



Diversity or Disparity?

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE IN CANADA (ECEC)

Community Indicators Project Report

Voices for ECEC - Decades of Discussion and Promises

Canada shall, under a Progressive Conservative Government, have an effective national system of child care.

Brian Mulroney, 1984

We are a nation of unmatched diversity and tolerance,.... A nation unshakably committed to ensuring that none of our people is left behind as we move ahead ... This means ensuring that all Canadian children have the best possible start in life.

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, Summer 2000

The [federal] government ...will work with its partners to increase access to early learning opportunities and to quality child care ...

Speech from the Throne to Open the Second Session of the Thirty-Seventh Parliament of Canada, September 30, 2002

Campaign 2000, the ECEC Community Indicators Project and This Report

Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan cross-Canada coalition of 85 national and community organizations. To ensure that children have *the best possible start in life* the coalition proposes a coherent and comprehensive National Plan of Action for Children that would ensure that:

- Children do not live in poverty;
- Early childhood education and care is available to give every child a good start in life;
- Parents have income security and jobs with good wages and decent working conditions to support their families; and,
- Safe and affordable housing is a reality for all.

Through the ECEC Community Indicators project Campaign 2000 and its partners in Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia aim to raise public awareness about early childhood education and care (ECEC) and to foster and strengthen links between the early childhood education sector and the broader community. The project's three main activities are: community forums; a website with discussion forum opportunities; and two reports, this one and one to follow in the fall of 2003. This report provides a snapshot of early childhood ECEC in Canada in 2001 by using indicators related to availability, affordability and quality of ECEC services.

Canada is a country where the diversity of its regions is celebrated. Unfortunately this report illustrates that when the focus is on early childhood education, disparity, the less attractive cousin of diversity, is frequently uncovered.



October, 2002

What is Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)?

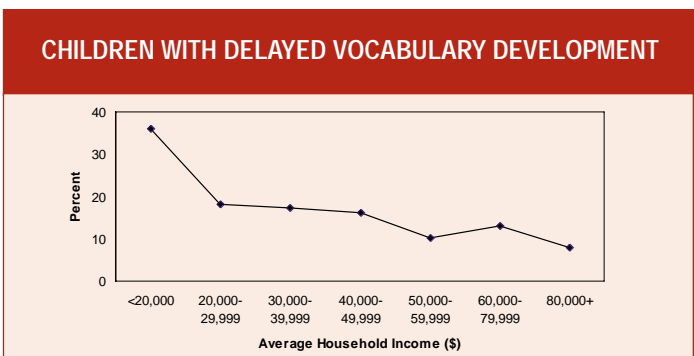
... “care” and “education” are inseparable concepts ... the use of the term ECEC supports an integrated and coherent approach to policy and provision, which is inclusive of all children and all parents regardless of employment or socioeconomic status ... such arrangements may fulfill a wide range of objectives including care, learning and social support.

(OECD, *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care*, 2001, p. 14.)

The term *early childhood education and care* (ECEC) encompasses settings where both learning and care occur for children under the age of six. It includes regulated child care services (part-day preschools or nursery schools, full-day child care centres and family child care homes) as well as pre-kindergarten programs, kindergarten and the family resource programs that support learning and care. In Canada most ECEC services for children under school age are funded on a user pay basis. The exceptions to this are kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs which are predominantly publicly funded.

As the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) points out, the early years are the first formative step in lifelong learning and a key to successful education, social and family policy. Closer to home the research tells us: *... that there is room for improvement in the environments in which most Canadian children grow up, right across the socioeconomic spectrum, and not just in those walks of life traditionally considered ‘high risk’.* In other words, the issue is providing ‘universal access’ to environments that support healthy child development, not just protecting those at risk. (Hertzman, *Leave No Child Behind! Social Exclusion and Child Development*, Laidlaw Foundation, May, 2002, p. 12.)

ECEC is recognized as an enabler ... regardless of where in the spectrum of abilities, advantage or disadvantage a child may rest. Developmental delays occur across all income groups as this graph plotting the incidence of children with delayed vocabulary development illustrates. There is much to support the premise that a universally accessible set of ECEC services should be available for all children rather than a fragmented set of targeted services for special populations. (Doherty, 2001)



Ross DP, Roberts P. (1999) *Income and Child Well-being: a new perspective on the poverty debate*. Canadian Council on Social Development: Ottawa, p. 25.

What Is An Indicator?

This report uses indicators to illustrate how well Canada as a nation is providing ECEC. It examines service availability, affordability and quality and touches on the effectiveness of the related public policy. Although there are many definitions for the term "indicator" this report uses the following one:

A social indicator is basically a statistic which tells us something about an aspect of wellbeing within an area or group. Moreover, if it is tracked or monitored over time it should give us an accurate idea whether or not things are improving, static or declining with respect to the aspect of wellbeing that it measures.

(Hugo, 1997)

A major constraint to the development and use of indicators for ECEC in Canada is the limited availability of administrative data that is common, consistent and collected on a regular basis across the country. The existing data is narrow in scope and measuring progress overtime is a challenge. Comparative information on kindergarten and family resource programs is even more elusive than information about regulated child care. Therefore the indicators that follow are based primarily on the available child care data.

SOURCES:

Population and labour force estimates for this report come from special tabulations by Statistics Canada of the Labour Force Survey 2000 & 2001 (LFS). Poverty estimates for 2001 are derived from the Statistics Canada's Social Policy Simulation Database Model (SPSD/M)*. The child care space, cost and subsidy information is based on the administrative data provided by the provinces to the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, University of Toronto (CRRU). The information on wages and quality has been compiled from the data set of the 1998 study of wages and working conditions entitled "You Bet I Care" known as YBIC! We regret that space constraints do not allow us to provide full references in the text of this report. However, they are available online at <http://www.campaign2000.ca/ci/>.

* This analysis is based on Statistics Canada's Social Policy Simulation Database and Model. The assumptions and calculations underlying the simulation results were prepared by Andrew Mitchell and the responsibility for the use and interpretation of these data is entirely that of the authors.



How Well Is Canada Providing ECEC?

Sadly the quick report card answer to this question would be an “F” for “far from well enough”. What do the indicators illustrate?

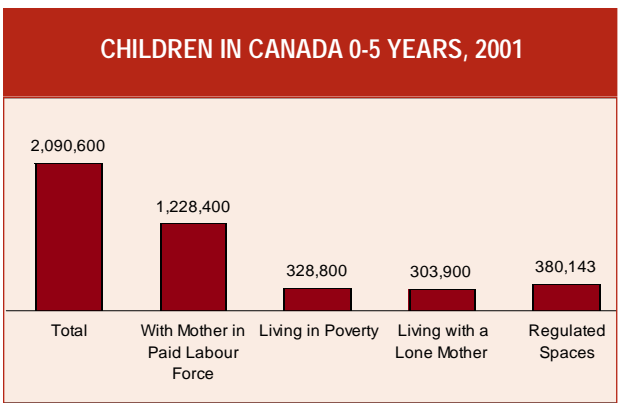
AVAILABILITY

Indicator: Number of ECEC spaces in proportion to child population.

Whether or not parents are in the work force, and regardless of their socio-economic status, providing their children with the opportunity to participate in an early childhood education and care setting should be an option. Some think it should be a right.

Access to childcare/daycare should become the right of every child by virtue of Canadian citizenship, and not restricted by either income, class or whether both spouses are gainfully employed.
(Courchene, 2001)

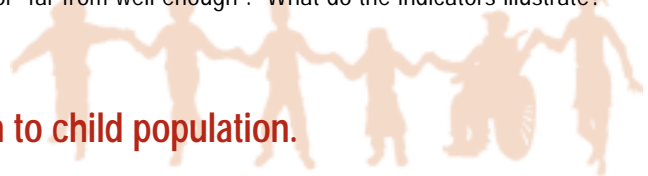
In 2001 in Canada 82% of children under the age of six did not have access to a regulated ECEC space.



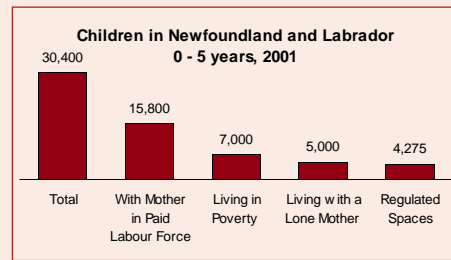
Source: LFS, SPSPD/M and CRRU 2002

Although the number of children in Canada is *decreasing* and the number of regulated ECEC spaces is *increasing* the short fall between them continues to be dramatic. At best in 2001 only 18% of all children under the age of six could be accommodated in a regulated ECEC setting. This included all child care services full and part-time. In all provinces except Saskatchewan, preschools make up a significant component of the regulated sector and usually provide a program for less than three hours a day. When this is factored into the estimate it is clear why the situation is often described as dire with respect to availability for children whose mothers are in the paid labour force.

We were unable to determine the number of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten spaces in Canada.

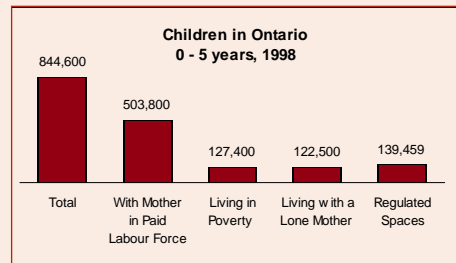


The availability picture is similar in each of the four provinces that are the focus of this report.

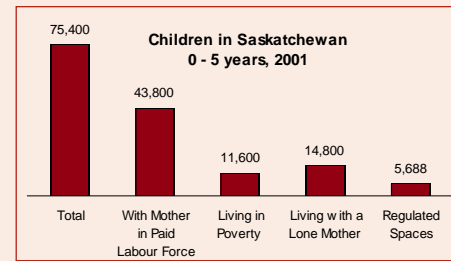


In Newfoundland there are only enough regulated spaces to accommodate 14% of the children under the age of six. 52% of these children have mothers in the paid labour force.

In Ontario only 17% of the total child population can be accommodated in a regulated setting but 60% of the children under six have mothers in the paid labour force. This estimate is based on 1998 data for regulated spaces as data for 2001 was unavailable.



Only 8% of the under six population in Saskatchewan can be accommodated in a regular setting. This percentage is likely a more realistic representation of the availability of regulated ECEC for



children whose mothers are in the paid labour force since part-day preschool / nursery school spaces are not counted in the numbers for regulated settings in Saskatchewan. 58% of all children under the age of six have mothers in the paid labour force.

British Columbia fares better than the other provinces with respect to estimates of availability. There are regulated spaces for 26% of the under six population of which it is estimated that 56% have mothers in the paid labour force. However, the 2001 BC Provincial Child Care Survey states that for children aged 3 - 5 there are only 87 spaces per 1000 BC children in full-day regulated settings versus 108 spaces for every 1000 BC children in part-day preschool settings.



Source: LFS, SPSPD/M and CRRU 2002

AFFORDABILITY

Indicator: Cost of ECEC as a proportion of family income.

In Canada cost is a serious barrier to access for many families.

Many studies show that attending day care has a positive impact on a child's intellectual development, knowledge, learning and language ... The length of time that the child attends the day care is also a factor: the longer the child attends, the better his or her performance.

(Cecilia Palacio-Quintin, *Isuma*, Vol. 1 N° 2, Autumn 2000)

What proportion of a family's annual average earnings is needed to pay for full time regulated child care? Again this depends on where the family lives, how many children they have and whether there is one income or two supporting the family. The table below illustrates the estimated cost for full time ECEC for a family with a two year old and a four year old.

COST OF ECEC AS A PERCENTAGE OF AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS			
2001 (estimates)	NEWFOUNDLAND	SASKATCHEWAN	BRITISH COLUMBIA
Average Annual Cost 2001 Full-time Regulated ECEC (Centre) 2 children 2 years and 4 years	\$8,880	\$9,648	\$13,872
Average Annual Earnings 2001 Pre-Tax	\$31,945	\$31,498	\$34,805
Proportion of Annual Earnings Spent on ECEC			
Family - 1 average income	28%	31%	40%
Family - 2 average incomes	14%	15%	20%

Source: Estimates of annual child care costs based on provincial administrative data provided to CRRU for 2001. Estimates of annual average earnings based on Statistics Canada average weekly earnings for employees in all sectors 2001.

The average family in Canada spends 35% of its income on housing, clothing and food. In British Columbia a single parent earning the average weekly wage would spend 40% of her before-tax earnings on regulated child care if her two children were enrolled in centres charging the average fees for that province! If there are two parents in the family, both earning the average weekly wage, 20% of their combined before-tax earnings would go to child care. In Newfoundland and Saskatchewan the proportion is less but in all provinces the cost of ECEC is a significant family expense, one which many low income families cannot incur.

Does Subsidy cover the Cost of ECEC for Low Income Families?

Another factor that illustrates that cost prevents many families from using regulated ECEC services for their children is the difference between the maximum subsidy and the fees that parents must pay for ECEC. In most provinces in Canada the maximum subsidy is less than the average cost of full day ECEC and parents must pay the difference. Whether a family uses centre care or regulated family child care the situation is similar. Using Saskatchewan and British Columbia as examples two illustrations are provided. The first low income family has a two year old and a four year old enrolled in a centre that charges the provincial average for the service. The second example is for the same family but they are using regulated family child care. In these two provinces families poor enough to be eligible for full subsidy must find between \$3,000 - \$5,000 dollars per year out of their already meagre incomes to pay for ECEC if they wish to enrol their children in a full-time program. This often puts regulated ECEC out of the reach of families living in poverty and the majority of those headed by a lone mother. And as the table on the right illustrates 55% of families headed by a lone mother in 2001 had gross annual incomes of \$10,000 or less.

From the perspective of social inclusion and the well-being of all children, the affordability of ECEC must be addressed.

Who is Eligible for Financial Assistance for ECEC?

Every province in Canada has a subsidy program which may help low income families to pay for their ECEC costs. A number of eligibility criteria must be met. One of these is level of income. The table below shows the income eligibility for two families, a single parent family with one child and a two parent family with two children in three provinces. (Ontario is not illustrated because the eligible income level varies from region to region within the province.)

ELIGIBILITY FOR CHILD CARE SUBSIDY PROVINCIAL COMPARISONS			
	NEWFOUNDLAND	SASKATCHEWAN	BRITISH COLUMBIA
Family Type: 1 parent with 1 child			
Turning Point	\$14,160 net	\$19,668 gross	\$18,984 net
Breakeven Point	\$20,280 net	\$31,920 gross	\$23,016 net
Family Type: 2 parents with 2 children			
Turning Point	\$15,240 net	\$20,868 gross	\$27,816 net
Breakeven Point	\$25,560 net	\$31,920 gross	\$31,846 net
Average Gross Earnings for Employees Across All Sectors			
Weekly	\$614.32	\$605.74	\$669.32
Annual Earnings	\$31,944.64	\$31,498.48	\$34,804.64

Source: CRRU 2001 and Statistics Canada

If a family's income is less than the amount called the "turning point" the family is eligible for the maximum available subsidy. In all provinces except Saskatchewan this is calculated on net income. Once income exceeds the "turning point" the maximum subsidy is reduced until the family income reaches the "breakeven point" the point at which a family is no longer eligible for financial assistance. Note how different the "turning" and "breakeven" points are in these three provinces even though the provincial average weekly wage is very similar. Some Canadian families must have a much lower income to be eligible for subsidy than their counterparts in another province.

ANNUAL COST OF FULL-DAY ECEC CENTRE CHILD CARE (CCC) & FAMILY CHILD CARE (FCC) For Low Income Families Eligible for Maximum Subsidy with Two Children ages 2 and 4 years				
	SASKATCHEWAN		BRITISH COLUMBIA	
	CCC	FCC	CCC	FCC
Annual Child Care Cost (2 children)	\$9,648	\$9,468	\$13,872	\$13,800
Maximum Annual Subsidy For Eligible Families	\$6,240	\$6,000	\$10,752	\$9,096
Shortfall to be paid by parent	\$3,408	\$3,468	\$3,120	\$4,704

Source: CRRU 2001

NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE LONE PARENT FAMILIES IN CANADA 2001 By Employment Income Group (Gross Annual Income)			
Min - \$10,000		251,000	55%
\$10,000 - \$15,000		32,800	7%
\$15,000 - \$20,000		22,500	5%
\$20,001 - \$30,000		46,200	10%
\$30,001 - 40,000		48,600	11%
\$40,001 - \$50,000		25,000	5%
\$50,001 - Max		31,100	7%
All		457,100	100%

Source: SPSP/M

Learning doesn't start at six!

In Canada ECEC services are much like private schools ... funded primarily through parent fees with limited public funding. Like private schools, many regulated ECEC programs are only available to those who can afford them. Public investment in the ECEC sector includes subsidy for low income families and a variety of grants that assist with operating costs. Although they are different measures the table below illustrates the 1998 annual average public expenditure per student for kindergarten through high school and per capita allocation of public funds for regulated child care in the four provinces that are the focus of this report.

PUBLIC FUNDING - PUBLIC SCHOOL AND REGULATED ECEC 1998				
	NEWFOUNDLAND	ONTARIO	SASKATCHEWAN	BRITISH COLUMBIA
Average Expenditure Per student KG - High School	\$5,309.00	\$7,133.00	\$5,740.00	\$7,110.00
Per Capita Allocation Regulated Child Care for Children 0 - 12	\$38.28	\$238.40	\$86.42	\$201.25

Source: CRRU 1998

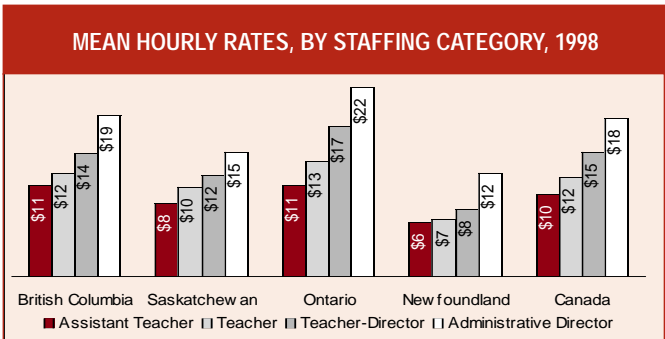
With respect to public policy regional diversity quickly evolves into disparity for Canadian citizens. This is illustrated by these indicators of ECEC availability and affordability, the two primary components of accessibility.

Disparity is even greater for families with children with special needs. Due to the limitations of the provincial administrative data in this area it is impossible to illustrate indicators of accessibility to ECEC for children with special needs.



Indicator: Wages are predictors of quality.

The *You Bet I Care* (1998) study found 'an unequivocal relationship between staff wages and child care quality' and recommended that the low wages for teaching staff must be addressed. It also showed that the mean hourly wages across all ECEC staffing categories varied considerably from province to province.

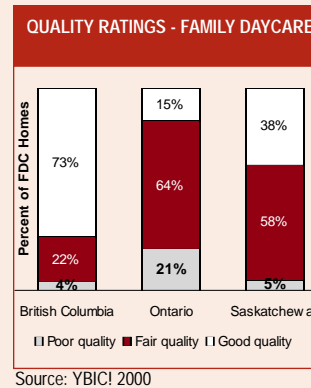
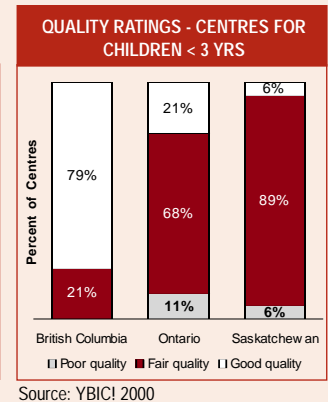
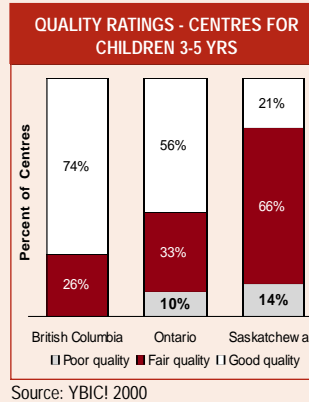


QUALITY

The positive relationship between child care quality and virtually every facet of children's development ... is one of the most consistent findings in developmental science.

Shonkoff, J and D. Phillips. *From Neurons to Neighbourhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, National Academy of Sciences. 2001, p. 313.

High quality ECEC services should be available throughout Canada yet the number of settings achieving good quality varies considerably from province to province.



The *You Bet I Care* Canada-wide study on wages, working conditions and practices in regulated child care provided detailed information about ECEC quality and the factors that predict it.

The good news is that the provincial administrative data collected for 2001 suggests that the average gross annual earnings for ECEC teachers has increased slightly since 1998. However the considerable disparity between the provinces continues. How do the estimated 2001 average gross annual earnings for an ECEC teacher measure up against the estimated average gross annual earnings for employees in all sectors?

	ANNUAL EARNINGS ECEC TEACHER	AVERAGE ALL EMPLOYEES
British Columbia	\$24,000	\$34,804
Saskatchewan	\$20,005	\$31,498
Newfoundland	\$15,109	\$31,944

Source: Estimates using provincial administrative data CRRU 2001, *The Daily*, Statistics Canada. August 28, 2002.

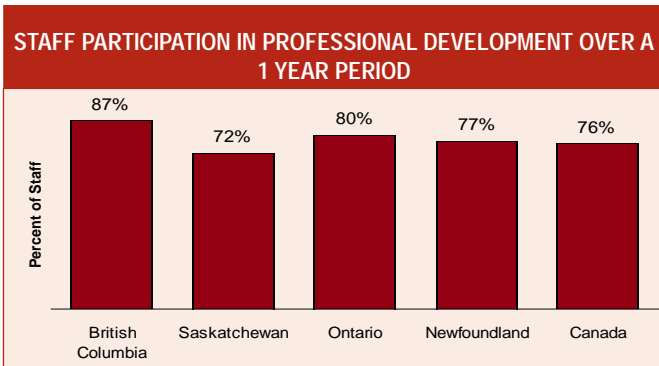
The gap between the remuneration for ECEC teachers and the provincial average annual earnings for employees in all sectors is estimated to be more than \$10,000 per year and in some provinces considerably more. The situation is similar for regulated family child care providers many of whom work very long hours each day. The 1998 study determined that approximately 70% of family daycare providers had gross annual incomes below \$25,000.

Staff wages account for more than 70% of the operating costs of an early childhood education setting. As long as the primary source of revenue for the operation of ECEC programs is from parent fees, wage levels for the sector will remain out of line with other sectors that have similar training requirements and responsibilities.

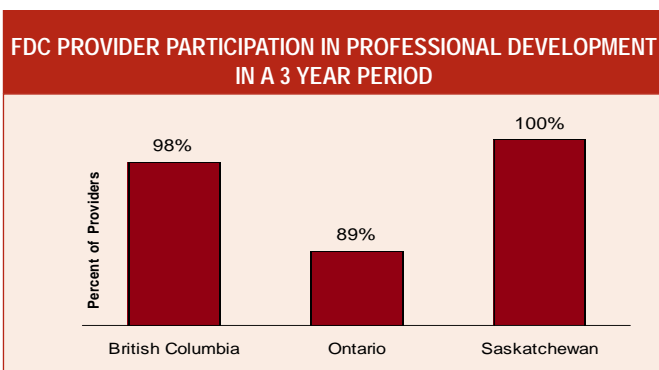
Indicator: ECEC training and education

ECEC teachers in Canada meet basic regulation training requirements, sometime exceed them and pursue professional development opportunities on an ongoing basis. The level of ECEC-specific education is a direct predictor of quality (Goelman, 2000. p. 70). In 1998, 71% of all ECEC teaching staff held one, two or three-year ECEC credentials or post-diploma credentials.

ECEC staff, regardless of their poor remuneration, also continue to pursue professional development opportunities throughout their careers. They tend to be a dedicated professional group often supported by their employers in their quest to develop skills and knowledge beyond what they learned in basic training. For example, in a three year period in Ontario, 74% of the ECEC centres supported their staff to take courses, workshops or in-service training on how to respond to challenging behaviours. In BC 43% focused on how to develop their programs to accommodate children with developmental delays. In Saskatchewan staff in 33% of the centres pursued anti-bias and cultural diversity topics.



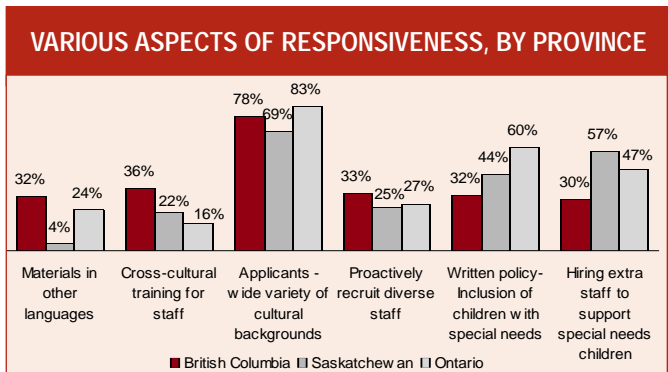
Source: YBIC! 2000



Source: YBIC! 2000

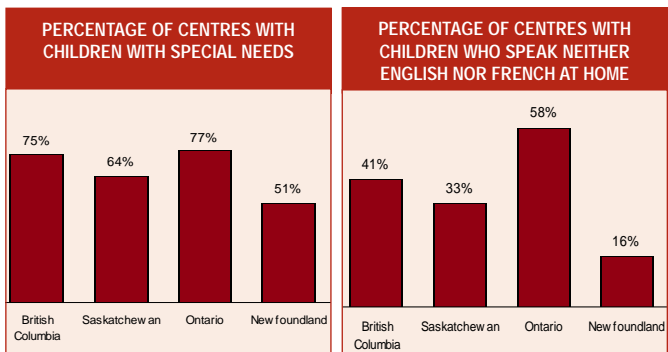
Indicator: Inclusiveness - the proportion of children from special populations that are included in ECEC settings and the readiness of the settings to meet their unique needs.

While there is no specific data to illustrate this indicator, the 1998 study provides some indication that the sector is aware of this issue and working on its responsiveness to Canada's ethno-cultural diversity and to the varying abilities of its children. For example the following table provides some examples of how settings address inclusiveness.



Source: YBIC! 2000

Many ECEC programs include children with special needs and children who speak neither French nor English at home.



Source: YBIC! 2000



SUMMARY

Canadian experts in diverse fields ... health, education, economics, crime prevention - as well as people concerned about social justice, have identified quality child care as a crucial component in addressing a variety of broad societal goals. These goals include: (1) promoting the optimal development and school readiness of all children; (2) supporting economic productivity and labour-force attachment; and (3) promoting social cohesion.

(Goelman, 2000.)

According to the indicators that have been used for this report there are not enough ECEC resources to accommodate even a quarter of the children in Canada who are under the age of six. Yet we know that over half of these children have parents in the labour force, many of whom would use a regulated setting if it were available. It is recognized that some parents choose not to enrol their child in an early childhood setting. Others use family members or unregulated community caregivers when they need child care. Most families in which there is only one parent in the paid labour force want their children to have the opportunity to attend a part-day preschool program but for many

communities this is not an option. Not only is availability a barrier to access but the additional barrier of affordability prohibits many moderate to low income families from enrolling their children in ECEC services even if spaces are available in their communities. All children attending ECEC programs should have the opportunity to attend high quality programs but quality varies from province to province. ECEC wages, a significant factor in quality, lag far behind the average wage for all sectors. This factor inhibits recruitment and retention.

Canadian children deserve better. Those who teach and care for them deserve better. Early childhood education and care should be publicly funded and available for every child whose parents want it for them.

What's Next?

Much has been learned from the data sources reviewed for this project. A second report will be released in the fall of 2003. Between the two reports, background information and issue papers on various aspects of ECEC will be posted to the project website: www.campaign2000.ca/ci/.

Public Policy in Canada and ECEC

Many people from diverse walks of life and professions understand the importance of early childhood education and care. Why then do we not have a national plan for it? One of the reasons is that initiating social policy in Canada is burdened with complexity.

SUFA - The Social Union Framework Agreement

In Canada health and social programs fall under provincial jurisdiction. This means that it is the responsibility of the provinces and territories to develop policy and deliver the programs. The British North America Act of 1867 gave a "spending power" to the federal government that allows it to "make payments to individuals, institutions or other governments for purposes that Parliament does not necessarily have the power to regulate." (Torjman, 2001). Historically the federal government has been able to influence the development of social programs because of its spending power. However "the division of powers is messy." (Torjman, 2001)

Some think that Canada's "great divide" is the schism that hinders the resolution of issues of national importance whether the environment or the well-being of children. That schism is the apparent contradiction and "tension between the provincial determination to put limits on the authority attached to federal spending power and the provincial determination to have more federal money transferred to them." (Lazar, 2000). From the ECEC perspective it is a tension similar to that experienced by many five year olds. "I want help tying my shoes but I don't want you to tell me how to do it!" This tension has been frequently used as an excuse for Canada's inability to establish a national child care program.

On February 4, 1999, all provinces and territories except Quebec signed the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA). Recognizing the inter-governmental tensions, the Agreement commits governments to work better together to strengthen Canada's social safety net, involve Canadians in the development of social programs, and strengthen partnerships among governments. All parties also "... reached a broad consensus that the first priorities should be children in poverty and persons with disabilities." As a result it is under SUFA that the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement was developed. This agreement may be the case that tests SUFA's ability

to reform and renew Canada's system of social services as the agreement is under review and there is much debate about its effectiveness. What is clear is that federal/provincial tensions continue and attempts to circumnavigate those tensions may be leading to other problems.

Federal/Provincial/Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement

In September 2000, Canada's First Ministers of all regions of Canada except Quebec reached an agreement on early childhood development and pledged to work together in the interest of children under 6 years of age and their families. The objectives of the Early Childhood Development Agreement are:

- to promote early childhood development, so that, to their fullest potential, children will be physically and emotionally healthy, safe and secure, ready to learn, and socially engaged and responsible
- to help children reach their potential and to help families support their children within strong communities.

As a result of the agreement, between \$300 m. and \$500 m. per year is being transferred to provincial/territorial governments over a five year period (2001- 2006).

Recognizing that the primary responsibility for early childhood development rests with the provinces and territories the First Ministers agreed to invest the funds transferred to them in **any or all** of the following four areas of action.

- ① healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy
- ② parenting and family supports
- ③ early childhood development, learning and care
- ④ community supports

However, to avoid aggravating federal/provincial tensions there are no guiding principles ... no common agreements about how priorities are to be determined, which services legitimately fall within each of these areas of action ... and there are no common public reporting directives. It is impossible for Canadians to monitor how the funds are being used.

The focus in this Campaign 2000 report is on the third area of action - early childhood learning and care. What investments have the provinces and territories made so far on child care, family resource programs, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten?

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT					
2001/02 Allocation	2001/02 Announced ECEC Activities Child Care/Family Resource Programs/ Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten	% of 2001/02 Allocation applied to			
		Child care	FRPs	Pre-K & K	All ECEC
Newfoundland/Labrador \$5.2 M	• Child care \$2.2 M • Family Resource Programs \$1.7 M • Early Literacy/Pre-K \$356,831	42%	32%	7%	81%
New Brunswick \$7.3M	• Child Care \$4.4 M	60%			60%
Nova Scotia \$9.1 M	• Child Care \$6 M • Family Resource Programs and related services \$1.6 M	66%	18%		84%
Prince Edward Island \$1.3 M	• Kindergarten \$500,000			38%	38%
Ontario \$114 M	• Early Years Centres		18%		18%
Manitoba \$11.1 M	• Child Care \$4.7 M (supplemented by \$9 M provincial funds)	42%			42%
Saskatchewan \$10 M	• Child Care \$1.019 M Pre-Kindergarten \$200,000	10%	2%		12%
Alberta \$29.7 M	No details available				Unknown
British Columbia \$39.7 M					
Northwest Territories \$0.4 M					
Nunavut \$0.3 M					
Yukon \$0.3 M					

Source: CRRU 2002

Is providing a pot of money to the provinces and saying 'you decide how to spend it' a national strategy that will enhance early childhood development services in Canada? Is it respecting the diversity of the provinces or is it promoting the disparity between them? It seems wrong headed to put strategies to enhance early childhood development in competition with each other.

To ensure that "all Canadian children have the best possible start in life" many join Campaign 2000 in a call for action on a national early childhood education and care strategy ... one focused on the learning and care aspects of early childhood development ... one that doesn't have to compete with the equally important health related or parent support strategies ... one that is universal in access and quality.

The OECD's Key Elements of Successful ECEC Policy: A Framework for Canada?

Why is the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development interested in early childhood education and care?

Because it has recognized that:

- ➔ research supports the importance of quality early experiences to children's long-term success in school and later life;
- ➔ quality early childhood services can mediate some of the negative effects of disadvantage and contribute to social integration;
- ➔ affordable and reliable early childhood education and child care provision promotes equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market and facilitates the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities; and that,
- ➔ access to quality early childhood education and care can strengthen the foundations of lifelong learning for all children and support the broad educational and social needs of families. (OECD, 1996. p.13)

Believing that cross-national analysis can contribute to the improvement of policy development the Education Committee of the OECD launched the Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in 1998. Twelve countries - Australia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States - participated. The review looked at policy approaches to improving both *access* and *quality*. It focussed on six primary policy areas: governance, staffing, program content and implementation, family engagement and support and funding and financing.

Canada is participating in the second round of reviews soon to be underway. It is therefore timely to consider the eight "key elements of policy that are likely to promote equitable access to quality ECEC" which OECD identified as a result of the review of the first twelve countries. The conclusion was that the countries that had adopted these elements shared a strong commitment to young children, had accepted responsibility for their pre-primary education and care in partnership with families and sought to ensure access to ECEC for all children, with special efforts for those who need extra support.

Key Elements of Successful ECEC Policy

- ➔ A systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation;
- ➔ A strong and equal partnership with the education system;
- ➔ A universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support;
- ➔ Substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure;
- ➔ A participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance;
- ➔ Appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision;
- ➔ Systematic attention to monitoring and data collection; and,
- ➔ A stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation.

(OECD, *Starting Strong - Early Childhood Education and Care* or for full text of the executive summary see <http://www.childcarecanada.org/pubs/bn/startingstrong.html>.)

Do these key elements provide a foundation for ECEC policy development in Canada? In a decentralized federation is it possible to influence all levels of government to incorporate them? Yes, if there is sufficient public support and political will.

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