

Why do we do what we do? Can Canada become Sweden?



Critical questions about
early childhood policy,
provision and practice
Ryerson Feb 10 2011

Main idea -

- Political ideas and structures are key in shaping social programs
- Very useful for understanding ECEC
- Provision, policy and politics

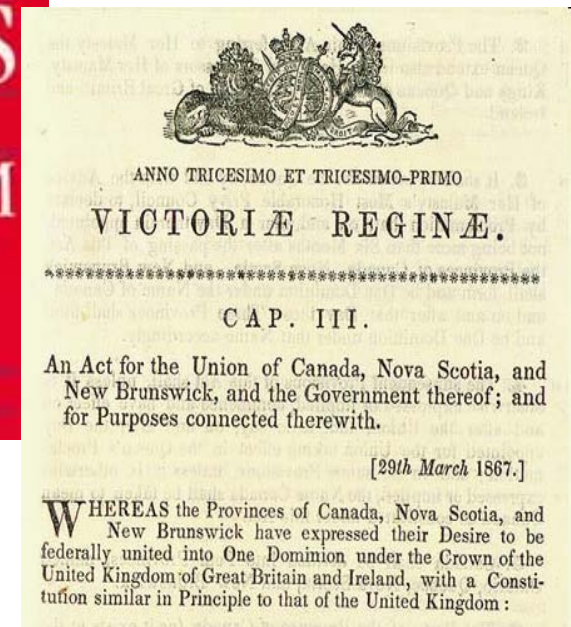
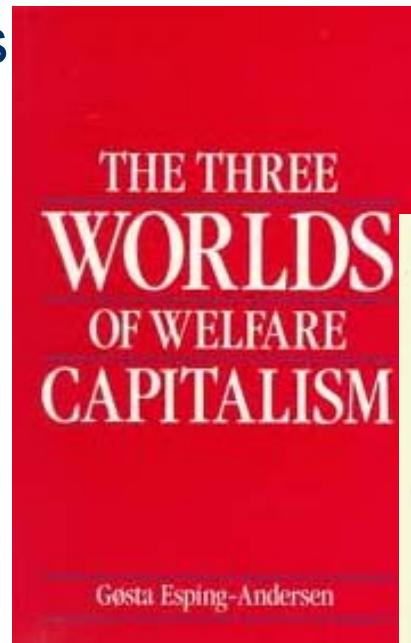
ECEC provision: What we do now

- Canada behind other OECD countries
- No national policy; limited provincial policy
- P/ts (including QC) more similar than different
- Hodgepodge, patchwork, unplanned -- , etc.
- Access, quality very undeveloped/limited
- Very under financed - including kindergarten \$
- National *and* provincial policy..."still in initial stages"

Why do we do what we do?

Two explanatory factors shape policy, therefore provision

- Welfare regime theory
- Canadian brand of federalism



Welfare state regimes

- ? How does political ideology shape social welfare programs?
- Social democratic, liberal-democratic, corporatist/conservative
- Usually aligned with political parties but not straightforward
- Balance of responsibility – State, market, family
- Liberal-democratic - “Privacy of the family and primacy of the marketplace”; woman-unfriendly

Liberal-democratic (Canada, other anglophone)

- Childcare/kindergarten divide; privatized funding, delivery and targeting - childcare;
- Reliance on parent fees, unregulated and private (for-profit and non-profit) childcare
- Public education tends to be valued (great leveler – equal opportunity)



Social-democratic (Nordics)

- Activist State
- Blended care/education
- Universal entitlement
- Primarily public delivery
- Primarily publicly-funded (affordable fees)
- Very high quality

Federalism – Strike 2

- Power/responsibilities divided between national and sub-national
- Federations differ in assignment of these and relative strengths of national/sub-national
- Canada is quite decentralized



Federalism - Where ECEC fits

- *Constitution Act of 1867*
- Social programs, especially services, considered to be provincial (EI, pensions, Child Tax Credit, UCCB – but – welfare)
- Education is very provincialized – Canada is the sole federation to have no national department of education
- Federal spending power – lever for federal leadership until the 1990s, now in decline
- Issue of conditionality is key

Politics

- Politics vis-à-vis ECEC - reflection of current ideas about ideology and federalism
- Clear interplay between ideology and federalism
- Neither political ideology nor federalism have been uniform – historically/regionally

Conclusion...

- Policy and politics both matter vis-à-vis provision - quality/access
- Policy ideas and structures are translated into politics that ultimately determine provision of ECEC “on the ground” for families and children.

Visualizing ECEC provision, policy and politics “on the ground”

Sweden	10	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Iceland	9		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Denmark	8	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Finland	8	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
France	8	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Norway	8	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
Belgium (Flanders)	6		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Hungary	6		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
New Zealand	6		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Slovenia	6	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓
Austria	5		✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	
Netherlands	5		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			
United Kingdom*	5		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Germany	4		✓		✓		✓	✓			
Italy	4		✓		✓	✓	✓				
Japan	4		✓		✓	✓					✓
Portugal	4		✓		✓	✓	✓				
Republic of Korea	4		✓			✓	✓				✓
Mexico	3		✓			✓	✓				
Spain	3				✓	✓	✓				
Switzerland	3					✓		✓		✓	
United States	3			✓			✓	✓			
Australia	2			✓			✓				
Canada	1						✓				
Ireland	1						✓				
Total benchmarks met	126	6	19	13	15	17	20	12	6	10	8

Question: Canada become Sweden???

Short answer –

Mothers are working
and value of good
quality ECEC is
(somewhat)
understood.

Can't become Sweden,
but today we know
enough to do much
better as Canada



Based on...

Friendly and Prentice. (In press). Policy, politics and provision in ECEC in Canada. Howe and Prochner - In *New directions in early childhood education and care in Canada*. U of Toronto Press

Two critical questions about ECEC in Canada: Why do we do what we do? How can we do better?
Manitoba Child Care Association. *Bridges*, Spring, 2011