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Martha Friendly and Jane Beach



PREFACE

Everybody now understands ... and this is an international understanding, it is not merely a Canadian understanding ... that early learning and child care fused together is the kind of objective which any civilized society strives for, and that it becomes an indispensable and vital dimension of a child's life, enhancing all of the family characteristics which shore up the child but profoundly influencing in the most positive imaginable way the opportunities for the child ...

Stephen Lewis, closing the Child Care for a Change! conference, November, 2004 (<http://www.ccsd.ca/subsites/childcare/lewis.pdf>)

MOVING TOWARDS A NATIONAL CHILD CARE SYSTEM

The past two years – 2003 and 2004 – have seen unprecedented recognition that early learning and child care (ELCC) or early childhood education and care (ECEC)¹ is central in Canadian social and economic policy. There was a strong commitment to a national early learning and child care program in the 2004 federal election. This – and high public interest generated statements, policy papers, proposals and positions on key issues from governments, NGOs and researchers throughout 2003 and 2004. The report of the OECD's Thematic Review of Canada was released in 2004, and *Child Care for a Change!* – the first national ELCC policy conference in more than 20 years – was held in Winnipeg in mid-November, serving as a useful vehicle for highlighting knowledge and views on ELCC policy.²

FOUNDATIONS: A NATIONAL EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE SYSTEM

The years since the last version of *ECEC in Canada* was published in 2002 have seen ongoing attention to early learning and child care, starting with the first federal/provincial/territorial agreement on child care – the Multilateral Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care – at the beginning of 2003. This was followed by the promise of a national early learning and child care program as a key Liberal commitment in the June 2004 federal election. Following election of a minority Liberal government in Ottawa, federal and provincial/territorial governments began negotiations on the national early learning and child care system. The Liberal platform said:

Over the next decade we must build for Canada's children and parents an early learning and child care system for the 21st century.

A Liberal government will create *Foundations: The national early learning and child care program*.

We will phase in a contribution of \$5 billion over the next five years, beyond funds already committed, to accelerate building the national system. The Foundations program will ensure that children have access to high-quality, government-regulated spaces at affordable cost to parents.

A Liberal government will enshrine in legislation four principles for Foundations – the “QUAD”: QUALITY, UNIVERSALITY, ACCESSIBILITY, DEVELOPMENTAL ...

¹ This report will use the term early childhood education and care (ECEC).

² The *Child Care for a Change!* website can be found at <http://www.ccsd.ca/subsites/childcare/>

...The implementation and details of the new Foundations program will be worked out collaboratively with provinces and territories consistent with the principles of the Social Union Framework Agreement. Provided provincial early learning and child care programs meet the QUAD principles, provinces will have flexibility to design a roll-out plan based on the most appropriate implementation to suit their circumstances.³

The commitment to the QUAD principles was reaffirmed by the new Minister for Social Development and, in November, by a meeting of provincial/territorial Ministers responsible for child care. Development of the program will build on the Multi-lateral Framework which was called the “first step toward a national child care program” when it was announced in 2003.⁴

LEARNING FROM THE OECD THEMATIC REVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

Shortly after the 2004 federal election, the Canada Review⁵ of the OECD’s 20-nation Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care was released. The review of Canada, the 17th country to be reviewed, had begun two years earlier. The Canada Review used a set of protocols common to all the countries reviewed; each Review included a Country Background Report commissioned by or provided by the national government; a two-week country visit of a team of international experts sent by the OECD that included site visits and meetings with governments and NGOs; and preparation of a Country Note report by the expert team that took into account the country’s context as well as the OECD’s international comparative analysis.

The Country Note describes how Canada has fallen far behind international developments in early childhood education and care:

...it is clear that national and provincial policy for the early education and care of young children in Canada is still in its initial stages. Care and education are still treated separately and coverage is low compared to other OECD countries. Over the coming years, significant energies and funding will need to be invested in the field to create a universal system in tune with the needs of a full employment economy, with gender equity and with new understandings of how young children develop and learn.⁶

The OECD’s Review made a number of points about the main issues in Canadian ECEC: first, the policy approach at both national and provincial levels is incoherent and ineffective; second, Canadian ECEC programs are severely underfunded; and third, neither the quality of nor access to Canadian ECEC is adequate. While these points have been observed before, the OECD’s perspective in the context of an international comparative study is a new and significant one.

Based on analysis of Canada’s ECEC situation, the OECD’s expert team studying Canada made a series of detailed recommendations concerned with “upstream” policy, funding and financing, access to programs and quality:

Upstream policy recommendations

- Strengthen the present Federal/Provincial/Territorial agreements and focus them as much as possible on child care and early learning.
- Encourage provincial governments to develop, with the major stakeholder groups, an early childhood strategy with priority targets, benchmarks and timelines, and with guaranteed budgets to fund appropriate governance and expansion.
- Build bridges between child care and kindergarten education, with the aim of integrating ECEC both at ground level and at policy and management levels.

3 For further information about the Foundations program and work towards its implementation, see CRRU online Issue Files at <http://www.childcarecanada.org/res/issues/04fedelection.html> and <http://www.childcarecanada.org/res/issues/towardsanationalsystemofearlylearningandchildcare.htm>

4 http://action.web.ca/home/crru/rsrscs_crru_full.shtml?x=32587

5 <http://www.childcarecanada.org/res/issues/oecdthematicreviewcanadareports.html>

6 Highlights of the recommendations, prepared by CRRU, online at <http://www.childcarecanada.org/res/issues/oecdthematicreviewcanadareports.html>

Funding and financing recommendations

- Substantially increase public funding of services for young children.
- Ensure the creation of a transparent and accountable funding system, and for parents, a fairer sharing of ECEC funding.
- Given the present patterns of provision in Canada, devise an efficient means of funding a universal early childhood service for children from 1 to 6 years, delivered equitably by mixed providers, governed by public mandated agencies.

Recommendations regarding access

- Continue efforts to expand access while promoting greater equity.
- In so far as possible, include children with special educational needs in public early development/education service.
- Reinforce policies to support and include Aboriginal children.

Recommendations to improve quality

As financing — a major indicator of quality — has been treated above, the focus in this section is on recommendations that impinge more directly on programme quality:

- Develop a national quality framework for early childhood services across all sectors, and the infrastructure at provincial level to ensure effective implementation.
- Link accreditation of services to structural requirements and the achievement of quality targets.
- Review ECEC professional profiles, improve recruitment levels and strengthen the initial and in-service training of staff.
- Provide publicly-funded, high quality interventions in all disadvantaged areas.
- Provide attractive indoor and outdoor learning environments.
- Co-ordinate Canadian research and through funding, orient it further toward important policy issues.

FUTURE POTENTIAL

The OECD report is intended to stimulate discussion at the political level that will lead to “a coherent long-term vision for each province and the country as a whole, based on the best available evidence and prioritized into defined steps and time frames”. Canada has much to learn from the kinds of analysis and recommendations outlined in the OECD’s report. These have the potential for playing a key role in formulating Canada’s new national early learning and child care system just as it’s beginning.⁶

⁶ The Canada Background Report and Country Note as well as other materials pertaining to the OECD Thematic Review of ECEC can be found online at www.oecd.org or linked on the CRRU website at <http://www.childcarecanada.org/res/issues/oecdthematicreviewcanadareports.html>

■ EXPLANATORY NOTES

Every effort was made to ensure the accuracy of the data provided in this publication and to use accurate and consistent terminology and categories across provinces/territories whenever possible. This was not always possible, however, due to the use of different terminologies, categories, data collection methods and missing information. In some cases, information that is consistent by date or definition was not available; where this occurs, dates and definitions are provided or noted in the text or in footnotes.

METHOD

The data were assembled from a variety of sources including Canada-wide data sources (identified below), federal/provincial/territorial government officials and from community and other resources.

Information on federal ECEC programs was assembled using print and online sources. These were enhanced and clarified through telephone interviews with federal officials.

The method used to collect data on regulated child care from each province/territory followed a series of steps. First, a written questionnaire was sent to each provincial/territorial child care office. P/T officials then assembled their data; this was followed by a telephone interview with officials in each jurisdiction who had relevant information. Additional consultation with community representatives were utilized as well. Using a combination of material provided by government officials, community groups, written and website material, a draft of the material was then compiled. Each jurisdiction assisted further by providing clarification and updates. Further follow-up was done throughout the editing stage to ensure the information's accuracy.

Kindergarten information was assembled by identifying and contacting the official (or officials) in each jurisdiction with responsibility for kindergarten and, through telephone interviews, by collecting information using a short questionnaire developed for this purpose. These data were supplemented by written and website information; sources are noted in the text where they were used. Community representatives were not involved in supplementing this information.

It should be noted that timely information that is consistent across Canada and over time is often not available.

DATA SOURCES

Number of children 0-12 years

Special tabulation based on the Labour Force Survey. Conducted by Statistics Canada. 2003 annual average.

Children 0-12 years with mothers in the paid labour force

Special tabulation based on the Labour Force Survey. Conducted by Statistics Canada. 2003 annual average.

Number of children 0-14 identifying with an Aboriginal group

Statistics Canada. 2001 Census of Canada. Topic-based tabulation 97F0011XCB01002.

Number of children by marital status of families

Statistics Canada. 2001 Census of Canada. Topic-based tabulation 95F0313XCB01004.

Number of children by mother tongue

Statistics Canada. 2001 Census of Canada. Topic-based tabulation 97F0007XCB01001.

Children 0-14 years with disabilities (2001)

Statistics Canada. (December, 2002). *A profile of disability in Canada, 2001: Participation and Activity Limitation Survey*. Catalogue no. 89-579-XIE.

The Participation and Activity Limitation Survey uses the World Health Organization's (WHO) framework of disability provided by the International Classification of Functioning (ICF). This framework defines disability as the relationship between body structures and functions, daily activities and social participation, while recognizing the role of environmental factors.

For the purpose of PALS, persons with disabilities are those who reported difficulties with daily living activities, or who indicated that a physical or mental condition or health problem reduced the kind or amount of activities they could do. The respondents' answers to the disability questions represent their perception of the situation and are therefore subjective.

Number and percentage of children living in families below the LICO (2002)

Canadian Council on Social Development using Statistics Canada Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics masterfile. 2002.

Workforce participation of mothers by age of youngest child

Statistics Canada. Labour force historical review. Statistics Canada #71F0004XCB.

These figures include employed and unemployed women by age of child. These two categories are considered to be in the labour force. These figures do not include women who are not in the paid labour force (e.g. students or individuals enrolled in a training program, or other guardians responsible for children).

Family-related leave

Length of maternity, parental and adoption leave in Employment Standards Legislation (unpaid).

Table from Labour Law Analysis, Strategic Policy and International Labour Affairs, Labour Program. Human Resources Development Canada (February 18, 2002).

Work-life balance in Canada: A report to Ministers Responsible for Labour in Canada, Chapter II (March 2001, updated February 2002). *The legislative framework*.

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/asp/gateway.asp?hr=/en/lp/spila/wlb/rtm/05chapter_2.shtml&hs=wnc#

Number of births and birth rate (July 1, 2003 to June 30, 2004)

Statistics Canada. Births and birth rate, by provinces and territories. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/demo04a.htm>

EI maternity, parental, and adoption claims (2003)

Monitoring and Assessment Report, HRSDC (2003). Annex 2, Tables 2.8, 2.9, 2.10.

http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/ei/reports/annex2_eimar_2003.pdf

Spending for EI maternity and parental leave benefits (2002/03)

Government of Canada (2005). *Early Childhood Development Activities and Expenditures/Early Learning and Child Care Activities and Expenditures*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Federal ECEC programs

Government of Canada (2005). *Early Childhood Development Activities and Expenditures/Early Learning and Child Care Activities and Expenditures*. Ottawa, ON: Author.

Average wages in regulated child care

Information as reported by provincial/territorial officials.

Fees in regulated child care

Information as reported by provincial/territorial officials.

Aboriginal ECEC programs

Government of Canada (2005). *Early Childhood Development Activities and Expenditures/Early Learning and Child Care Activities and Expenditures*. Ottawa, ON: Author. Additional information as reported by officials.

Varieties of ECEC programs under federal and provincial/territorial jurisdiction

Government of Canada (2005). *Early Childhood Development Activities and Expenditures/Early Learning and Child Care Activities and Expenditures*. Ottawa, ON: Author. Additional information as reported by officials.

Note: All other information was provided by provincial/territorial kindergarten and child care officials and/or community organizations and researchers.