Two Recent Commentaries from CPRN

Tuesday, May 11, 2004 – Two recent contributions to the op-ed pages of the *Globe and Mail* will be of interest to *e-network* subscribers.

In early April, Jane Jenson, Director of CPRN's Family Network, and Canada Research Chair in Citizenship and Governance at the Université de Montréal, made the case (yet again!) for accessible early childhood education centres (ECEC).

Her commentary, ***Parents, Starting From Zero, Could Use a Public Boost***, reiterates the findings of CPRN's 1999 study, *The Best Policy Mix for Canada's Young Children*, that for children to thrive, three conditions must be met: adequate family income, good parenting, and supportive communities. Each is necessary, but none is sufficient on its own.

Jenson builds the case for support to parents in the form of accessible quality ECEC. She points to OECD studies that show Canada is lagging far behind other members who are investing in ECEC for both social and economic reasons. The trend, the OECD says, is to provide at least two years of free, publicly funded ECE before the start of compulsory schooling. Canada has resisted this trend in spite of the evidence of its crucial value. Jenson asks why.

You can access or download a copy of her commentary by clicking here.

Maxwell Commentary

At the end of April, a furor erupted in the Ontario Legislature over the provincial government's efforts to involve citizens in its pre-budget deliberations. Those efforts included commissioning CPRN's Public Involvement Network to undertake a citizens' dialogue in accordance with its well established practice.

The partisan exchange in the Legislature threatened to overshadow what was an important experiment in citizen engagement. In response, Judith Maxwell, CPRN's President, prepared an op-ed commentary for the *Globe and Mail*, highlighting the growing role of citizen engagement in modern democracies around the world.

Her argument, ***Hear! Hear! For Citizen Input***, stresses the appropriateness of government efforts to engage citizens in difficult policy choices. Maxwell describes the methodology and process of a typical citizens' dialogue as practiced by CPRN, and describes the potential outcomes. These include, the provision of a framework of values and principles to guide public decision-making, the conditions citizens attach to their approval of various policy choices, and a renewed commitment to take part in the political process – an important outcome for our tired democracy.

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