

TRACKING EXCELLENCE

The first years following conception are often considered the most important because they are a time of accelerated growth and lay the foundation for future development. Hence the importance of a proper understanding of this crucial stage. But what does “proper understanding” really mean? How can we be sure that what we know is scientifically true?

“The value of a study depends on the quality of the methods used”, according to Dr. Richard E. Tremblay, the Centre’s director and holder of the Canada Research Chair in Child Development at the University of Montreal. “Reliable knowledge is knowledge based on many different empirical studies that point to the same result.”

To be useful, the information the Centre distributes must meet the needs of a whole range of stakeholders, from parents, educators and health professionals to social service providers, service planners and policy-makers. It is essential that people be able to understand the mechanisms of child development and identify the most appropriate services for children and parents. Further, they need to be aware of the policies that are most likely to favour the optimal development of young children.

Our goal at the Centre of Excellence is to make all of this information available. To do so, we have set up a Canadian consortium of researchers, service providers and planners who will work with the most authoritative international experts to identify, analyze and comment on the latest studies on early childhood develop-

ment. Their work will be summarized in our quarterly newsletters.

OUR PLAN OF ACTION

“Human brains are like pension funds – you have to start investing at an early stage in their development”, notes Dr. Tremblay, adding, “To invest intelligently, you need a good grasp of the factors that affect how that development will occur.”

To cover the broad range of determinants of health and well-being, the Centre has organized its activities according to an integrated view of early childhood development: “The physical, cognitive, emotional and social development dimensions are interdependent, so all of them have to be taken into consideration”,

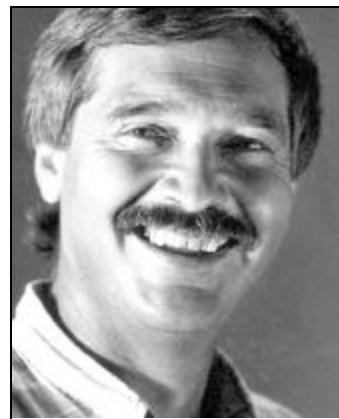
“Human brains are like pension funds – you have to start investing at an early stage in their development”

explains Dr. Tremblay. “At the same time, the Centre’s resources are limited, so we will be focusing on the social and emotional aspects. We will look at studies on physical and cognitive development to the extent that they are related to emotional and social development.”

Children grow up in complex environments. To help them get off to a good start, we have to consider both the mechanisms of development and the effectiveness of the programs and policies intended to nurture this development. And above all, we have to stop working in isolation. “Only by integrating this information,” insists Dr. Tremblay, “will we be able to say that we are



Richard E. Tremblay



Ray DeV. Peters

Wherever Fancy ranges,
There’s a Truth unknown before.
Head and heart let us embrace it,
Seeking not the falsely new:
In an infant’s laugh we trace it,
Stars reply, Yea, Life is true.

John Sterling, 1844

beginning to know what is good for children.”

Knowledge integration is what the Centre’s committees are all about. The three committees – Development, Services and Policy – are made up of multidisciplinary partners from a variety of sectors. Each committee brings the particular perspective of these three areas to bear on a common subject.

“We believe that activities to promote the well-being of children must be grounded in the best possible understanding of the mechanisms of development,” asserts Dr. Ronald G. Barr, chair of the Development Committee and holder of the Chair in Developmental Pediatrics at McGill University. This information is key to defining hypotheses on how best to respond to the needs of children.

OVERVIEW OF OUR WORK

During its first year of operation, the Centre is focusing on the prenatal and perinatal periods. The three committees (Development, Services and Policy) are currently considering the role of the following factors in the social and emotional development of young children:

- Smoking during pregnancy
- Stress during pregnancy
- Low income during pregnancy
- New reproductive technologies
- Fetal alcohol syndrome
- Aggression

"Those hypotheses translate into child development support programs" adds Dr. Ray DeV. Peters, chair of the Services Committee and professor of psychology at Queen's University. "We have to make sure that their effectiveness is proven through rigorous evaluation."

Taking the argument one step further, Allen Zeeman, chair of the Policy Committee and general director of the Applied Research Branch at Human Resources Development Canada observes, "It is not enough for the programs to be effective. They also have to be accessible, ethical and in line with society's abili-

ty to pay. And they have to be integrated into coherent local, provincial and national policies."

"We hope that the work of the various committees will enable us to provide all Canadians with a nuanced summary of the state of the knowledge on child development, so that they will be in a position to make the best possible decisions", concludes Dr. Tremblay.



Allen Zeeman



Ronald G. Barr

A FEW OF OUR PRODUCTS

"We have chosen four ways to make the latest information available: a newsletter, conferences presentations, CDs and an encyclopedia", Claire Gascon Giard, the Centre's general coordinator, is pleased to report. "You can also draw upon our "Web" of knowledge about young children by visiting our Web site." Below is a quick look at what you will find at the Centre's site.

A "Web" of knowledge about young children

The following items will be available at www.excellence-earlychildhood.ca

TOPICS

The articles written by experts are arranged by subject and by perspective (child development, services, policy). Also included are peer responses to the original articles.

DIRECTORY

Our directory of Canadian researchers who specialize in early childhood development is an easy-to-use tool that provides quick access to all of the Canadian experts in the field. The search engine will support searches by subject and by province.

FEATURE ARTICLES

The Centre of Excellence will feature recent studies on the emotional and social development of young children published by Canadian researchers in the top international scientific publications.



Claire Gascon Giard

THE CEECD IN A NUTSHELL

The Centre identifies and summarizes the best scientific work on the social and emotional development of young children and makes this information available to planners, providers of public and community services and policymakers. The Centre also makes recommendations on services that, if established, would support optimal development in young children.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF MONTREAL

"The University of Montreal is proud to sponsor the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development," declares Alain Caillé, Vice-Rector for Research. "The development of young children is one of the priorities of our strategic research plan."

"If we want to promote the health and well-being of children, we need the benefit of bio-psycho-social studies of the highest calibre," adds Emile Levy, director of the Research Centre at Sainte-Justine Hospital, the University of Montreal's teaching hospital for children.

Alain Caillé concludes by saying that "the Centre of Excellence is playing a crucial role by helping to make the best scientific studies available."

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