

Book Review

Recent Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada

Nina Howe and Larry Prochner, editors
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There is ongoing debate on the quality of early childhood and care (ECEC) in Western countries, including Canada. The biggest drawback of Canadian ECEC is that it has no national policy framework for program delivery. Alan Pence, in a postscript to this book, refers to a European Commission (2009) report, according to which, to promote social cohesion, it is important to provide equal opportunities for all families to receive high-quality ECEC services. When families receive these services, they gain opportunities to work while balancing their family lives. Most European countries have tried to achieve these services but Canada is a little behind. Nina Howe and Larry Prochner's edited anthology hopes to help improve the quality of early childhood experiences of Canadian children and families. This book consists of essays on various issues that provide a strong argument for change in the field of ECEC in Canada. The book is divided into three parts and each part is set under a different theme. Each chapter ends with a commentary from an expert in the field. Collectively, the essays in each theme cover the past, present, and future of early childhood education in Canada. According to the editors' introduction, the idea of organizing this book came from a small workshop called *New Directions in Early Childhood Education*, held at Concordia University in Montreal, Québec, Canada, March 12-13, 2010.

Part 1, *Historical and Contemporary Issues*, discusses not only the current history (since 1950), social policies, and economics of childcare, but includes issues related to Canadian provincial regulations and policies. Part 1 is the most relevant for those interested in learning about current and historical views on ECEC. The first chapter, by Prochner and Lynne Robertson, addresses key developments in ECEC during the Second World War. The era of the Second World War and the following 15 years was a time of cutbacks because many people (especially women) decided to stay at home with their young children. Prochner and Robertson use seven dimensions to examine this period: ethos, teaching, learning, settings, curriculum, assessment, and diversity. Through the use of these dimensions, they analyze advances in the field of ECEC in the 1960s; these advances have brought about important changes in the practices of ECEC. They focus particularly on the idea of childcare support after World War II when it was suggested that children be enrolled in preschools as a plan for decreasing the rate of poverty. The current Head Start program is an ongoing example of this strategy. Prochner and Robertson also identify three current and apparent themes in ECEC as a result of these advances: the integration of services both for children and their families, new ideas for curricula

through international inspiration, and current emphasis on school readiness in ECEC programs. This opening chapter is very well organized, well positioned in the book, and brings up many issues that are discussed in later chapters.

The next chapter is by Martha Friendly and Susan Prentice, who carry on the story begun by Prochner and Robertson by giving an in-depth analysis of existing policies of ECEC programs and services in Canada. They examine the political structures and the way that ECEC has developed in Canada over the years. They use 10 standards of quality ECEC services, as described in the 2008 United Nations Children's Fund ECEC Report Card, to evaluate the quality of Canadian ECEC programs. The results indicate the failure of Canadian programs to achieve those standards. According to Friendly and Prentice, a major problem with current ECEC in Canada is the absence of a comprehensible and national strategy and clear standards. Most European countries work toward providing equal access to quality ECEC programs for their families as a strategy for social cohesion and progress but Canada still lags behind this ideal.

In the third chapter, Gordon Cleveland examines ECEC in Canada through an economic lens, which adds logic to the arguments put forward by Prochner and Robertson and Friendly and Prentice. He refers to international research, highlighting how the benefits deeply affect the quality of the ECEC services and how specific policy developments are linked to the costs and benefits of financing in ECEC programs. With references from international research and policies about the costs and benefits of ECEC services, this analysis helps to compare the Canadian ECEC services with international standards.

The final chapter of Part 1 is written by Ellen Jacobs and Emmanuelle Adrien and it provides an in-depth evaluation of childcare regulations and care at the provincial and territorial levels. The authors evaluate early childhood educators' pre-service and in-service professional development. They also examine childcare programming and curricula through the discussion of regulations in the 10 Canadian provinces and three territories. The criteria used to examine the regulations for programming and curricula include developmental appropriateness, behavioral guidance, and cultural sensitivity. This examination reveals that all regulations focus on process variables such as programs and curricula. The authors emphasize the need for regulations that empower and support educators to make their own decisions in their classrooms regarding what and how to teach.

At the end of Part 1, Hillel Goelman shares insightful comments as an expert in the field of ECEC. He says that all four chapters in Part 1 inform us of the different aspects and journeys of ECEC in Canada and thus add to "a geology" (p. 147) of ECEC. One interesting thing that he mentions is that the authors speak only of formal daycare services when there are many other kinds of early childhood services. He calls these the "harder-to-define, harder-to-find and harder-to-study forms of ECEC" (p. 154). All four chapters in Part 1 discuss historical, economic, and political aspects of ECEC programs, but the authors do not talk about the in-class issues of ECEC related to teaching and learning. Goelman comments that "this discussion of regulations brings us to the doorway of the ECEC classroom, but not quite inside" (p. 155). Overall, the four chapters in this section are consistent with its theme of *Historical and Contemporary Issues* and open a new window of understanding about the link between the factors that affect the quality of ECEC programs in Canada.

Part 2, *Children, Curriculum, and Teachers* consists of five chapters that highlight the issues associated with the new trends in programs for children, curricula, and teachers. These issues are associated with diversity, intergenerational programming, and quality both in childcare and

in-service professional development programs for early childhood educators. All of these topics depict current efforts and approaches to the delivery of high-quality programs and early learning experiences for children. Due to globalization, migration to North American countries has been on the rise over the past few decades. There is a long history of immigration to Canada but it has never been as complex as now. Immigrants face many challenges, including issues associated with ECEC services for their children.

Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Judith Bernhard, in the first chapter of Part 2, focus on problems that newcomers to Canada face in ECEC programs. They also identify the services that are offered to these newcomers to help them in their adjustment to a new culture and society, and early childhood care is one of them. The authors want their readers to look more deeply into the current experiences of Canada's immigrant population and the relationship between these experiences and ECEC. They ground their contribution in conclusions from studies that have adopted anti-racist and transnational feminist viewpoints. They quite successfully achieve their goal of presenting a substitute framework for providing new and better ECEC services to newcomers. In the second chapter of Part 2, Rachel Heydon, also uses a critical theoretical framework to assess the quality of ECEC programs. For this purpose, she examines intergenerational programs and the resulting benefits of these programs for young and elderly learners and their teachers. She concludes that programs that involve people of different generations can provide new directions to learning in ECEC.

The first two chapters of Part 2 underline the issues associated with children and teachers in ECEC settings but in chapter 7, Rachel Langford focuses on curriculum. This is also a major factor contributing to the quality of ECEC services. She highlights the latest efforts at the provincial level in the development of early learning curricula frameworks. New Brunswick, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia recently established curricula frameworks, which outline their educational philosophies, following Québec, which established a framework in 1997. These structures are planned not as prescribed curricula but instead as guides for the practices of early childhood educators. Langford examines the theoretical approaches and social contexts of all these structures from the perspective of international approaches to curricula. At the end of the chapter 7, Langford also discusses the use and evaluation of each framework. Her discussion includes the issue of updating pre-service and in-service educators on the new frameworks. In chapter 9, Nina Howe and Ellen Jacobs not only continue this debate but also prove that in-service professional development could be used as a way of improving early childhood educators' practices.

In chapter 8, Pence and Pacini-Ketchabaw continue the discussion of quality and focus specifically on the measurement of ECEC practices, training, policies, and researches. They talk about the analysis of the Quality Project, which they developed and used in British Columbia. They recommend it as it is fully Canadian and incorporates completely the needs of the local population. This project was created as a result of analyses of current practices and was planned to develop new ECEC research methods and practices, which were inspired by post-structuralist theory and international developments, mainly those in New Zealand, Italy, and Sweden. Pence, an educator, researcher, and thinker, provides an interesting commentary at the end of Part 2 by using his own personal experience to examine changes in the field since the 1960s. As a group, these chapters suggest that change has started in Canada. It is important that we look beyond North America and that each province chooses ways to bring change that improve its ECEC programs and services. Policy change at a national level could also help in the establishment and improvement of ECEC programs and services.

Part 3, *Government Initiatives and Involvement in the ECEC Field*, is about current progress in getting support from the Canadian government for ECEC programs to improve the lives of Canadian children and their families. All chapters in Part 3 focus on how research can help governments in the domain of policy development. These chapters focus also on how policy implementation affects the processes and outcomes of different ECEC programs.

Part 3 starts with Christa Japel's critical analysis of the efforts of the Québec government to develop a better childcare system. For evaluation, she uses Canadian QUAD principles (quality, universality, accessibility, and developmentally appropriate programs). Japel not only closely examines the research studies that show that Québec's childcare system almost fails to meet the high standards of the four QUAD principles, but also suggests solutions to support provincial regulations for childcare, teacher training, and the quality of care delivered to children and families.

In the second chapter of Part 3, Ray Peters, Angela Howell, and Kelly Petrunka summarize community-based early prevention and intervention programs designed to improve the quality of life of at-risk Canadian children and families. They review many federal and provincial programs, including Ontario's Better Beginning Better Futures (BBBF) Project. They fail to find long-lasting effects of BBBF programs for younger children because of low rates of participation due to insufficient government incentives. In the third chapter, Jessica Ball continues the discussion of the quality of programs for at-risk Canadian children and families. She provides historical background of the past 20 years to explain why First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities emphasize developing culture-based ECEC programs. In 1995, the federal government provided funding for the Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) program to help Canadian Indigenous people form childcare programs. The purpose of ECEC and AHS programs are to help in children's cognitive, Indigenous language, and cultural development. The AHS program also provides health, nutrition, and social support to Aboriginal communities in Canada. Each chapter in Part 3 shows how research can help provincial and federal governments address policy related issues for ECEC programs. In addition to this discussion, Janette Pelletier recommends in the final chapter of Part 3 that the school may be a hub for early childhood services to gain better results.

Finally, I like the way this edited book is organized, especially Part 1, which gives readers a solid background of the historical and contemporary issues in the field of ECEC. Parts 2 and 3 support Part 1 and shine more light on current issues and trends in ECEC. Due to the variety of topics discussed across all chapters, readers can find themselves a little confused, as all chapters refer to the problems but provide very limited suggestions for improvement. Overall, it is a good contribution toward the debate on providing quality ECEC services for all Canadian families. All chapters in this book recommend a change but ECEC in Canada is currently stuck at the policy level. This means that Canada lags behind compared to European countries in providing these essential services to families. Helen Pence comments at the end of this book, "No human service, of any kind, is unchanging" (p. 417). We can hope that the efforts put forward by the editors and contributors of this book will be another step toward improvement. All contributors propose high-quality ECEC services and suggest high-level federal intervention and a better-funded and comprehensive policy environment for all families, as previous government programs provide for families in need only. As Canada is a wealthy country, these goals should not be difficult to achieve. This book could also be a good start for a researcher who wants to explore Canadian ECEC issues further and a good addition to any library on ECEC, as it has a large collection of essays by researchers working on a wide range of issues related to the field of ECEC in Canada.

Reference

European Commission/NESSE (Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training). (2009). *Early childhood education and care: Key lessons from research for policy makers*. Retrieved from <http://www.nesse.fr/nesse/activities/reports/ecec-report-pdf>

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