
Setting a vision for early childhood services: an international perspective

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The OECD *Starting Strong* evaluations

From 1998-2004, 20 countries invited the OECD to review ECEC policy & provision

- **Australia** 
- **Austria** 
- **Belgium Fl** 
- **Belgium Fr** 
- **Canada** 
- **Czech Rep.** 
- **Denmark** 
- **Finland** 
- **France** 
- **Germany** 
- **Hungary** 
- **Ireland** 
- **Italy** 
- **Korea** 
- **Mexico** 
- **Netherlands** 
- **Norway** 
- **Portugal** 
- **Sweden** 
- **UK** 
- **USA** 

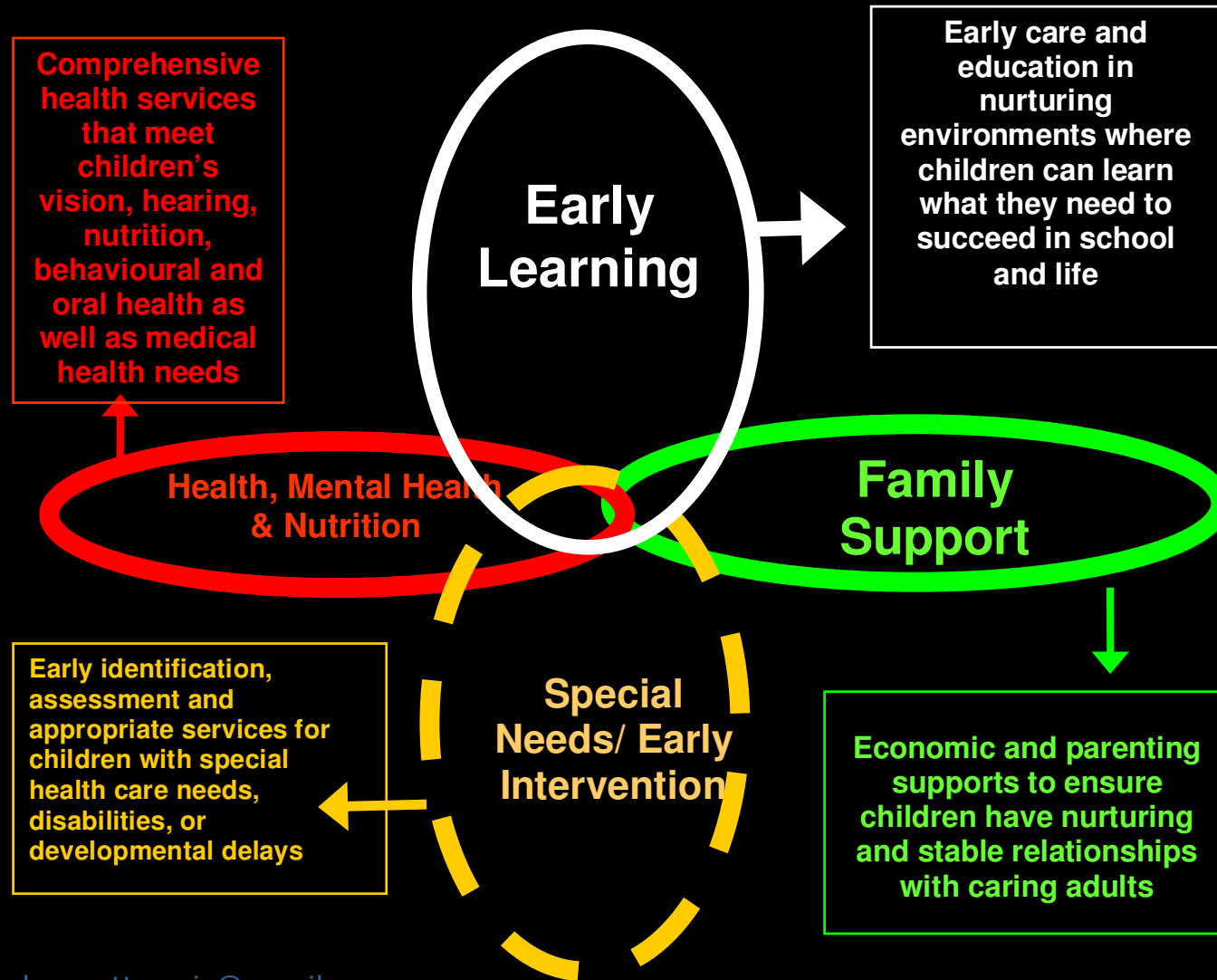
Overview of the presentation

- **The complexity of the early childhood field**
- **Various rationales are used to justify ECE policies, the organisation of services and financing:**
 - **Early education as nation building** – colonial period... impact on ethnic populations... preparation for school (France, UK...)
 - **Early education in the service of the economy** – closing the gap, economic competition...
 - **Early education as social policy** – closing the gap, current targeted programmes...
- **Tentative conclusions – moving from political policies to theoretical (e.g. how children learn) and egalitarian, local democracy solutions.**

We are speaking of complex systems



With comprehensive services in which marginalised parents and children should have agency



A complex task

- **There are many parameters, multiple aims, different stakeholders, different children and families...**
- **The field is rooted in history - in particular concepts, vocabulary and practices;**
- **The vision needs to meet current realities and future challenges;**
- **It needs to be decided democratically and implemented locally ... otherwise (early) education becomes a consumer product... rather than a relationship, first to a person...**
- **The vision needs to be broad enough to be implemented in different ways among different populations and through different curricula**

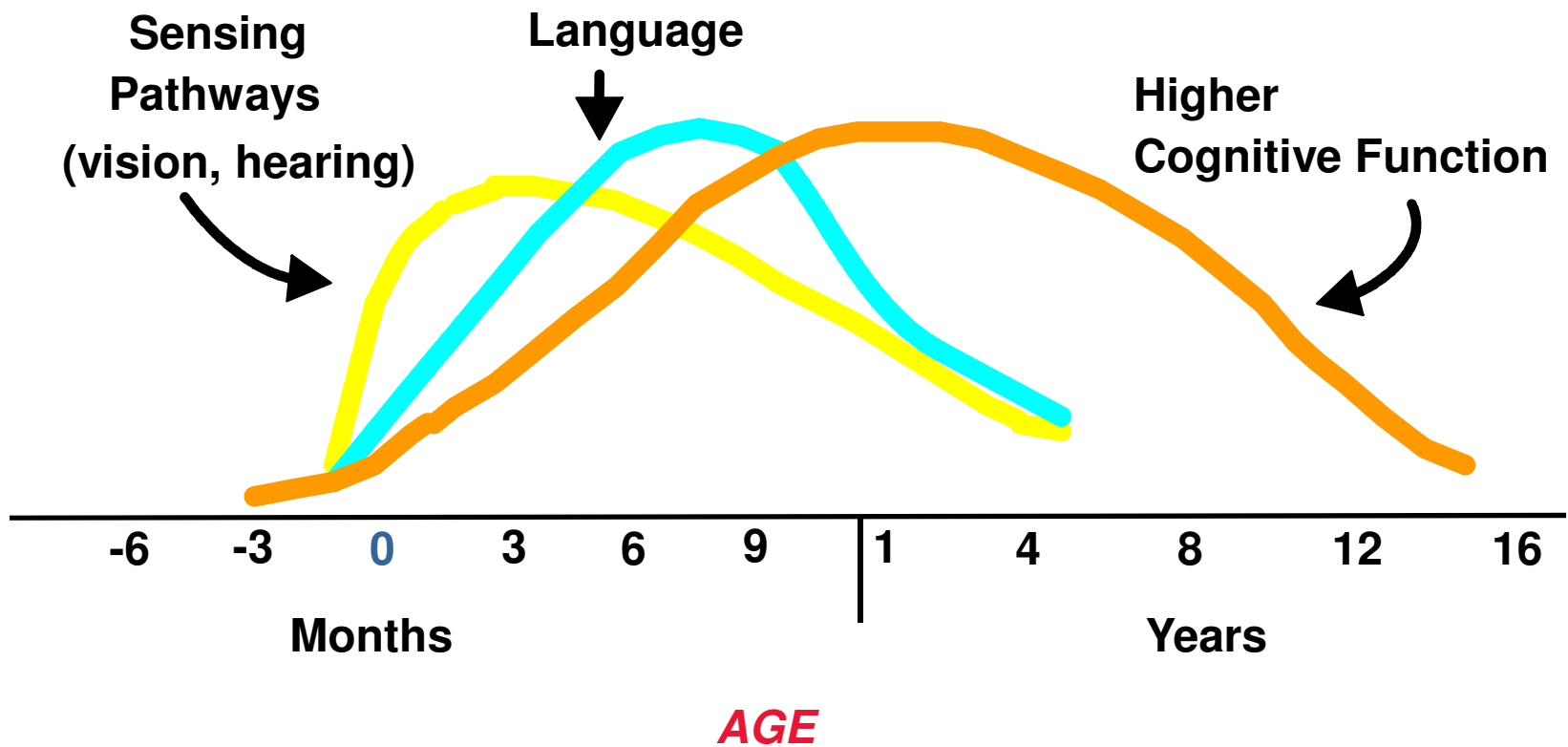
Some approaches to the field

1. Early education as nation-building

- **Source in 19th century Europe and extended to the colonies where, in general, education remained national not local**
- **Its aim – to introduce ‘modern’ ideas and practices among young children and disseminate the use of English, French, etc. Rarely presented as nation-building but rather as giving better educational opportunities to the children of the working classes // ethnic populations (masking the political as education). Health, well-being and holistic development of secondary importance - 0-3s mostly ignored**
- **A preparation for school, for literacy and numeracy, to build a literate and compliant citizenry...**
- **Strong focus on imperial history and values: “*Nos ancêtres les Gaulois*” (The Gauls, our ancestors)... and the suppression of diversity in language and culture.**
- **Rigidity in curriculum and pedagogical methods; little outreach and adaptation to the needs of marginalised children. Judgmental...**
- **Still survives in some centralised national systems – **taught** by primary teachers with high child-staff ratios... the listening, compliant child...**

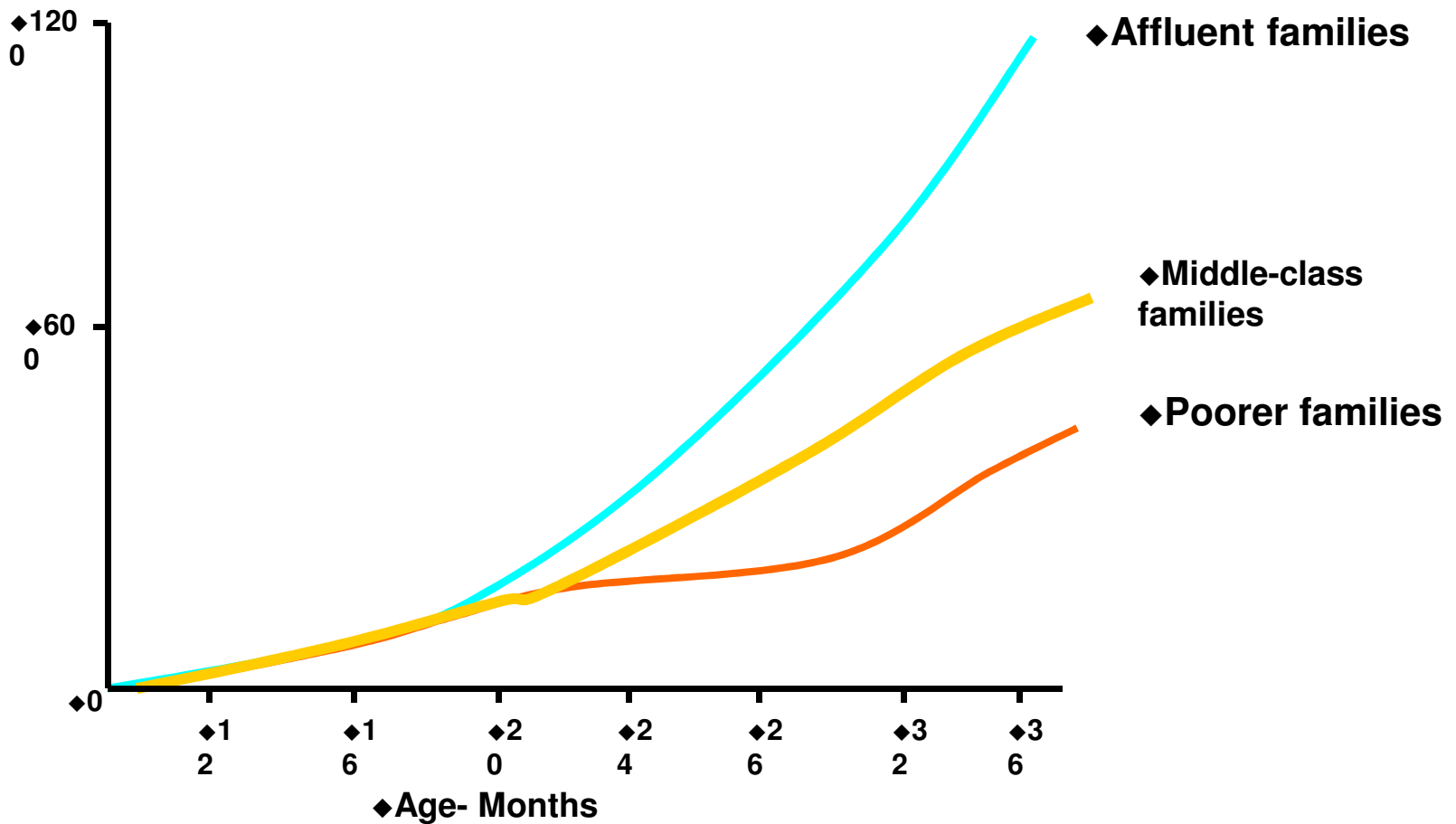
The period from pre-natal to 3 is the foundation stage of adult health, well-being, socialisation and language development

0-3 years: an optimal moment to supervise the health of children and, through inter-action, to support the sensory, cognitive, and language development



Vocabulary Growth – First 3 Years

◆ Vocabulary



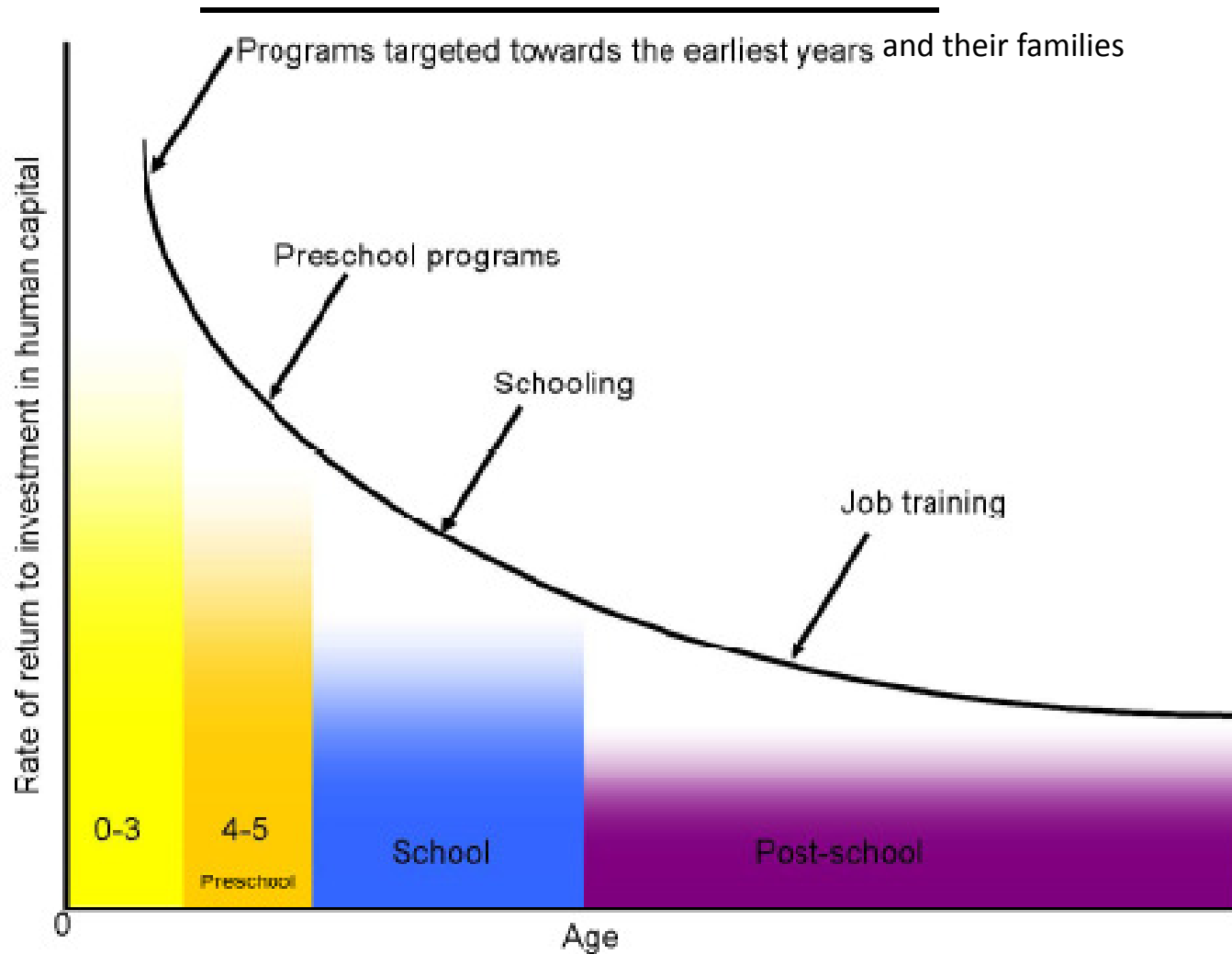
◆ Source: B.Hart & T. Risley. Meaningful Differences in Everyday Experiences of Young American Children, 1995

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2. Early education in the service of the economy

- **Linked strongly to the older model of nation-building, education is perceived predominantly as serving the economy** (vs. the notion of a liberal education - an approach to learning that gives a broad knowledge of the wider world and helps children and students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills)
- **In the economic vision, early childhood services useful to bring women into the workforce, to give 'an early start' in education to children and eventually, to have a better qualified (than others) workforce. Education ministries focus on early instruction (early literacy, numeracy and science) and ignore the years from birth to 3 or 4.**
- "We want one class of persons to have a liberal education and we want another class of persons, a very much larger class of necessity, to forgo the privileges of a liberal education." --Woodrow Wilson, 1909
- President Bush in his 2006 State of the Union address requested, as part of a new American Competitiveness Initiative, that students should take more math and science courses and such courses must be "rigorous enough to compete with other nations." (State of the Union Address, 2006).
- Making the earlier stages of public education and 'incompetent teaching' responsible for difficulties in competing with the new economies is, in the words of the education historian, Laurence Cremin (1985), "a crass effort to direct attention away from those truly responsible for doing something about competitiveness and to lay the burden instead on the schools. It is a device that has been used repeatedly in the history of American education". (Starting Strong II)

Heckman's curve - Rates of return to human capital investments across all ages

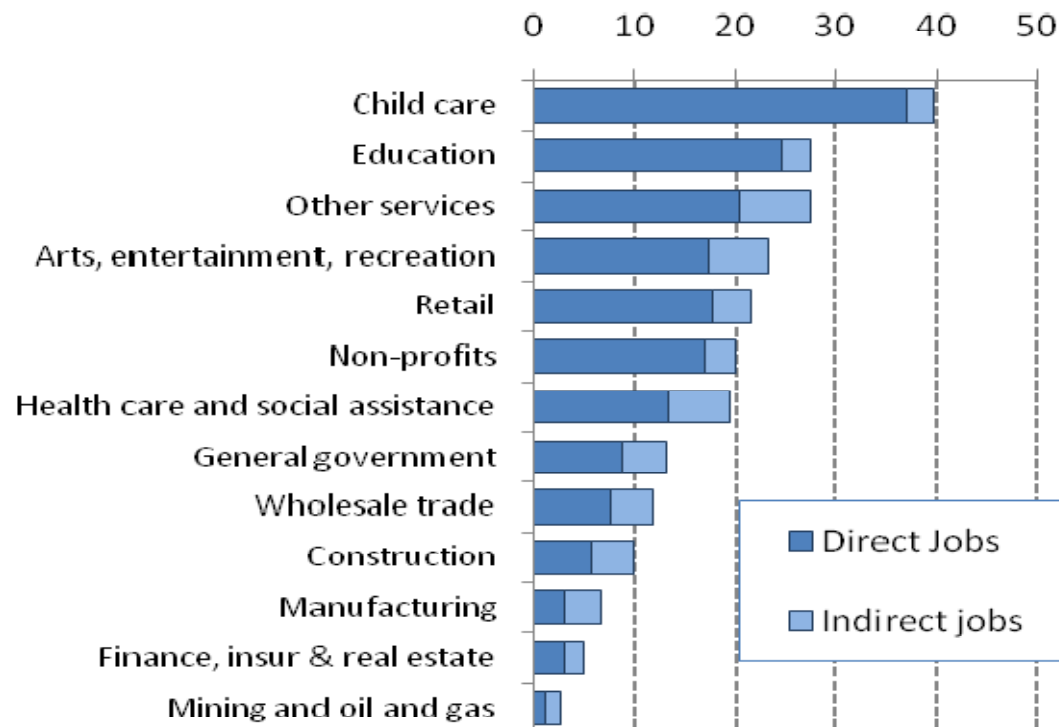


3. 'Childcare' as a solution to labour market needs

- The new service economy requires better educated workers and flexible working hours... **female employment**. Condemned after the Second World War, now desired. Little consideration of other policies that might serve the well-being and interests of women
- Many advantages for governments and employers: improved employment/population ratio; larger tax base; better educated, more compliant, and lower wage workforce...
- At the same time, **public** investment in infrastructure, the workforce and community services may be weak. Childcare is considered to be in the private sphere, a family affair. Women work double-time...
- The market is invited to supply child care services... but because of the profit motive, may be opposed to regulation and quality improvement... The main (announced) goal is to keep children safe (litigation) and respond to the wishes of parents
- The three ways of making profit in this field: train and pay staff poorly, increase the child-staff ratios, focus on middle class areas where parents can pay increased fees...

VERY attractive to governments a large job-creation sector...

The early childhood sector is a privileged field for job creation. In the last decade, it has been a major creator of jobs in North America, not just in education alone but in the health, catering, food preparation, janitorial, transport, etc. services which are involved in the sector. A recent Canadian Economic Forecasting Services report (2009) shows that for every million dollars invested, almost 40 jobs are created within the early learning sector.



Source: Child Care Human Resources Sector Council, Workforce Shortages Socio-economic Effects Report, p. 31

4. Early childhood education as social policy: 'closing the gap'

- **That is, as closing the education achievement gap between marginalised and majority children. Tends to mask the political (social inequality) as the technical (Biesta, 2007; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2007)**
- **Bring the marginalised children into cognitively oriented programs early enough and as night follows the day, they will later achieve in school... Head Start, Sure Start... Perry Pre-school , Abecedarian research...**
- **Integrated, targeted services are used as an anti-poverty strategy (the American, liberal economy vision, within a very unequal society: social containment rather than social solidarity...);**
- **It can work to the age of 6 years... but then come family dysfunction, drug-infested neighbourhoods, second-rate schools, low expectations... Difficult for children from deprived backgrounds to make the link between education and well-being, between education and the labour market.**
- **Ed Zigler – “40 years of believing in magic is enough” ... the democratic deficit**

5. Early childhood services as a public good and the right of children

- Early childhood services are considered by government and people as a public good and a right for all children
- Management and affordable provision a responsibility of government... often, an entitlement to services at the end of parental leave
- Curricula should be broad and democratic, influenced by the CRC. Services strongly influenced by the 3 Ps: Provision, Protection and Participation. – and framed according to the goals of education as defined in the CRC
- Behind such a vision – and the others previously mentioned - lie a set of ideological beliefs:
 - The Nordics are firmly attached to gender equality and equal rights (children are not just mini-citizens with mini-rights)
 - They see the advantages of women working and paying taxes
 - They believe “it is good for young children to be in preschool”, to be educated by trained professionals and to make friends
 - They believe that to function effectively in their society, immigrant children and their parents should learn Swedish and Swedish ways

6. ECS as a moral and political activity at local level

- **In this vision, a more advanced view of democracy and community responsibility is emerging**
- **A major goal of day care services and schools is to ensure to children an understanding of the key practices of participatory democracy, and facilitate an atmosphere of equality and concern for others**
- **Goals and management are community-based with the different stakeholders in dialogue**
- **Basic principles of work: early childhood educators value:**
 - **The protagonism / agency of the child;**
 - **The open and collegial nature of educational work; and**
 - **The centrality of family participation in the educational project.**

Working democratically with young children calls for

- **Democracies based on first, second and third generation human rights and committed to prevention, fairness and citizen entitlement;**
- **Democracies that maximise opportunities for sharing, exchanging and negotiating perspectives and that have rigorous monitoring systems to inform the public;**
- **A welfare state using social protection and inclusion policies to reduce inequality and ensure universal entitlement to services;**
- **Education systems (from nursery to university), based on diversity and plurality, and strongly committed to democratic values;**
- **An education workforce that is well educated and willing to work with diversity and reflection.**

Conclusions

- **All visions of early childhood are deeply influenced by beliefs, giving rise to tensions that are necessary to overcome:**
 - Notions of human rights and fairness... 1st, 2nd and 3rd 'generations' of rights
 - Notions of democracy - central or local control of services or shared... or controlled by market services? What role should parents and families have? What attitudes toward diversity? Toward 'first nation' peoples?
 - Notions of public and private - have young children rights as individuals? Should families with young children receive state help and how (services or cash benefits)?
 - Political tensions- the level of equality to be sought? Should we invest in prevention or remedial services? If government involvement, what share should ECS have? Competition with other economic priorities... should savings be made by cutting back on access? On the qualifications and salaries of staff?
 - Tensions between tradition and research... how young children learn? The early childhood period as the foundation stage of adult health, well-being, socialisation and education...

Setting a vision

- **Develop a democratic vision for early childhood**
 - **That addresses the holistic development of children beginning from before birth to school age**
 - **That considers the role of families, schools, and communities... and the existing needs of women and marginalised groups**
- **Take into account tradition (what is already there... beliefs) and current context (opportunities, challenges...)**
- **Make a strategic plan (timelines, partnerships, governance structures, agency collaboration, program and system standards, data collection, sustainable financing, communications...)**
- **Ensure accountability for results across agencies and between the state and local levels. (Trust in the local level or engage in administrative reform).**
- **Track performance rigorously – not only system and program outcomes but also outcomes for children and families**