in the school system.”

“Kids will come at early age. Like learning because it’s school, they leave. I like the idea. I like that the earlier kids get exposed to the structure the better. You have to supplement your own skills with the skills of specialists.”

“I really like it conceptually. I have some reservations about really structured learning for children but I think that even given my personal opinion I think this is fantastic. And I can do whatever I want. I would rather pay taxes for this than some F35s.”

“ I had so many reactions, because my son’s 11 now. I think this is definitely a superior way to operate a system. And when you think about it, because of our economy, it requires people to work harder to have a decent standard of living. So the more help we can get and healthy environment we can have for our children, the more we can work. So I’m all for this type of program. This has been talked about.”

“When I grew up we finished work till 2 or 3 o’clock and sat with mom and dad and did homework.”

“Now mom and dad are working.”

Why do we not demand a system for children going right to?

“Well they call it free kindergarten. It’s not free when you factor in before and after daycare. It’s like a couple of hundred dollar difference. They would be able to work and be emancipated and self actualized.”

“The economy, in order to own a house in Vancouver, that’s like a pipe dream for most of us. And you really need to have two adults working in order to possibly make that happen. Families require this if they want to work to own their own home. In this country it shouldn’t be out of reach for so many.”

“Think about how many parents are not working because they can’t take care of their kids. And every parent not working is not paying taxes because of this.”

“My concern is, I remember getting into Grade 8 and showing up at high school and being tiny again. That’s important because there’s a really big difference between a kid who’s 12 and 3. Bit of a red flag.”

“This whole concept of age segregation is 100 years old.”

Would the child benefit?

“I think maybe socializing but not necessarily education.”

“It depends on the kid too, like my daughter, she’s hyperactive. Have to stay close to her. I was afraid something would happen.”

“I don’t think in this document we have enough information about the educational aspect. It’s just talking about the stability, time and resources.”

“There is research. The answer to this question is yes.”

“If you look at people who have their kids in daycare, it’s full-time. Then when they start the school system, it’s only half day. If you only ever gave them half day it would be the norm.”

“If you’re a parent that puts your child in full time, if you kept your child at home it’s going to be devastating to that child to transition.”

“If you look at schools, private school, their kid’s really fantastic, but it’s \$1,100 a month to pay for daycare.”

“That’s why there’s a strong start program to help those families.”

“I think a lot of lower income families, their children experience a lot more fellowship because they have so much more in common. The parents and the siblings. You have to bond together. The siblings have to step up and it kind of bonds people together and it creates a really rich learning environment.”

Reaction to video

“That’s the kind of learning. When you said structured before I think that’s play-based learning.”

“I liked the last part. They had walks in nature.”

“There’s no underestimation of the child and their capabilities. Give them the responsibility and they’ll find their own way.”

“If you give kids more trust than they expect ,hey will give you back more and that’s what they’re doing there. It’s phenomenal.”

“It really resonated. People are really warm. They do a lot of activities. But there was more in there, involving children.”

“[Parents], they feel like they can trust the system and trust these teachers and like the gentleman said I’m able to work. It really gives you flexibility.”

“Such a great role model to know that you can trust. Kids will want to please you anyway. They copy what you do what you say. I was lucky my daycare was pretty much like that.”

Every parent has access?

“No.”

“I know someone who was looking for child care and said it was incredible how people were fighting for child care not even regulated. Two places with 18 kids.”

“That’s disgusting.”

“I thought the video was awesome. In an organized setting it was better than what I imagined. If we had something like that here it would be a shock going to elementary school. Our schools should be modeled more after this. Especially trusting children with responsibility. Kids are very capable. If I had the money I would, at this point in my life, probably stay at home. If they’re my kids I want to be the one who’s spending 8 hours 10 hours 12 hours a day with them. I certainly wouldn’t want to do that by myself I would find other parents in my community.”

“One of the challenges I’m facing, having worked full time throughout my life, this is really beautiful but I’d never put my child 6 am to 6 pm. How are we treated as women being punished to have to work full time and if we ask for flex work we’re looked down on and are not able to be as successful as men in the same position. A problem in our society.”

“Many of us would be happy to work a 28 hour work week.”

“I appreciated the trust in the children and I thought that was a very different cultural approach to the way we see children here, but I loved the fact that children stayed together as a cohort. If you want to talk about healthy educational environment, it’s community building and it really builds on continuity and self development. Even thinking about it I really get chills because I have a lot of issues with the education system in general now. I see some powerful attributes that I would like to subject my daughters to ...”

What would be the impact?

“Gives some choice and freedom. If you want to do something else, there’s a system there for you.”

“First step? Subsidizing and having daycare more available.”

“I think I was cynical, [another participant] thought it would change the culture of the schools more. I hope but ... if we had this program and nothing else changed we’d still be dealing with problems with the transitioning although we might have more resilient kids. Equal pay. Build on the feminist agenda.”

“It would also stimulate our economy.”

“There are systems that are very good and why not take the good from those systems.”

“How is it contributing to our general wellbeing and happiness.”

“Transition to school would be a culture shock.”

“It’s definitely a very comforting thought. In such a home environment instead of school. After a while it would start to have a ripple effect.”

“In order to implement a system like that, you would have to take a really serious look at the education system.”

“90% of my friends who are in their 30s are freaked out. Children are just not on the horizon. There are a lot of women who have maternal instincts and they’re suppressing that.”

The men ...

“It just doesn’t seem like there’s enough money for the same things that even five years ago. I’ve had friends and relatives who have had a difficult time finding employment.”

“I’m one of the other few that’s born and bred here and I remember the ’90s. We’ve had a good provincial and federal government to steer the ship.”

“I’m a grateful person. I’ve never been without a job. I’ve never been without anything in my life. It’s opportunities.”

“Two economies – for the working class person. I don’t have a bad wage but it’s unaffordable for me right now this city. It’s more expensive every year.”

“ I don’t feel like it’s raining money but at the same time we’re so fortunate in Vancouver.”

“If you’re wealthy or in an industry that caters to that you’re doing well if you’re not ...”

Experience of recession?

“Companies are becoming less and less unionized. The city has become more expensive.”

“I have a very secure job in public health care in gerontology.”

“I wasn’t really affected. The post office is recession proof. I know people that were affected but my immediate family not at all.”

“I’ve been fortunate but the company I work with, we had to lay off top key personnel. We did as a company take a big hit and we do get updates on the numbers and there’s less people parking here. Has to do with parking tax increase and rise of HST.”

“Personally, it didn’t really affect him very much but it did affect me. But I always try to take the positive out of it. When the recession hit ... Chevron ... I honestly believed that I had a job there that I was secure and I was there for two years and I went OK I’ve got money in the bank. I get my summer off. I got called back to another company in September. Same wage same benefits. Working under the table is very common.”

“My job is federal so the closest I came, we took the opportunity of low interest rates and bought a trailer.”

Experience of children, child care?

“We were putting them in daycare from time to time to get them used to other children. High-functioning autistic child. She’s working part-time and I’m working full-time. We take advantage of the municipality programs, the drop-ins. It was too expensive at that time. What my wife was saying if I pay the daycare I’m just going to have in my pocket \$400 a month. It isn’t worth it.”

“We do a nanny share. Us and another couple and she comes to our house. We both work full-time. \$15 an hour. The cost was similar across the board. We like the idea and the convenience of having someone at our house. As she gets to be older and we want her to socialize more. But this made sense financially.”

“My son ... I was able to be there for my son every time he got out of school and my wife was on and off contract, we used daycares and grandparents. Daycare out of a person’s home. I’m trying to remember if it was \$70 a day and you pack your own lunch. But it’s cheaper than my wife staying home and not having that income.”

“I was lucky with my son. I worked for customs at the time and when I was on afternoons, thank god he wasn’t a morning guy. We’d both get up ... until he was almost

three when I was on afternoons. With my daughter I changed jobs and I didn't have that experience unfortunately but we'd visit her at her grandmother's."

"When my daughter was young it was more of the fact my wife had a real good job and I was basically, we had some money from passed down family money and I stayed at home with my daughter. It was a blast. It was like Mr. Mom. There was a Chinese lady down the street. Because of resources, that's one thing I'll always do. We took my daughter to an after school fun for the kids and they just had a great time. They all grew up from five years old to kindergarten."

Daycare in home setting or elsewhere?

"Vancouver Sun just had a whole series of daycares in the lower mainland ... I'd never ever put her in someone's home."

"It's just somebody that wants the money. They don't really care about the kids. It was all about the money."

Children need a lot of stimulus and supports at different ages ... satisfied with options?

"What do you mean by accessible and affordable?"

"We have funding for the government and it's nothing we just put the money on the agencies and they do everything (autistic child) the money's not enough. We were spending that money and it's not working out."

Does the state/society do enough?

"I think so. I've heard about the difficulty people have with preschool registering preschool when they've conceived. School system is so heavily politicized. We got into for next to no trouble and it wasn't expensive. I read those horror stories. We wanted to do it for the socialization. We're fortunate, they don't have special needs so I can't speak to that and I'm not a big believer in the government doing everything. There's some businesses government belongs in and for others there's private sector."

"Ideally the government is to provide to do more to make it more accessible ideally parents would be there that's the ideal situation but ..."

How much kids can learn?

"They grasp knowledge because everything's new."

"First two years ... their ability to learn for the rest of their life."

"It's something like 50 times easier from the time you're 1 and 6 to learn a language."

“Being exposed to a second language.”

“Every hour she’s shocking me with a demonstration of something she knows and I had no idea. My wife and I are doing everything to stimulate her. We do whatever we can because now’s the time it’s now or never at this stage.”

Reaction to quote?

“It can be totally true but it depends on what the organized activities are if it’s quality they could benefit immensely.”

“What happens is I have an eight year old and he’s still learning and ... they forget the lateral thinking. I’m trying to fix that but it’s too late.”

Organized early learning opportunities?

“Kindergarten for two-year-olds.”

“Whether it’s organized, like preschool, or you as a parent making a concentrated effort .. our kids benefit from going to adult things and participating in conversation with adults. I find both of them have a vocabulary that far outstrips most of their peers. I think that came from that, putting in a little extra effort.”

Can any parent offer their child everything they need in terms of early learning?

“It depends on the quality if someone is a very good parent and patient and creative then yes. Assuming there’s socialization, you’re taking them out to friends but it depends on the quality of the alternatives and the quality of the parent.”

“Every parent could, they should, that would be great. Circumstances are so varied with people. A lot of people aren’t able to provide that.”

“I’m looking at the variability. With me when I was in school. I was one of those ADHD kids. Not a lot of stuff stimulates me but wit my daughter. We’d get her spelling. She’s an honour roll student right from Grade 1.”

“You could stick them in front of the television and have them watch movies or interact with people.”

“I respectfully disagree. No matter how good a parent or educator you are, you’re still an adult. Being there with other kids regardless of another educator or parent being there they learn to discuss and negotiate and play. And they’ve got to learn those lines amongst themselves.”

“They learn about sharing and about values. I’ve been around kids they were just with grandma but when it came to sharing and stuff like that it just wasn’t there.”

“I think kids can benefit if the parents are absentee or whatever.”

“Against it comes down to the quality.”

“I don’t like the kindergarten for two-year-olds it strikes me as so competitive. It just strikes me that life is turning into a competition for kids. I’d rather they be able to think and create and discuss and be smart and apply themselves ... the whole competition.”

“You try and create an overachiever right away put that drive in them/ let them be kids for Christ sakes.”

“In sports they’re pushing kids too much.”

What exists in other parts of Canada?

“I’m aware there’s a whole spectrum in a range for example in the states you get six weeks of parental leave and that’s it you’re on your own.”

“Quebec ... they have a lot of supports for their kids.”

“If you really look into the opportunities that are available there’s so much resources that are attainable in the lower mainland. You can find places that are going to be reasonable. You can’t get a coffee for \$7 a day.”

“It should be available to people who need it.”

“I know some people who took that course for child care and they’re working in a facility with 10 kids and they’re always sick.”

“When you say there’s access to so many daycares I guess the thing is the quality of all those daycares.”

“Stimulate the economy.”

“The last thing we need is another government boondoggle that’s out of our money. From now on everybody should pay about \$53 a month.”

“You can choose to have children but you can’t choose to have cancer get laid off get divorced so these programs can help.”

“Get exposed to ideas, nutrition, may create a more productive citizen.”

“And there are programs for people at risk I’m not saying don’t do those.”

“We can stop doing things like the stadium and really put the money on other things.”

Why in Quebec?

“Personally I’ve never heard about it.”

“It’s cultural.”

“Who’s it provided by -- the provincial government? So that’s it, we have a different provincial government.”

“Still get a lot of federal dollars going into the provincial government. I guess that’s what they’re paying for some of this stuff.”

“I don’t think we’ve been brought up with the choice. It hasn’t been put on the table has it?”

“I completely really sometimes wish that I was taxed a little bit more and that I could pay a little bit more.”

“I think there are people we should be helping but I don’t think making another government dept all this money we pay for taxes to make these big conglomerates. And I work for the government. Top heavy and I just don’t see it being done better.”

Reaction to handout?

“I’m not sure structured for kids that young ... all encompassed under one umbrella, I think there’d be more bonds and interactions that is definitely better than parents shuttling their kids to and from. It would be completely practical.”

“I think the word utopian, some of it sounds really nice. Economies of scale, there’s a lot of parents, quite frankly, that will blow off parenting. It makes it easier for those who are kind of inclined. There’d be all kinds of issues with the teachers union. Some of it I see is positive and at risk communities. Right from the pre-natal stuff all the way through. But my father- and mother-in-law made a life for themselves and didn’t know a word of English now people come and we’re paying for them to get resources. There’s so many things we really need that aren’t getting done. It’s just another big drain.”

“Economy of scale. Bring everything under one roof. I hadn’t considered the structure and that is concerning. The hours, 7:30 to 6 -- I tried to hire a nanny. She wanted to start at 9. And she wanted to be done by 4:30. The hours are far more realistic for what parents need the flexibility. I’m concerned about the terminology like one single program. There needs to be a lot of variety and multiculturalism. Just like in the school system in Vancouver right now. I do have concerns there are special needs students and it takes away from everyone. There’s a lot of drainings and not a lot of resources.”

“The most important part of it, getting parents to be able to spend more quality time with their children, whatever budgeting or whatever it could be the bottom line is he wants to spend time with his kid when he’s not burned out from work.”

“It’s an era that’s kind of gone. There’s not a stay at home mom.”

“You need two incomes to get by.”

“To be able to get people to be able to spend time. To me society is sad now.”

“I can respect what everyone said, especially the schedules. When I see things that are government words like structure, I get cynical.”

“I live in a working class area and it fosters community ties. It’s the most cohesive community I’ve ever lived in. There’s a lot of resources, a lot of supports and there’s a lot of quality of life if you can put that kind of model in the schools. I’ve seen supports work.”

“Early education is very important. But keep it simple. Don’t create a big administrative thing besides that they should run it with real people, create small units. Don’t create a monster.”

Impact if something like this existed?

“They’d have an influx of citizens from surrounding areas.”

“A lot of people are greedy. The people that are rich and can afford this stuff will come. The rich people are going to come after it.”

“People who live here have the resources. I’d like to see this in New Westminster or Coquitlam.”

“Not everybody in Vancouver owns a million dollar house.”

“Giving people the options and they can afford the other options. I’m philosophically opposed to it and I’d still probably do it.”

“It doesn’t have to be \$7.”

“It could be sliding scale.”

Would children benefit?

“Depends on the family. Quality.”

“It might not be worse but it would be cheaper.”

“Talk about the expertise under one house and you might identify problems sooner. But you’ll be taxed. At one point is enough enough? At one point they’re going to start with the people with the most troubles but soon they’re going to have everybody on the list to make themselves a big empire.”

Economic impact?

“I think there would be an economic net benefit overall.”

“Decreased effect on the criminal justice system. Early intervention for kids with problems and good role modeling about drugs-- all of these things drive a better result for each kid.”

Reaction to video?

“I thought it was less structured, so that was good. I think it’s great. I, however, don’t see how that would happen. It would take a lot of resources to make that happen.”

“I like that they put some faith in the kids and put some expectations on them. And I liked they mixed the ages, within reason. They were expected to show leadership as long as it’s monitored.”

“I guess in the video when they were doing the krokodil part they looked very engaged. And you could see the relief in the faces of the younger parents who stated that the system worked out very well for them.”

“I loved it. I thought it was very appropriate to their ages. I really liked the vertical stacking. I think it would be a huge benefit to their development and huge benefit to their society. Criminal justice, health care. There’s a lot of absentee parents, even when they are home.”

“What I see is ... keeping the kids together and then they feel comfortable around those certain people. They kind of grew up together.”

Impact on our society, parents, children

“Like university health care, eventually it would become a source of pride. Equity. We’d see hopefully right now the kids being born ever have a lower life expectancy than the parents. This might teach a lot of life skills. Also parents are so busy.”

“I see some positives. One thing I’ve seen in my own son’s school is may be a little potential for xenophobia. I think 20 years from now you’d have a whole generation of little socialists. There’d be an expectation that this is the right way. There’s always an agenda. Teaching to the lowest common denominator is reality in lower Vancouver.”

“Have a lot more socialism and that would be a good thing.”

“It would make them more cohesive. Kids are growing together, the same values.”

“I’m conflicted because, yes, the work life balance is always a big challenge. We barely have time to work out. But things do get missed. Going out for dinners, going to the gym, and with this it might improve that, but the temptation would be to leave them there a bit longer. They make it a lot too easy to lose out. And sometimes it’s OK to make that sacrifice. The flexibility is wonderful. I’m just concerned a lot of parents would turn it into an extended babysitter.”

“You can’t beat for most parents the child.”

“Some people shouldn’t be parents.”

“Lots of people shouldn’t be parents.”

“Communities are connected anytime you can close that gap it creates a healthier society.”

How to sell it?

“That’d be a tough job. Testimonials like that. Show people what it can be, what it means to people’s lives.”

“Quality daycares. There’s a big need in the province.”

“But people know that now it doesn’t mean a thing. They don’t want to pay more taxes for it.”

“Identify what they like about it and get supporters from both sides of the spectrum and say this isn’t a left or a right issue. There isn’t an agenda. So you don’t have the teachers’ federation running the show and saying this is how we’re doing it.”

“The abilities or the after effects of children going into the program.”

“It’s going to cost you less in health care taxes, it’s going to tax you less. People are selfish. If you can show people without kids what the benefit to them is.”

“Tax the rich.”

“So many people complain about tax. Well you know what? It’s just part of life. We have a great country here.”

“If you’ve got less expenses on health care and criminal justice and building on already existing infrastructure it could be a business case.”

“And this is a huge investment if you think of how many people would be needed. You’re talking about hundreds of thousands of new employees on the provincial tax system.”

“We’re not very visionary these days we don’t really try to accomplish great things.”