

Integration of child care and education in Canada: A comparison with Sweden, New Zealand, England and Wales ^[1]

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Source: International Journal of Early Childhood

Format: Article

Publication Date: 3 Jul 2013

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Cleveland, G. & Colley, S. (2013). Integration of child care and education in Canada: A comparison with Sweden, New Zealand, England and Wales. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 45(2), 167-189.

Abstract

Starting Strong (2001) and Starting Strong II (2006), the OECD Reports on early childhood education services in 20 countries, emphasized the need for governments to take steps to integrate early childhood education and care services: child care and kindergarten in particular. Integration has become a policy agenda that would meld the best of both worlds. It would increase the amount and quality of resources that are dedicated to out-of-home services for young children before school, ensure that these services are universally accessible as a right and of low cost to parents, with stable employment for well-qualified staff able to implement a flexible, well-designed, play-based curriculum. In most countries with integrated systems, this has occurred under the aegis of education authorities, making it more likely that providers will be either public or not-for-profit agencies, dedicated to continual improvement in serving the interests of children rather than the objective of private gain. This paper compares Canadian developments in integration to those in Sweden, New Zealand, England and Wales. Context and history make the issues of integration somewhat different in Canada than in these countries. Overall, integration of early childhood education and care services in Canada is less developed than in Europe, but this paper reviews some promising recent reforms. In particular, the language of integration has been adopted widely by advocates, bureaucrats and some policy makers in Canada and a number of provinces have moved the administration and policy-making functions of child care services into the education ministry. However, Quebec's low-fee child care reforms are built upon a traditional split system of services. Ontario's reforms of services for 4- and 5-year olds are very important, but partial. Prince Edward Island has planned a more fully integrated new early education system, but the transition has only recently begun. This paper analyses context, history and political factors that have shaped Canada's experiences of integration until now.

Region: Canada ^[3]

Tags: kindergarten ^[4]

school system ^[5]

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