



Examples of Quality in Minnesota Todd Otis: Progress Report

So much good, transformative work is going on quietly every day throughout Minnesota in ways that benefit tens of thousands of young children. It is truly inspiring to think of the unheralded successes in our field, the little and incessant strides forward that go in to shaping the lives and future of hundreds of thousands of young citizens.

Sometimes when we get caught up in policy discussions and ideas we can lose sight of what is happening on the ground and in the field. Not only are young children being shaped, but programs like Head Start, Way to Grow, quality childcare, and Early Childhood Family Education are transforming families, as well.

I was recently involved in two meetings that helped me better understand some of the great work being done, and showing what is possible if we can build on the foundation of success that is already in place. These two programs are doing good work, and pointing the way to important strategies to serve young children and their families.

One is Joyce Preschool in Minneapolis. The program is run in the lower level of Joyce United Methodist Church, and its mission is “to provide children from diverse ethnic, linguistic and economic backgrounds with developmentally and culturally appropriate preparation for success in school and lifelong learning”. They just achieved national accreditation, a major milestone demonstrating their high quality. Their dual immersion program of Spanish and English is helping to close the achievement gap. They provide a part-day program that enables 90% of their children to be assessed ready for kindergarten.

And parents are vital partners with the Joyce staff and key to their children’s success. They stress literacy, including Club Leopoldo, a family literacy program. They also provide monthly parent support sessions for Latino parents. In Latino culture, family is critically important. Joyce builds on that strong cultural value.

When raising children, expectations are everything. Joyce gets parents thinking of their children’s future life at college. Ninety-five percent of Joyce parents with children going on to kindergarten plan to be involved in their child’s school in the fall.

The other program I was recently exposed to is in home visiting, a critically important part of the world of early care and education. Home visiting occurs in many ways with many organizations, including the nurse home visiting program that Ready 4 K supported in the 2007 session. An important niche in the home visiting array of programs is one targeting really low-income families with children from 2 to 4 both because of what can happen in the home and how such a program can connect challenged families to other early childhood programs.

The Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP), a national model, is run in Minnesota by Jewish Family Children Services and has a powerful impact on families that are deeply challenged and often unable to avail themselves of community programs, for various reasons. Trained home visitors visit qualified families twice a week for two years, and those visitors catalyze deep and important changes in the parent-child relationship, often with a focus on improved literacy. Families grow closer together and Dr. Todd Risley, co-author of *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* has said “The Parent-Child Home Program arguably has the best cost-benefit ratio of any literacy intervention program.”

As a recovering politician, I must confess I appreciated hearing that PCHP literally door-knocks in key geographical areas, and reaches people where they are, such as in Laundromats.

Studies of program participants have shown that increased parent-child interactions correspond with children’s subsequent increased school readiness both in cognitive and social-emotional development.

Both programs are in the range of \$3,000 to \$4,000 per year per family, and both appear to be getting very solid results.

Ready 4 K continues to fight for giving every child exposure to quality early learning experiences, in the myriad of possible settings that exist. Hats off to the staff and parents at Joyce, at PCHP, and at the thousands of other places where young hearts and minds are being shaped and families transformed.

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