



increased faster under the current government than under Margaret Thatcher.

Income inequality is driven by human capital inequality, and human capital can't be taxed and redistributed. You have to build it at the bottom to ensure maximum fairness.

When you turn your attention to human capital formation, you begin by thinking about job training and schools. But you discover that while learning is like nutrition (you have to do it every day), earlier is better. That's because, as James Heckman puts it, learners learn and skill begets skill. Children who've developed good brain functions by age 3 have advantages that accumulate through life.

That takes us to where the debate is today. How do we inculcate good brain functions across a wider swath of the 3-year-old population? Forty-one states are tinkering with or creating preschool programs. Oklahoma is leading the way with preschool and pro-family efforts. California is considering universal preschool.

Getting this right is tricky. Head Start produces only modest benefits, as a study from the Department of Health and Human Services has reminded us again. Small, intensive preschool programs yield tremendous results, but realistically, they cannot be done on a giant scale.

The problem is this: How does government provide millions of kids with the stable, loving structures they are not getting sufficiently at home?

If there's one thing that leaps out of all the brain literature, it is that, as Daniel J. Siegel puts it, "emotion serves as a central organizing process within the brain." Kids learn from people they love. If we want young people to develop the social and self-regulating skills they need to thrive, we need to establish stable long-term relationships between love-hungry children and love-providing adults.

That's why I'm grappling with these books on psychology and brain function. I started out on this wonk odyssey in the company of economic data, but the closer you get to the core issue, the further you venture into the primitive realm of love.

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