

■ WHAT IS THE STATE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILDCARE IN 2007?

TWO HISTORIES: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CHILD CARE

The history of early childhood education and child care in Canada stretches back to the mid-19th century. In the first half of the 1800s, infant schools were developed in several provinces to offer care and instruction to poor children. Following these - motivated by the idea that children benefit from formal education and then influenced by the thinking of the time about the importance of education in early childhood - the first private kindergartens began to appear and, in cities and larger towns, were commonplace by the end of the 1870s.

The kindergarten movement soon moved beyond its first middle and upper class clientele as private kindergartens spread across Canada. These included "free kindergartens" run by missionary and charitable groups which began to be used as a tool for social reform and as a way of assimilating immigrant children¹. Following on the heels of the first public kindergartens in the United States, the first Canadian public kindergarten was opened by the Toronto Board of Education in 1883. Influenced by the work of European educational specialists like Pestalozzi and Froebel, the Ontario kindergartens were recognized officially in 1885 and were funded by the province two years later². Intended for three-to-five year olds and full day, by 1900, there were kindergartens in many towns and villages across Ontario.

Some of the early kindergartens were apparently used - in part, at least - as "care" programs and as Toronto's public school kindergartens were becoming more widespread, some were opened to look after children while their mothers were employed. Even before this, however, there were a few services developed to "take care" of young children in Montreal, Toronto and, by 1920, in Halifax, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Vancouver and other cities. Throughout this period, these early childhood services - some of which accommodated infants - were developed and run by churches and women's charitable groups.

While there was organized child care in several of Canada's provinces early in the 1900s, there was little government involvement until World War II when a 1942 Order-in-Council established the Dominion-Provincial-War-time Agreement, the first federal intervention in organized child care. It offered 50 percent cost sharing to assist provinces to provide child care for children whose mothers were working in essential war industries. Only Ontario and Quebec participated in this agreement. After the war, the federal government withdrew its support and all six of the Quebec child care centres, and many of Ontario's, closed.

Following World War II, the federal government's role in child care in the modern era was mostly indirect and limited. Nevertheless, its second foray into child care in 1966 had an important impact on the way it has developed since that time. The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), the national welfare program, was introduced in 1966 to ameliorate or prevent poverty. Through the child care provisions of CAP, the Government of Canada entered into cost sharing agreements with the provinces for welfare services including child care. For the purpose of 50-50 cost sharing, CAP treated child care like other welfare services and established federal conditions for cost sharing. These conditions stipulated that federal funds were available to pay only for services for needy, or potentially needy, families, and that to be eligible for funding as a welfare service, child care had to be regulated and public or not-for-profit³. The design of CAP meant that federal funds were used almost exclusively for fee subsidies for families who were income - or means-tested to determine eligibility .

As social services are a provincial responsibility in Canada, the provinces were not compelled to participate. However, although it took a decade for them all to begin to use CAP's child care provisions, eventually all the provinces cost-shared their eligible child care costs through CAP. Thus, CAP began to spur the development of child care services throughout Canada and to shape their evolution throughout the 1970s and 1980s. However, its residual approach to funding meant that regulated child care emerged as a welfare rather than a universal or educational service.

But as mothers with young children entered the paid labour force in growing numbers, middle class families also began to use child care centres that usually served both subsidized and fee paying families. Although there were always difficulties with the limited funding arrangements, the supply of regulated child care services grew dramatically throughout Canada as most of the provinces developed and refined service delivery, regulation and funding in the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1971, parental out-of-pocket child care expenses were allowed as a tax deduction for eligible families under The Income Tax Act and maternity benefits for eligible new mothers were included under The Unemployment Insurance Act.

In 1970, the Royal Commission on the Status of Women called for a National Day-Care Act, the first national recognition of child care as part of the growing recognition of women's equality. The provinces - beginning with Quebec in 1979 - began to provide funds other than fee subsidies to child care centres to reduce operating costs or to improve wages. Community demand for child care services - especially from a vibrant feminist movement exemplified by the National Action Committee on the Status of Women - swelled throughout the 1980s.

At the same time - separated conceptually, administratively and programmatically from "care", public kindergarten to provide early childhood education was established in almost every province and territory, becoming an entitlement in most jurisdictions so that by the mid 1980s, most Canadian five year olds and (in Ontario, four year olds) were enrolled in public, mostly half-day kindergarten programs.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN THE 1990s

Between 1984 and 1995, there were three significant attempts to develop a national approach to child care as successive federal governments announced that a national strategy for child care would be developed. Each of these - the Task Force on Child Care set up by the Trudeau government (1984), the Special Committee on Child Care of the Mulroney government (1986), and the initiative based on Jean Chretien's 1993 Red Book election commitment - was initiated by a federal government. Each recognized the primacy of the provinces in social or educational services such as child care. However, none of these efforts was successful in producing a pan-Canadian strategy or approach to early childhood education and care.

In the mid 1990s, Canada's political arrangements (which had historically featured tensions between federal and provincial roles) tilted toward provincial primacy. This shift very much impacted on the future of early childhood education and child care. During this period, the Canada Assistance Plan⁴ was abolished in 1996 (and never re-established) and all federal dollars for provincial health, education and welfare programs were subsumed in a block fund, the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST)⁵. Social policy experts feared that without conditions like those that had been part of the CAP agreement, provincial spending of the substantially reduced federal dollars in the CHST would become less accountable both to the federal government and the public.

A debate about what was termed "social policy renewal" arose in a climate of anxiety about Quebec separation and the fiscal deficit. This was formalized in February 1999 as the federal government and the nine provinces comprising "the rest of Canada" outside Quebec signed the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA). These features of politics vis-à-vis Canadian federalism continued to play key roles in the development of a national early learning and child care program after 2000. While there was interest in young children and in "child development" as manifested in the National Children's Agenda (1997) and the Early Childhood Development Agreement (2000) which carried new federal funds for provincial children's programs, throughout this period, early childhood education and child care per se was off national policy agendas and, indeed, lost ground in some provinces such as Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

In 2001, the federal government increased the parental leave portion of the Employment Insurance benefit to 35 weeks making a total benefit covering 50 weeks combined maternity/parental available to eligible new parents. In response, all provinces/territories eventually amended their employment legislation to allow for an extended parental leave to match or exceed the federal benefit period.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN THE 2000s

Child care remained off the national policy agenda and while it remained off most (not all) provincial/territorial agendas, Quebec took a giant step forward. With a process that first began in 1997, Quebec began the process of bringing in a publicly-funded universal program for early childhood education and child care. The evolution included shifting from relying on parent fee subsidies like other provinces to a public funding model; introduction of full day kindergarten for all five year olds; expansion of spaces (supported by capital funding) to provide much greater availability through community-based centres de la petites enfances (CPEs) that include centres and family day care; a \$5-a-day parent fee for all families regardless of income; and a commitment to improved maternity/parental leave. The processes took place over the end of the 1990s and the first part of the 2000s.

Canada-wide though, it was not until 2003 when another intergovernmental agreement – the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care – was put in place by Federal Human Resources Minister Jane Stewart and provincial/territorial social services Ministers. The Ministers' communiqué said that, "This early learning and child care framework represents another important step in the development of early childhood development programs and services" while Minister Stewart called the Agreement, "the beginning of a very solid national day-care program for Canadians".

But it was the next step towards a national early learning and child care program that was historic as it was the first time that a national child care program had been promised since Brian Mulroney's Progressive Conservative government in 1986. This commitment came in the 2004 election campaign when the federal Liberals promised to develop a national early learning and child care system based on four principles – Quality, Universality, Accessibility and Developmental [programming] (QUAD). The campaign platform promised \$5 billion over five years (new dollars) to begin to build the system. Most of this money was to be transferred to provinces/territories using the CST formula; \$100 million was to be used for "accountability and data" and \$100 million was to be used for early learning and child care for First Nations communities on reserve.

After the Liberals won the 2004 election, they began negotiations with provinces in the SUFA model – that is, proceeding by securing assent from the provinces. The federal government's conditions were: a) provinces were to produce Action Plans before a five year funding agreement was finalized; b) federal funds be used only for regulated early learning and child care programs; c) provinces would publicly report on the use of funds. The outcome of this process was that by December 2005, nine provinces had signed bi-lateral agreements-in-principle with the Government of Canada on early learning and child care and two – Ontario and Manitoba – had published provincial action plans and, with Quebec (which did not sign an agreement-in-principle or publish an Action Plan) moved on to full five year funding agreements with the federal government.

These agreements marked the first time that a Canadian government had followed through with an election commitment to improve child care across Canada. While there was some variation in the provinces' directions as described in the agreements-in-principle, in signing them, the provinces committed to developing detailed Action Plans based on the four QUAD principles. In addition, all agreements included provincial commitment to collaborative infrastructural work in such areas as a national quality framework and data systems.

NEW DIRECTIONS

In January, 2006 a minority Conservative government was elected. The new government announced that the processes set in motion by these agreements would be terminated; that all jurisdictions – the three provinces with five year fund-

ing agreements⁶ (Quebec, Ontario and Manitoba), the seven provinces that had not yet released their Action Plans, and the three territories - would get federal funding for one year; federal funding would end March 31, 2007.

The new federal government promised instead an individual cash payment to parents – the “Choice in Child Care Allowance” (now Universal Child Care Benefit) – a payment of \$1,200 to all parents with children under age 6, taxed in the hands of the lower-income spouse. In addition, the Conservatives said that they would initiate the Child Care Spaces Initiative (capital funding to set up child care) to help employers and communities create child care spaces in the workplace or through cooperative or community associations by establishing a tax credit for capital costs of \$10,000 per space; funding of \$250 million a year was identified for this initiative.

The Universal Child Care Benefit cheques began to flow to parents in July 2006. An advisory committee was established to advise the Minister on the Child Care Spaces Initiative and consultations were held across Canada on this initiative.

In the March 2007 federal budget, the government announced a transfer of \$250 million per year to provinces and territories, beginning in 2007, to support the creation of child care spaces. Funding will flow through the Canada Social Transfer, beginning in 2008–2009, following discussion with provinces and territories. Transition payments totalling \$250 million were made on an equal per capita basis to each province and territory at the end of June 2007, for the fiscal year 2007–2008. In addition, Budget 2007 proposes a 25-percent investment tax credit to businesses to create new child care spaces in workplaces to a maximum of \$10,000 per space.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN CANADA: THE CURRENT STATE

Each of Canada’s 14 jurisdictions – 10 provinces, three territories and the federal government – has a number of programs for “care” and “education” as well as for meeting other objectives such as ameliorating the effects of poverty and supporting parents.

Each of the provinces and territories has a program of regulated child care that usually encompasses nursery schools or preschools, centre-based full-day child care and regulated family child care. The provincial/territorial child care programs provide legislated requirements for operation of services and a variety of kinds of funding arrangements, usually under a social or community services ministry. Provincial/territorial governments also have responsibility for public kindergartens that in most jurisdictions are part-time for five year olds under ministries of education⁷. Generally, kindergarten programs for five year olds (or fours in Ontario) are a public responsibility while “care” and early childhood education for children younger than age five is assumed to be a private, family responsibility. In addition to these provincial/territorial programs, there are a variety of care and education programs – for example, Aboriginal Head Start – that are under the aegis of the federal government.

These programs – regulated child care and kindergarten – supplemented by family resource programs (primarily intended to support parents), an assortment of cash payments, and complemented by maternity and parental leave, constitute ECEC (or early learning and child care) in Canada.

Between the mid-1990s and 2001, the proportion of children aged six months to five years who were in child care increased significantly while more child care-using families shifted to child care centres and relatives⁸. Many of the more than 70% of children with both parents (or a single parent) in the paid labour force were presumed to be in child care that was not regulated. These arrangements are provided by an unregulated family child care provider or in-home caregiver.

The range, quality and access to early childhood education and care services and access to them vary enormously by region and circumstances. Organized ECEC services across Canada are in short supply or – like public kindergarten – not labour force sensitive. Regulated child care is usually too costly for ordinary families or not high quality enough to be “developmental”. Young school-aged children may be alone after school or attend recreation or other community programs that are not intended to provide “care”. No region of Canada yet provides a system of well-designed and funded

early childhood education and care services to meet the needs of a majority of families and children. However, a 2006 analysis of national data shows that a majority of all children now participate in some variety of organized early childhood education and care programs including child care centres, nursery schools, kindergarten and regulated family child care although data that indicate whether these meet parents' needs for "care" and are high quality so as to be defined as "early childhood education" are not available⁹.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR ECEC

That Canada's government is a federal system is key in how responsibilities for ECEC are defined. The division of powers between federal and provincial governments was originally defined in the Constitution Act of 1867 and has evolved over the years. The SUFA agreement of 1999 has shaped Canada's social policy¹⁰ for some years although its status and the current state of federal/provincial relations is unclear at this time.

A new role that has developed in the 2000s has been a financing role for the federal government. The federal government has begun – for the first time – to transfer earmarked funds to the provinces and territories to spend on regulated child care. These specifically earmarked funds flow through several intergovernmental agreements (see History section, previous, Tables 28, and Federal section). Although the largest transfer – the bilateral agreements on Early Learning and Child Care (2005) ended March 31, 2007, in the 2005/06 and the 2006/07 fiscal years, the transfer funds were quite considerable, reaching \$950 million in 2005/06 and \$900 million the next year. Even now that the bilateral agreements have ended, earmarked federal transfers to provinces will total \$600 million in 2007/08.

With few exceptions, ECEC services - child care, nursery schools, kindergarten – like health, social services, and elementary, secondary and post-secondary education – are under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories. Each of Canada's 10 provinces and three territories has developed a program of regulated child care and – in almost all cases – a separate public kindergarten program.

Canadian municipalities do not have powers assigned by constitutional arrangements but are subordinate to the provinces which delegate powers including taxing powers to them. Outside Ontario – where they play several important roles in child care (funding, operation of services (about 9% of regulated child care services) and policy-setting) – municipal /regional governments generally have no role in regulated child care although the City of Vancouver has adopted a key planning role. Local school boards (or school divisions) – also subordinate to provincial governments – usually have primary responsibility for operation of elementary schools including kindergarten.

"The community" and parent users are an important part of Canadian ECEC. At the service delivery level, the bulk of the supply of regulated child care is initiated and maintained by parent and/or voluntary boards of directors; these child care programs comprise much of the non-profit child care sector which represents about 80% of the total supply. Otherwise parents generally have little specific role in regulated child care although the bulk of child care services are paid for by parent fees; a national study in 1998 found that an average of 49.2% of revenue for full-day child care centres came from parent fees.

In most parts of Canada, advocacy, professional and service groups, and, to some extent, organized parent groups where they exist, make up what is often called "the child care community". These groups are important providers of services like professional development and in-service training.

In addition, advocacy for more and better child care - and now ECEC - has been a visible feature of the Canadian ECEC landscape for decades. Alliances with other groups with an interest in ECEC - for example, the labour movement, anti-poverty activists, feminists and other sectors have long been a fundamental element of Canadian advocacy for child care.

SERVICE OVERVIEW

Almost all of Canada's ECEC programs are under provincial jurisdiction. Generally, regulated child care includes centres, usually (except in Quebec, Saskatchewan and the Yukon) nursery schools or preschools (part-day centre-based programs) and regulated family child care under the same legislation. Almost all jurisdictions now require at least some of the staff working in child care with children to have some training in early childhood education; however, Canadian requirements for early childhood training are generally acknowledged to be less than adequate.

All jurisdictions subsidize all or some of the costs in regulated child care for low-income parents. However, in most cases, limitations on the number of these subsidies exclude many eligible parents; in other cases, the subsidy provided doesn't cover the whole fee; sometimes there is a significant gap between the subsidy rate and the parent fee. Some provinces also provide funds to support the overall operation of child care services; this may be in the form of wage grants to raise staff wages. Overall, though, except in Quebec, and to some extent Manitoba, child care is primarily a fee-paying service in Canada with many families not able to access services due to costs. Only Quebec has set out goals for child care and designated substantial public funding.

All of the provinces and territories also provide public kindergarten. In most all cases kindergarten is part of the public education system¹¹ and in most jurisdictions, it is an entitlement. All provinces/territories provide kindergarten for five year olds; in Ontario, most school boards offer universal four year old kindergarten too. Most kindergarten is part-day or part-time with three provinces offering full-day kindergarten. Attendance at kindergarten is compulsory in several jurisdictions; however, almost all age-eligible children attend public kindergartens when they are offered. Three provinces and the territories maintain more than one publicly funded school system by religion. All offer kindergarten in both official languages where population warrants. Nunavut provides kindergarten in regional Inuit languages.

Generally, there is little connection between kindergarten programs and regulated child care services at either the policy or service delivery level. In some provinces, Ontario, for example, there are many child care centres located in schools; in Toronto, a pilot project, First Duty, has integrated child care and kindergarten more programmatically. Except in Quebec where school-aged child care (including for five year olds) is under the aegis of the Ministry of Education and Saskatchewan, where responsibility has been transferred to the Ministry of Learning, child care services are usually not the responsibility of the education system but are operated by community boards of directors, other institutions or organizations or by for-profit operators. School-based child care often serves school-aged children but other age groups including infants and toddlers may be served in school locations also.

Provincial/territorial ECEC programs are covered in more detail in the individual section for each jurisdiction and in the Big Picture and Long View tables. ECEC services for Aboriginal communities and those under federal aegis are described in subsequent sections.

Notes

- 1 Prochner, L. (2000). A history of early education and child care in Canada, 1820-1966. In Prochner, L. & Howe, N. (Eds). *Early childhood education and care in Canada*: 11-65. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- 2 Mathien, J. (2001). *Children, families and institutions in the late 19th and early 20th century Ontario*. Masters thesis. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education – University of Toronto.
- 3 CAP's other route allowed child care costs in for-profit services to be cost-shared for eligible means tested families as an "item of assistance".
- 4 The Canada Assistance Plan was ended by the federal government in 1996 and was not replaced by another national welfare program.
- 5 In 2004, the CHST was divided into the CHT (health) and the CST (social).
- 6 The three five year agreements (Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario) contained a pro forma "escape" clause that specifies that either partner to the agreement may cancel it with one year's notice.
- 7 Note that there are several exceptions to both these.
- 8 Statistics Canada. (2005). Child care: 1996-2001. *The Daily*. Ottawa, ON: Author. Retrieved June 2007 from <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050207/d050207b.htm>
- 9 Cleveland, G. (2007). *Rewriting the facts about early childhood education and care in Canada*. Paper delivered at the Canadian Economic Association meetings. June, 2007: Halifax.
- 10 See CRRU Issue File. *The Social Union Framework Agreement: Issues in Canadian Policymaking* http://action.web.ca/home/crru/rsrscs_crru_full.shtml?x=62287
- 11 See Table 9.
- 12 Corter, C., Bertrand, J., Pelletier, J., Griffin, T., McKay, D., Patel, S.I & Ioannone P. (2006). *Evidence-based understanding of integrated foundations for early childhood. Toronto First Duty Phase 1 Summary Report*. Toronto: City of Toronto.