

Integrating child care and early education: A central theme in early learning and care ^[1]

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Excerpt

Introduction

The idea of “integrating” what have historically been treated as two separate sets of children’s services in Canada – child care under a social services mandate and kindergarten as the first step of public education – has become one of the key issues in early learning and care (ELC). The division between “care” and “early childhood education” programs dates back to initiatives by 19th century social reformers who were responsible for founding both custodial crèches for the children of indigent mothers as well the early education programs that they saw as beneficial for young children. The split between early childhood education and child care persisted throughout the 20th century and still shapes much of the discussion about early learning and care for young children and their families today.

The divide between care and education is not uniquely Canadian and was once the practice in most countries (Moss, 2006). ECEC integration was identified as a key international trend in 2001 (OECD, 2001), as many countries moved toward, if not to the full practice of, integrating what are increasingly understood as complementary or common services. In many, if not most, jurisdictions integrating child care and early education is a work in progress.

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