

OPENING PANEL

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION IN CANADA, THE US, THE UK AND AUSTRALIA — AND WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES?

Jacqueline Hayden

University of Western Sydney, Australia

Bronwen Cohen

Children in Scotland, Edinburgh

Marcy Whitebook

Center for the Child Care Workforce, Washington, DC

Rita Chudnovsky

Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, and Douglas College, Vancouver

Helen Penn

University of London

Moderator: Marvyn Novick

Ryerson Polytechnic University, Toronto

Marvyn Novick

This conference is designed to help people who are exceptionally active in the early childhood child care field deal with the large social and political conflicts of their work. We are at a historically very significant time in Canada, a crossroads period. We now have, for the first time, public support for the directions that child care people have been pursuing. We are entering a post-deficit period in this country with an emerging fiscal capacity to pursue the visions that we know are important. It is a critical point for people in the early childhood child care community to become very vigorous and effective on the broader stage as to why this area ought to emerge as a public policy priority.

We have three levels of government in Canada. Today, we are closest to the municipal level, as we are meeting in the Council Chamber of the newly amalgamated City of Toronto. The dissonance that exists in this Council's debates and decision-making reflects the

mainstream responses to the needs of the children of this city. Up the street, however, we have an Ontario provincial government which reflects the other direction, a direction that is not mainstream, a direction that is fostered by the right-wing perspective and that divides people. This provincial government is the most right-wing and divisive government we've had in Ontario since World War II, a legacy which has hurt families, hurt communities and schools and teachers and educational resources.

In Ottawa the federal government this year will have a \$10 billion budgetary surplus, and its use of that surplus will determine what its political, moral, and social strengths are. This government now has the capacity, if it were so committed, to establish an early childhood care and education fund as it did last year a Millennium scholarship fund for post-secondary education. It has the resources to do it. It could implement the national children's agenda or, alternatively, it could squander that surplus with the kind of tax cuts to the advantaged that would make the gap even greater in this country.

We are here today to learn from our own and others' experience. In this opening session we will explore the social and political landscape here in Canada and, as important, in other parts of the English-speaking world.

THE VIEW FROM AUSTRALIA

Jacqueline Hayden

Like many of the Western/pluralistic democratic nations in this decade, Australia has not escaped the ravages of neo-conservative policies nor the down side of neo-liberal philosophy. We are subject to the same (often draconian) trends and policies that make up the political and social landscape here in Canada. We are functioning within a context that values:

- economic efficiency over human needs/rights;
- individualism over social responsibility;
- reduced government intervention;
- reduced government spending;
- market approaches to social services;
- deregulation;
- privatization.

As in other nations, choice theory is being used to rationalize a dichotomized system — services for the rich under user-pay schemes, reduced options for the poor.

These trends have had a direct effect on child care services. In the 1996/97 fiscal year, the budget of the Children Services Program of the Commonwealth Government was reduced by \$800 million. Most of the cuts came from dollars which had been earmarked for non-profit centres in the form of an operating allowance. The funding cuts resulted in increased fees for parents and in a reduction of services (such as lunch and diaper provision). Other outcomes from these cuts include reports by parents (women) that they are being forced to

leave gainful employment because they can no longer afford to pay for child care; an increase in “backyard,” informal, unlicensed, unmonitored care arrangements; the development of a new phenomenon called “reluctant grannies” — retired family members who are recruited into child care arrangements, but are not enthusiastic about this role; an increase in patchwork arrangements (children who make use of a variety of care arrangements because full-time formal care has become too expensive); an increase in the use of “telecare,” (children use the telephone to check in with working parents, and the television in lieu of human caretakers). Meanwhile nearly all services report reductions in staffing and/or special programs. Many child care services have closed.

Perhaps the most disconcerting outcome is that these developments are accompanied by a growing apathy towards the system of government supported child care. This attitude is reflected in a June 26, 1998 editorial in Sydney’s mainstream newspaper, *The Morning Herald*. In summary, these are its sentiments:

- The only role for government support to child care is to meet the needs of working parents;
- Too much money has been spent on the child care system;
- Child care is a residual service and government assistance should be targeted at only those needy (less able) families who might need temporary assistance.

For some of us, these statements produce a sense of *déjà vu*. We heard them 25 years ago and thought we had struggled long and hard to overcome them.

An alternative vision: Self-construction

A group of us in Australia is determined to transcend this regressive landscape (both the attitudes and the policies), and to reconstruct early childhood education into a system which does not depend upon politicians' whims or economic trends or backlash ignorance.

Accordingly, I would like to subtitle this presentation "The Second Service" out of respect for Simone de Beauvoir for her 1956 work, *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir was referring to the role of women in post-war western cultures. She believed that women were socially constructed as the "other"; their role was defined by its difference from, or sameness to, the dominant sex — male.

She believed that women needed to recreate themselves by breaking free of this "otherness" and also of their own past self-image. "Woman must," she proclaimed, "define herself not by her past but in respect to the future through which she projects her aims" (de Beauvoir 1956, 76). While it is very difficult to transcend the context in which one is located, de Beauvoir did inspire us to try. She was convinced that we — women — could become self-constructed.

The field of early childhood education in Australia seems to me to be in a similar place as the 1950s de Beauvoir woman. Early childhood education in Australia (and likely elsewhere) needs to, and some of us believe *can*, define itself apart from the prevailing zeitgeist; *can* transcend (and recreate) its landscape .

We in the field of early childhood education need to redefine ourselves in a way that does not rely upon other programs or services. We must transcend the definition of our service as a substitute for home care, a prerequisite to education, a supplement to health/welfare programs. We must also transcend our own past self-image. We need to move

beyond the discourses which have brought us this far and create a new discourse for ourselves.

Historical precedence: Early discourses

Early childhood education burst onto the political arena in Australia during the Commonwealth election of 1972, riding on a pro-feminist wave. The women's electoral lobby (WEL) is credited with pressuring governments and propelling the child care issue, making it into a major election platform and winning significant concessions from the elected party. The WEL kept child care on the political agenda throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Brennan 1998). Here is what the leader of the WEL, Eva Cox, stated just a few weeks ago in an interview:

Because we were having difficulties getting enough momentum for child care, we emphasised its relationship to the work needs of women and we were successful. We got the Labour party to put lots of money into child care and they actually started talking about it as an economic service but in the process we lost some of our capacity to argue about children from the point of view of the needs of the child — and of the community (Cox 1998, 23).

Those last three words — *of the community* — reflect what the new early childhood education field needs to become.

Today in Australia we are coming to realize that the focus on early childhood education as a work-related service is not in the best interests of many stakeholders. As Eva Cox stated,

we needed this argument during our early days in order to get a stronghold in mainstream economic/political agenda. But that is our past.

We now know that we cannot (should not) reduce early childhood education to a service whose main purpose is to support the employment of women. Nor is it enough to focus upon and use the discourse of early childhood education as a service (benefit) for the child. This too is reductionist because, if child care is defined as a benefit to children *only*, it can be viewed as a residual service. That is, it becomes a service for some children. If the benefits rest solely with the child, then an argument can be made that wealthy parents can and should purchase this service to the extent that they want to benefit their child. Less wealthy families can be given a subsidy to assist them in accessing these benefits. In this sense early childhood services remains tied to a user-pay philosophy and become something that well-off citizens are free to purchase, and that disadvantaged groups — or those with special needs — can be given some (government) assistance to purchase. It becomes a private good not a public (social) responsibility.

Meanwhile the definition of who needs assistance to access this good — and how much they need — will always be subject to the whim of party politics and/ or fiscal policy.

In Australia our promotion of child care as a benefit for children has had some serious repercussions. The focus on benefits to the child has reinforced an ideology of motherhood (apparently a lot of policy-makers have not read de Beauvoir). When we talk about early childhood services for children only, we provide fuel for those who see caring for children in terms of a dichotomy of family versus institution. Child care institutions become the other/the second service, their success measured by their likeness to family care.

Our present Liberal (conservative) government has been using our own child centredness argument to promote the responsibility of the family (read mother) for young children. The best interests of the child, we keep hearing from editors and politicians, is to be at home with mum; and by the way, our employment crisis will be solved when women leave the work force to attend to their appropriate role as mothers!

This philosophical stance is reflected in Australia through regressive policies on female labour participation. These include stay-at-home payments for mothers of preschool-aged children; a tax rebate for stay-at-home spouses; a child care cash “rebate” which is paid directly to any parent who is working. The payment can be claimed for a variety of child care or baby-sitting expenses, including the cost charged by a relative who minds a child in its own home.

While we in the early childhood field welcome government support for diverse child care options, the schemes mentioned above have redirected dollars away from systemic support and development. The schemes also promote an image that babysitting is equivalent to formal, monitored, accountable education and care situations.

Positive aspects

Despite the activities described above, Australia has had, and continues to have, a good system of early childhood education. Distributions in terms of per capita funding and availability of spaces for all income groups have been relatively generous. Despite the recent cuts — and the spectre of more cuts — there remains a lot of money in the system. Indeed,

politicians frequently argue that funds are not so much being reduced as changing hands — coming out of the hands of operators and into those of (needy) parents in the form of subsidies paid to the parent directly. Some of us policy watchers see this form of subsidy as a way to implement more cuts. It is easy under this payment scheme to simply draw a new line (decrease the income above which a subsidy will not be paid) and thus reduce the child care budget by millions of dollars. These kinds of cuts affect individuals, not systems, and thus are less likely to arouse media attention. In any case the cuts to individuals can always be rationalized within a user-pay philosophy

Nonetheless, while we are losing the funding game, we have a different kind of policy support which makes us still one of the most progressive systems in the western world. We have a considerable amount of constitutional power!

I am borrowing these terms — distributions and constitutional power — from other literatures. Distributions refer to policies or goods that are handed out by politicians and other decision-makers. In the child care arena they usually take the form of funding or spaces. In Australia the WEL has been very successful in securing distributions to the field of early childhood education. Except for the last two or three years, Australia can boast a steady growth in dollars and spaces in the child care field throughout the last decade.

However there is another form of allotment which is needed to secure the field. These are what I am calling constitutional allotments. They are the policies or activities which serve to enhance infrastructure, to devolve decision-making and to empower the field.

The terms have been defined as follows: the distributional dimension of policy relates to the allotment of the tangible benefits across various interests in society; the constitutional

dimension relates to the allocation of positions of influence in the making and implementation of policy (Creighton 1994, 249).

Over the years we have come to see that while most politicians win votes and “kudos” by the act of distributing, the distributions themselves are often precarious. They can be as easily taken as given. More important, they do not change the status of the taker. The taker remains the “other,” the group that sits and waits or cajoles for handouts.

Constitutional allotments are different. They are about becoming a decision-maker, not advocating to one. Constitutional allotments are those which result in a changed landscape.

Until recently distributions in the child care field in Australia were relatively generous. Our constitutional allotments, however, were low. We weren't fighting for some of the important things because we were being appeased/seduced by the outlay of funds and the appearance of responsive policy-making. When things got tougher, we got smarter. We turned our lobby efforts towards these more foundational items.

We have in Australia today some significant constitutional allotments. I believe that they are neither precarious nor easily dismantled. They are moving us towards our new and best discourse. Some in the early childhood field are:

- A Child Care Advisory Council reporting to the Minister for Family Services; it is made up of practitioners, academics and peak organizations;
- Children's commissioners in most states;
- A National Council on Accreditation which runs our accreditation system — the only government-regulated accreditation system in the world.

Some exciting constitutional movement is taking place in my state, New South Wales. We have recently established a centralized office which is to become the clearing house for all children's issues, thus addressing the fragmentation that has constrained action in the past. The manager of this office is a well known activist and early childhood academic. The state has launched a new campaign which aims at integration of services (described below) and it has recently voted one million dollars for research into child care and related issues.

I was one of many recipients of this research thrust. I have been funded to investigate (in partnership with the Department of School Education) strategies for enhancing literacy development in child care centres.

Another initiative, called Families First, is being organized through the state Office of Children and Young People. Its aim is to promote collaboration between five government departments and agencies to address equity and best-service issues for families with children under the age of eight. Early childhood educators are collaborating with health, education, welfare, legal and immigration agencies and professionals to develop, implement and evaluate Families First programs. While this is a new and yet untested initiative, it has some promising components. It is research-based and well resourced. Its aim is intersectoral collaboration. It works through a series of committees made up of diverse community representatives. Its structures should allow many voices to be heard.

Other positive components of the Australian landscape are: high levels of training, large numbers of trained specialists and good employment opportunities; alternate training routes whereby graduates from a variety of backgrounds are inducted into the field; research and publications with Australian content are coveted; an increase in student demand for post-

graduate qualifications, and an increased number of senior academics in this field; and perhaps one of the most important constitutional elements — a commitment to collaborate with other fields.

An alternative approach

Other analysts (notably ----Moss, -----Dahlberg, -----Pence and Donna Lero) have conceptualized the field of early childhood education in terms of four prevailing discourses:

The first discourse: Child care as a support for working parents. In Australia we used this discourse to penetrate the political agenda, and then to stay on it. Much government funding is rationalized by this discourse.

The second discourse: Child care which provides compensatory programs for special needs (disadvantaged) children. This discourse describes early childhood education in terms of social justice but with a residual approach. Early childhood programs are provided by governments to meet a deficit in families and/or individuals

The third discourse: Child care for school readiness. While this discourse is heading more towards universal coverage, it still defines this system in terms of the other — early childhood services become the means to the end of improved efficacy of the school system. They are a support to the school system.

All three discourses describe early childhood education in terms of programs for target groups. Our alternative vision is to redefine child care as a service to the community. In order to break away from being a second service, early childhood education needs to go beyond

employment-centred, beyond child-centred and even beyond family-centred approaches. It needs to be recognized as an agent which creates social capital. It does this by being the vehicle whereby links, relationships and opportunities for networking develop.

The outcome, or the way by which early childhood programs measure their success, thus will not be based upon more women in the workforce or more children advancing in school. The outcome or success will be seen in terms of fostering and nurturing of social relationships: building community, enhancing civil society.

The fourth discourse: A community-oriented approach to social services. This is the antidote or alternative to neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies and practices. It is a way to counter hostile anti-family, anti-human landscapes. Within the fourth discourse, early childhood settings become places where social relationships, networks and community are developed. They are the public place where young children and families are inducted into and construct civil society.

In a forthcoming book, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence state:

Early childhood institutions . . . are forums located in civil society. . . . They can make important contributions to other projects of social, cultural and political significance. . . . Further, early childhood institutions can play an important part as the primary means for constituting civil society . . . and for fostering the visibility, inclusion and active participation of the young child and its family in civil society (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence forthcoming, 7).

What is the landscape of Australia?

In Australia we are subject to the ravages of economic downturn coupled with attitudes and policies which reinforce traditional sex roles. We have a government which promotes economic efficiency over social responsibility. We are victims of widespread privatization of social services, deregulation, downsizing. We live in an era when victims of social and systemic breakdowns — unemployment, poor educational outcomes, poverty — are blamed for their plights. We are living, in Australia as in Canada and elsewhere, in a desert of neo-conservatism and with the harshness of neo-liberalism.

What are the alternatives? Simone de Beauvoir insisted that women could create themselves, could wrench themselves from socially constructed definitions. Some of us believe that we can create early childhood education apart from the landscape, the (hostile) context in which it finds itself; and apart from its own past and traditional discourses.

We are moving towards a new, fourth, discourse whereby early childhood services are the agents of community development; whereby early childhood services do not merely survive in the landscape — they pro-actively reconstruct it.

When we review political activity in terms of distributions versus constitutional issues, we are able to plan and measure our progress towards this goal/vision. We can put our energies into building and reinforcing infrastructures that move early childhood services into a central place in the community. We can reformulate early childhood services so that they work to foster social relationships, networks and interagency collaborations.

We have had some success in some parts of Australia in promoting this definition of early childhood services, moving it from the second service to the dominant or at least central service.

I want to end on this optimistic note. The New South Wales Department of Community Services launched a new campaign in November 1998, the week of the Toronto conference. Its goals have captured what we feel about early childhood services — the best that we can become: early childhood service as a central aspect of a community thrust which focuses on building community; which sees children as a shared responsibility; which situates families and children in the centre of the community; which envisions services that transcend rigid structures — that acknowledge, and are developed around, diverse needs.

The campaign is called “It Takes a Community” (to care for a child). This is what we are moving towards making early childhood become — the place where community takes hold and grows.

Politically, we are living in sad times; but perhaps they are spurring us to creative and better resolutions. This symposium is the first step towards identifying common problems and working together to redefine and transcend them. I feel privileged to be part of this movement.

For further reading:

Brennan, D. *The Politics of Australian Child Care: Philanthropy to Feminism and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Cox, E. “Profile.” *Rattler* 46(Winter) 1998: 20-23.

Creighton, A. “Health Care in Canada and Australia: The development of a comparative analytical framework.” *Australian Canadian Studies* 13(2) 1995: 59-71.

Dahlberg, G, Moss, P. and Pence, A. *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Post Modern Perspectives*. London: Falmer Press, forthcoming.

de Beauvoir, S. *The Second Sex*. London: Penguin, 1956.

Hayden, J. (ed.) *Early Childhood Landscapes: Cross National Perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang, forthcoming.

Lero, D. "Early Childhood Education: An Empowering Force for the 21st century?" in J. Hayden (ed.) *Early Childhood Landscapes: Cross National Perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang, forthcoming, 376-385.

Pence, A. and Benner, A. "The Ministry of Children and Families," in J. Hayden (ed.) *Early Childhood Landscapes: Cross National Perspectives*. New York: Peter Lang, forthcoming, 361-375.

THE VIEW FROM THE UK

Bronwen Cohen

In Scotland in 1816, Robert Owen, the world's first nursery provider described his vision for his nursery. The parents would be relieved from loss of time, ## their children in the care ## ### to that at which there is a school. The child will acquire the best habits and principles, while at mealtimes and night it will return to the company of its parents, and the affections of each are likely to be increased by the separation. Owen's vision also involved school-age child care service. It was a meeting place for children from 5 to 10 years of age, previous to and after school hours. It also combined an element of parenting, as Owen believed that parents are very deficient with regard to the best modes of training their children.

Robert Owen's themes in 1816 — the nursery, the emphasis on education, parents, school-age child care, the attention to parenting — all these are threads contained in child care in the UK today. It is a mystery to me how Owen could have been so quick off the mark and how it has taken us so long to get to that point ourselves.

Quite simply, we have a very fragmented system in the UK. We have a very short pre-school period. Compulsory schooling starts as early as the age of 4 in Northern Ireland, 5 in the rest of the UK; this short pre-school period has a very fragmented structure comprised of a mixed economy of public, private, and not-for-profit services. In the public area, 27 or 28 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds are in nursery education; the other part of the public area, day nurseries, is very tiny, with 0.7 percent [of what age-group?]. For the most part, arrangements are for family day care and child minders, and private day nurseries which are still not very significant.

That was the scene more than 180 years later, in 1997, when the current government took over. The new Labour government was elected after a campaign in which child care was not a very big issue. It nevertheless made some specific commitments on child care. One of these was to develop a national child care strategy. Involved in that commitment was an acknowledgement for the first time of a public responsibility to all children, rather than focusing on need. The second of the commitments was a specific one, to expand nursery education to provide at least part-time spaces for all 3- and 4-year-olds. There was a related commitment to adopt a specific policy directive on parental and family leave which the previous government had opted out of. There were also a number of commitments in areas such as social exclusion and child poverty.

The government published its national strategy a year after the election, in May, 1998. There are actually four strategies, one for each part of the UK. The proposed Scottish strategy has an overarching aim of providing good quality, affordable child care for children aged 0 to 14. This is the first time we've ever had such an overarching aim. It is to be achieved by raising the quality of care, defined in the strategy as including better integration of education and child care, and more consistent regulation of, and new standards for, education in child care, and more training opportunities. One of the first moves the government made was to transfer part of the responsibility for child care services to the education ministry, where the responsibility for nursery education has continued to be; so now the two responsibilities are together at the government level.

Improving affordability and accessibility is to be achieved by a mixture of supply and demand funding. On the supply side, £25 million will be provided in Scotland in the period to 2003; together with money in the education system, this will provide a total of £91 million

pounds over three years. In addition, a working-families tax credit will help lower-income families pay for child care. A demand subsidy, i.e., assistance to parents in paying for child care, applies to wider age groups, children up to 14 years, and up to 16 in the case of children with special needs. The age range for public responsibility is actually being raised.

The supply subsidies vary in nature between the age groups. The funding is restricted largely to our school services from the age of 3, and further funding is available in case of hard times and for the education of 3- and 4-year-olds. At the bottom end of the age range, for children under 3, centres are being established that supply very intensive early intervention and family support services — something akin to the Head Start program in the United States, although envisaged in a somewhat different way. That initiative came up in a review of a whole range of provisions for children under the age of 8 in the UK. It is effective in the prevention of social exclusion.

The child care strategy forms part of a veritable snowstorm of government initiatives relevant to children. Policy papers are flowing across my desk. They include proposals relating to social exclusion, health, welfare, special educational needs, and the child care strategy itself. In Scotland, expectations are being to a raised very high

THE VIEW FROM THE US**Marcy Whitebook**

Some people refer to child care in the US as a non-system, a patchwork quilt. Parts of it were established long ago, and now a lot of new things are coming on stream — it is very hard to grasp fully what the picture in the 1990s really is.

There are no federal regulations that govern all delivery of child care services throughout the US. Each state determines who is qualified to work in child care, what kind of ratios there should be, what kind of group sizes there should be; and beyond that, each state also determines what to do with the money it receives from the federal government, and each state decides whether or not to augment that funding with its own funds, or alternatively just to use its own money. Devolution is occurring in some states. In California, for instance, all 58 counties are deciding what to do with child care money, and they're deciding to do different things. So it's a very incoherent system. There are exceptions, of course: Head Start, which is a federally run program, does have some standards, and our military child systems do have some standards.

Even though there is obvious inconsistency, real similarities are to be found across all communities. The biggest is that child care is not affordable for most families. People in the US are paying at least as much for centre-based child care as they pay for public university education, yet public university education is far better subsidized for parents than our early childhood system is. As an example of subsidized child care, only 25 percent of California families who qualify for subsidized services actually get them, and even then the level at which they qualify is so low that many more are left needing help.

Furthermore, care is not necessarily designed to meet parents' needs — people who work in the evenings or on swing shifts have a much more difficult time finding child care than if they were working standard hours. There is a mis-match between the availability of services and families' needs.

Finally, child care employment is one of the worst-paying jobs in our entire society. In many cases, child care workers cannot make a sustaining wage for themselves, let alone for themselves and other people in their families. That means many communities are experiencing a big shortage, particularly now when the economy is relatively good, of people who will actually work in child care programs. Programs are closing or they accept fewer enrollments, or they just can't find staff.

All of that is happening in the context of a great deal of money being poured into the child care system. We are trying to “grow” the system at the same time as there is a shortage of people willing to do the work.

One way to understand the child care system situation in the United States is to think about bipolar personality disorder — people have difficulty integrating the different parts of themselves into a coherent form of behaviour. In the social policy field we have an inability to think about more than one part of the problem at any given time. We can see that most clearly around the welfare reform issue, which has driven a great deal of the interest and the money that is now flowing into child care. Some people are very concerned about getting poor women out of their homes and into the market place; there is big push with welfare reform to get people working, with a consequent focus on child care as the key to getting people to work. But this involves the need to expand the child care system, so at the same time as we are pushing women into the work force, we are also pushing many of those same

women into child care employment — and that makes no sense because they will not be able to support themselves and their families.

Another example of the way social policies look only at one part of the problem and not at the other is the current emphasis on reducing the size of elementary school classrooms. People with a four-year Bachelor's degree can get a job in an elementary school, so teachers in the child care system who have a Bachelor's degree are going into the public schools where they can earn perhaps \$5,000 to \$10,000 more a year, with full benefits. That's a clear case of social policy focusing on one part of the problem but not on the other. A further example of this bipolar behaviour is in the split in the child care community between early education and child care. People are saying, "We can't talk about child care any more; nobody likes that. Let's talk about early education; Americans like education." As a consequence we are seeing a lot of interest in setting up pre-schools for 3- and 4-year-olds, but the thinking is about setting them up as a two-hour or three-hour program — an add-on — without considering what happens after that period. At the same time, with Head Start, there is a realization that those programs need to be full-day programs, because women are working and need full-day care. I am quite fearful, therefore, that we will have early education teachers as child care workers, even though it is clear that the children are being educated, and education and care are integrated for young children.

A final area where we see this bipolar split is around the issue of child care jobs. The research makes the point abundantly clear that good services for young children need trained and educated providers. We have put a large amount of money in many of the states into training people, yet at the same time our efforts to improve child care jobs is quite underdeveloped. There are a few lone, hopeful patches, but in most cases child care employment is

at the poverty level; even though we say in one voice that we want to have trained providers, our social policies go quite the other way. (Many states actually lowered their reimbursement rates for public services when the new welfare provisions came in, reducing even further what people are actually getting paid.)

Is there anything hopeful on the US landscape? I can give you some good things. One is a growing awareness of the need to improve child care jobs. The move is small, but there is more organizing going on among people who are working in child care. People are beginning to find a voice and are talking about the need to improve jobs; and they are beginning to form coalitions at the local level to deal with that. We actually got legislation passed in California last year that would provide stipends to people working in child care, over and above their wages. The labour movement is starting to talk more in some communities in New York and California, and is getting involved in child care and in the coalitions where people understand that we have to think about building a system that provides good employment as well as good affordable services. Another positive example is that a group in California has produced a state budget for working families, and has tried to think about what a coherent family policy would look like. Another, that we are talking about child care in terms of economic development.

So some positive things are happening, but one big concern is that so much is happening and the system is changing so quickly that people are having great difficulty in understanding and grasping it all. Decisions are being made and new sources of funding are coming in, but at the local level people are not well organized yet to respond, or the voices that are organized represent one point of view but we have no coherent strategy.

I am struck by the similarity in these issues across countries. We really need to think about how we can push forward with a coherent plan, and not become stuck on individual measures that we think we can get through the political and administrative system without thinking about their implications — like the example of the pre-kindergarten serving children for two hours a day while so many child care needs are unattended to.

THE VIEW FROM CANADA**Rita Chudnovsky**

Until the 1980s the social safety net in Canada, although it was far from perfect and many were excluded, was in hindsight pretty good in comparison to what we have today. Our expectations have really been turned upside down. The landscape has been reversed and the predominant trends have derailed our expectation that child care would join other social programs to make up the social safety net of Canada.

Central to some of those trends has been a decentralization of both responsibility for and authority over social programs and social policies, together with a significant reduction in the federal role in the development of social programs, in setting a national vision and in the level of funding it supplied. This has resulted in structural changes, one result of which is that we no longer even have a federal department with early childhood issues as part of its mandate.

The change in the way that the federal government provides funding for social programs across Canada, as reflected in the Canada Health and Social Transfer, or CHST, has left child care with no real home in social policy today. As a result we are continuing to experience, probably at an accelerated rate, what we could call policy fragmentation. Policies related to early childhood (and they're few and far between) are being implemented by different departments under different mandates with different visions, and there is no place for us even to come and talk about where to bring those things together.

Closely related to that fragmentation and decentralization has been a significant reduction in the amount of dollars flowing from the federal government through transfer

payments to the provinces to support social programs. This has been justified in the name of deficit and debt reduction, but Canada is now, with a budgetary surplus, in a position to look at reinvesting fiscally so that argument is no longer viable.

The reduction in federal spending and the decentralization of responsibilities was not only about deficit and debt reduction. It was, in my view, much more fundamentally about an ideological shift, a value shift which set out to convince us that democratically elected governments were no longer to be trusted for delivering on our collective responsibility for the well-being of all. As a result of this ideological, political and economic shift, we now have a landscape characterized by a shift in responsibility for social policy and programs from the federal government to the provincial governments and to individuals. The shift has seen funding move from support for services, to subsidies for low-income individuals, increasingly under very targeted eligibility rules.

So what does this mean for early childhood care and education? It means first of all that, contrary to what many of us thought in 1970s and 1980s, all social programs in Canada are coming to resemble more closely the situation in child care. All social programs are now moving towards fragmentation, mixed delivery systems, no guarantee that people will be provided with service, no guarantee that equity, access or quality will be addressed; and we are moving towards the development of two, if not multi-tiered, systems — a fundamental reverse of what we had expected.

Second, the differences across the country are getting bigger, and mostly for the worse. The big exception to the downward trend in early childhood care is clearly the introduction in Quebec of a new family policy. This is a very significant development in terms of the landscape, that Quebec has clearly seen child care and early childhood care as a central piece

of sound policy. It has broken down the split which had existed between parents in the labour force and parents who are at home, and between care which is delivered in different kinds of settings; and it shows us that, when a provincial government has the political will to act, it can and it does. However, the experience in Quebec is not being shared across the country and in most other jurisdictions we have seen the negative impact on early child care services as a result of both reductions in funding and deregulation, and less emphasis on issues associated with quality, and so on.

There is a significant increase in both public and political attention to the issue of children. We see it reflected in the federal, provincial, territorial and aboriginal discussions now loosely titled the National Children's Agenda, the contents and future of which remain somewhat unclear. Nevertheless, this does reflect both public support and a political expression across governments for a shared vision to ensure the well-being of Canada's children. It is at best puzzling to find, even within that broad renewed public interest with a growing body of research from a wide variety of fields which clearly speak to the value of public investment in the early years, that child care or, even more broadly, early childhood care and education does not find a home.

One of the positive features about our landscape is that the public is ahead of the politicians on this matter. Rarely do we see public opinions polled that so clearly highlight a very strong sense, albeit very general, that the public supports an increase in investment in the early years.

Let me share with you my visual image of the landscape we find ourselves in: early childhood care and education finds itself today in a valley, and our valley is surrounded by a hostile environment. We are clear that, without finding a way through that hostile

environment, we cannot be a sustainable community. There are some paths, there are some places to build bridges, but it is clear to me that without our collective efforts to explore those paths and build those bridges, the landscape for children will not change.

THE VIEW FROM EUROPE**Helen Penn**

I have been asked to talk about the alternatives — that is, views of early child care and education which, from a North American or Anglo-American perspective, may seem so far-fetched as to constitute fantasy. Nevertheless, such systems and practices exist and even thrive outside of our neo-liberal market-oriented societies; and it is useful to consider them, if only because they give us a glimpse of what we might be missing.

Our conversations and recommendations here are necessarily directed to the minor adjustments we might make to a system of child care which is essentially hostile to children. Child care is seen as a labour-market supply issue, ensuring a flow of women into the workforce; a view which paradoxically coexists with a welfare approach that sees children as needing intervention; they are vulnerable, or they need protection against the mismanagement of their mothers who don't look after them properly, or against profiteers — or worse, abusers — in child care services. This situation, we painfully argue, can be improved by more and better training of child care workers, making sure their practice is developmentally appropriate; by better pay for these workers; by tighter regulation of services; and, if the government is a liberal one, by targeted subsidies for the most vulnerable children (paid for in the case of the UK by lottery money and betting profits!). These tortuous explanations, justifications and ameliorations of what is basically a system inimical to children, are what we deal in.

Can it be different? I was recently in Bulgaria, a very poor ex-communist country where the minimum monthly wage is Canadian \$40. Yet in Sofia, the capital, 95 percent of

children aged 3 to 6 go to full-time state nurseries, open from 7 am to 7 pm, and staffed by trained teachers. Most of these nurseries are in light, spacious buildings in their own grounds, and more than half have their own heated swimming pools. The Bulgarian teachers asked me about nurseries in London and could scarcely believe my reply — that most child care provision is private and very expensive, not all child care workers are trained, nursery schooling is a separate and part-time system available for only two-and-a-half hours a day, children start formal school at the age of 4, and no, swimming pools are not routinely provided. After digesting this, one of the teachers replied, “We’ve always admired Britain and America; I thought living standards are so high and people are so free. But perhaps I am better off here.”

To give an even more unlikely example, Mongolia, sandwiched between Russia and China, is one of the poorest countries in the world, in the bottom 10 percent for GNP. It is exceptionally remote and inhospitable, where more than half the population is nomadic. But even here there is a state nursery service, staffed by trained teachers. Every settlement in the Gobi Desert, or in the mountains, has a nursery service, often offering outreach work to nomadic populations as well as a centre-based service. The nurseries may be basic by our standards, but they represent an extraordinary investment and commitment of public resources in a Mongolian context. Mongolians are also open to improvement and to new ideas in a way that is truly humbling, given the myopic assumptions in North America and the UK that everyone is, or is trying to be, like us; or, worse, that there is no world outside of the USA that seriously counts.

These two examples may appear extreme and exotic, but they illustrate that the patterns of child care and education in the English-speaking world are by no means universal, and

may even constitute a *minority* approach in a global sense. Although this is now an unpopular reference, most of the ex-communist world had state-funded and very extensive nursery systems and, because of public pressure and goodwill, these have mostly survived, although in diminished form, ten years after the fall of communism.

But in much of Western Europe too, with the exception of the UK, which is the least comfortable member of the European Union, there are extensive publicly funded creche and nursery systems, and private and voluntary provision plays a small role. British Prime Minister Tony Blair may be a hero of our time, but his gaze on almost all matters, including child care, is a transatlantic one, and it is North American paradigms rather than European ones that he has chosen to adopt.

My colleague, Peter Moss, has worked over a ten-year period with colleagues in the European Union to document the extent and nature of early childhood services in Europe. One of the key differences between European policies and those of English-speaking countries is the assumption that the state has a major, if not an exclusive, role to play in the planning, funding and provision of services. This means that equity of access for *all* children is a major consideration, and one which is enshrined in law in a number of countries. Equity of access also means equity of standards; that is, all children should be entitled to a similar kind of service in which standards, in basic training, pay, adult-child ratios, premises, curriculum, and so on, are set at a relatively high level which simply cannot be breached, any more than the public health or public education systems can be allowed to fall below a certain level (although these may not be persuasive comparisons in a North American context). At any rate, early childhood services are taken out of the market arena; they are no longer a commodity subject to supply and demand, whose costs are related to what the

market will bear. Instead, services are value-driven; they are provided because there is a consensus that they are valuable per se for children and their parents, and a civilized society ought to be providing them.

The security that this kind of widespread public provision gives, its universal take-up, and the public respect accorded to it, create a very different climate for development and experimentation. All the basics, for which we are still rather hopelessly struggling in a North American or English-speaking context, are accepted and taken for granted; the question is, what else can the system do to create good practice, where is the new cutting edge? Although some of the state systems are regarded as rather rigid, most notably in France, there are plenty of interesting examples to draw on. Briefly, I want to give four examples of experimentation in public practice, from Belgium, Denmark, Germany and Spain.

The Belgian system has its peculiarities, not least that there are completely separate French-speaking and Flemish-speaking systems. I am referring only to the former system, although the Flemish may be similar. All children aged 3 to 6 go to full-time kindergartens which are part of the state education system, but about 40 percent of children from 0 to 3 go to full-time creches run by the Ministry of Health. This Ministry is currently rewriting its guidelines for the creches, and those charged with the rewriting are particularly interested in the work of a Hungarian theorist called Emile Pickler, who argues that institutional life cannot possibly imitate or mimic home life, and what is important is not the relationships between adults and children, but those between children themselves. He spent his life exploring how group solidarity among children can be developed and encouraged. This is a very different approach from the conventional Anglo-American view that adult-child relationships are crucial in the nursery, that key worker systems need to be in place, and that

young children are inherently too individualistic to relate to each other without friction. This approach of Pickler is systematically tried out and developed in the creches, with a great deal of enthusiasm from staff.

The Danish system offers full-time care for children aged from 0 to 7 years, run by the Ministry of Social Welfare. In practice, because parental leave is good, there are not many children under the age of 2. The system in Denmark is a very devolved one. The Ministry sets a very broad curricular approach, and within that framework, parents and workers are free to make their own plans for their nursery. A very common theme for Danish nurseries is ecology; care of the environment, working out relationships to the environment, is a paramount concern. In some cities there is a scheme operating throughout the year, whatever the weather, known as forest kindergartens, whereby children are taken regularly by bus to nearby woods and lakes for the day.

The unification of East and West Germany has posed interesting challenges to the regime. East Germany had a comprehensive nursery system, run on traditional communist lines; while West Germany had a much more partial and patchy, but more innovative, system. After unification, much of the provision for children under 3 was shut down; but in return the Government offered more extensive parental leave, and guaranteed a kindergarten place, full-time if required, to every child aged 3 to 6. This has meant a substantial expansion program in West Germany. In the city of Frankfurt, the architects' department took this challenge very seriously; they developed a program of building which they put out to *international* tender in order to attract the world's leading architects. The nursery building program in Frankfurt has already become a legend in architectural circles — the buildings have won prizes of the kind only previously awarded to museums and banks. As an example, the nursery by

Hundertwasser, an Austrian equivalent of David Hockney, is a fairytale castle. It doesn't have a straight line or a corner in it; it has a turf roof and a gilded cupola, and every single item in it, from the stair banister to the skirting boards, is hand-carved and painted. Other nurseries include a ship, a greenhouse, and an entirely recyclable ecological nursery — being green is a serious business in Germany. These nurseries are all public buildings, mostly used by poor communities, including Turkish guest-workers.

Finally, Spain. Spain is one of the countries I describe in my book, *Comparing Nurseries* (1997). Spain has perhaps the most comprehensive and well thought out education legislation in Europe, enacted in 1989. All provision for children aged 0 to 6 is regarded as educational, and is administered by education departments; this provision offers care as well as education and simply does not distinguish between the two. The Education Act further defines and describes tertiary education, and the teacher training necessary to staff services for younger children. The education law is semi-federal; within a very broad framework, each of Spain's regions and cities has the competence to set its own curriculum for young children, which is then refined again at nursery level. In the city of Barcelona, which I know very well, the nurseries have not only been run as collectives — that is, without managers — but the Barcelona education and culture committee requires nurseries to emphasize the city's cultural heritage, which they do willingly. So 3-year-olds speak Catalan and Spanish; they are likely to be familiar, for instance, with the paintings of Miró and Picasso, and the colour tones and brush strokes they use; they have learned to taste and discriminate regional cuisine; and when the European symphony orchestra visits Barcelona, it gives a special performance for nursery-age children and their parents. A public nursery in Barcelona can be a very lively place.

To sum up, I want to make four points:

First, there is in Europe a substantial and very diverse tradition of early childhood services which operates on premises very different from North American models.

Second, policy and practice are intimately connected; within the security of a well-established and comprehensive policy framework, development and experimentation are not only possible but at best feed into and enhance policy.

Third, comprehensive and public early childhood services can be more inclusive than any other arrangement; they do not need to segregate children according to income or to the perceived inadequacies or needs of either the parents or the children; they are equally for all children.

Fourth, while we all have to operate within the constraints of the daily world in which we live and work, we should be alert to the possibilities outside it. The USA constitutes only 5 percent of the world's population; Canada rather less. The UK is a dot on the world map. What happens to the children in the rest of the world? Surely in this global age we should be well-informed about their lives too.

For further reading:

Dudek, M. *Kindergarten Architecture*. London: E. Spon, 1996.

European Commission Network on Childcare. *Quality Targets in Services for Young Children, and A Review of Young Children in the European Union*. Brussels: European Commission Equal Opportunities Unit (DGVA/A/3). 22 rue de la Loie, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium, 1996.

Penn, H. *Review of Kindergartens in Mongolia*. London: Save the Children UK, 1997.

Penn, H. *Comparing Nurseries*. London: Paul Chapman, Toronto: Corwin Press, 1997.

Marvyn Novick (concluding comments)

The five presentations from our panel have given us a range of perspectives on the whole question of ## early childhood care and education. We heard from Jackie Hayden that people in Australia are looking at early childhood ## in terms of its community development ## aspect ##. Bronwen Cohen told us about the integration of education and child care in Britain, and Marcy Whitebook about ## approach, coalition development in the United States. Rita Chudnovsky talked to us about the Quebec experience, and I want to suggest that you think about that, because Quebec has made child care and family support a part of their national project of sovereignty; and while you may agree or disagree with the project, I think you will agree that is an important dimension. Finally, Helen Penn reminded us quite clearly that the extent to which we invest in all children reflects important ideological perspectives ## state.

Those of us in the early childhood social policy field should not believe that, because we argue for the innocence of children, we are relieved of the burden of dealing with the ideological questions. In the end, it is the ideological focus that determines where our investments are made and where they are not made.

I urge you in your sessions during this symposium to think hard about how early education child care can become part of a national project in Canada. It is clear that the development of much of our welfare state in this country and elsewhere goes through periods of intense national solidarity, whether it was in support of the war effort in the 1940s, or whether it was during a period in the 1960s when the sense of this country was strong.

What role does the healthy development of children play, and what role does early education and child care play in the national vitality of this country? What role do they play in terms of meeting its commitments ##, in terms of social cohesion — which people are very concerned about in Canada — and in contributing to economic innovation. One of the weaknesses of neo-liberal economics is that it's wrong. It's not just ##, it's wrong. ## economic # economic theory, beginning to talk about how wealth is created ##, opportunity for that talent to lead ## is an essential part of long term economic vitality. ##.

I hope this symposium gives you an opportunity to work together on these questions.