



From Women to Children

Reframing Child Care in Canada

Julie Amoroso

Queen's University

Introduction

In 2006, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) ranked Canada last among developed countries in terms of its programs for early childhood education and care.¹ Indeed, since the movement en masse of women into the Canadian labour force in the 1970s, various proponents have advocated in vain for the creation of a national child care program that is affordable and accessible to all parents. In 2004, it seemed as if these goals had been realized, as the Martin government attempted to set the foundations for national child care infrastructure through bilateral agreements with the provinces. However, the 2006 election of the Conservative government resulted in Prime Minister Harper's termination of the agreements in favour of a nominal child care allowance for parents of young children. While arguments for universal child care services have persisted over the years, the way in which these arguments have been framed has changed, shifting from a focus on women's rights and gender inequality in the labour force to a focus on children's needs and scientific and corporate rationales for "investing" in early childhood development.

¹ Jenson, 2009

Therefore, new actors rose to prominence in the child care debate, displacing women's organizations and gender related concerns.

This paper will discuss in detail both the policy changes and shifts in the way that the child care debate was framed from the 1970s to the 2000s, and will argue that the child investment perspective allowed both policy makers and child care activists to de-emphasize women's rights in terms of justifications for child care. In fact, Quebec, the only Canadian province which has in place a universal, affordable, and regulated child care system is also a provincial outlier in terms of its emphasis on child care as a citizenship right for women rather than a social investment. Nevertheless, I will argue that the implementation by Prime Minister Harper of the Universal Child Care Benefit represents disembarkation from both women's equality and social investment perspectives, and instead reflects an ideological perspective that has constrained the creation of a universal child care system since its conception in the 1970s. emphasizing parental choice in child care.

Although women did enter the workforce to fulfill labour shortages during the Second World War, and some unmarried women worked for pay even in earlier times of peace, the beginnings of married women's labour force participation is often traced to the 1950s. During this period, the proportion of married women in the workforce rose from 30 percent in 1951 to 49.8 percent in 1961.² As argued by Timpson (2001), this strengthened women's claims to 'social citizenship' in the newly created postwar welfare state, as it was driven by the concept of the 'worker-citizen', who participated in paid employment. However, in the context of a male breadwinner model, women's employment was considered ancillary to that of men and the domestic and familial responsibilities that constrained their work force participation were largely overlooked by policy makers during the 1950s and '60s.³ Indeed, while this period did see the federal government create a Women's Bureau to examine the potential consequences of married women's labour force participation, employees of this department were reluctant to propose policies that focused "on the personal and family problems of married women employees".⁴

The concept of universal child care did not enter mainstream discussion during this period, and certainly was not considered a "citizenship right" for women.⁵ However, through the Canada

² Timpson, 2001

³ Mahon, 2002

⁴ Timpson, 2001

⁵ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004

Assistance Plan (CAP), created in 1966, the federal and provincial governments shared the costs of subsidizing child care as a “rehabilitative service” for low income males. Therefore, this service was framed as an issue of social citizenship, in order “to enable the individual to attain or regain the fullest measure of self support and independence of which he is capable”. As emphasized by Mahon and Phillips (2002), “the officials clearly saw that individual as a ‘he’”. Eligibility for this means tested program was assessed in part based on the size and age of the male applicant’s family, as male breadwinners who could not support their family on their salary were deemed to be living in poverty. Therefore, child care subsidies allowed mothers in low-income families to supplement their husband’s earnings by seeking employment. The needs of married women entering the labour force were thus tied to the needs of their husbands. Moreover, while child care subsidies were available to single mothers, they were not used as an inducement for single mothers on social assistance to enter the labour force and decrease their dependence on welfare.⁶ In addition, the CAP transfers were the extent of the federal government’s relationship to child care decision making and spending in the late 1960s. These transfers only contributed to the cost of child care subsidies for low income families, and not the capital costs of child care centres, although in 1972, CAP was amended to allow the federal government to contribute to the provincial costs of operating and repairing the centres. In accordance with this limited involvement in child care, there was no federal approach to program delivery or nationally defined standards in terms of the limited services offered.⁷

As the second wave of the feminist movement gained strength in the 1960s and ’70s, female unions and general women’s movement supporters mobilized to challenge the government’s paternalistic social welfare approach to child care as well as its hesitancy to create a national system.⁸ Universal, affordable daycare was framed as a citizenship right that was vital to women’s equality of opportunity with men.⁹ A formative event for this movement was the creation of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) in 1967. The commission held several public hearings with Canadian women and culminated in December 1970 with a report that highlighted strategies to achieve gender equality in paid work and parenting.¹⁰ While the promotion of a

⁶ Mahon and Phillips, 2002

⁷ Timpson, 2001

⁸ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004

⁹ Newman and White, 2006

¹⁰ Mahon and Phillips, 2002

universal child care system was not part of the commission's mandate, many of the written submissions, both by women's groups and individuals, indicated that it should have been.¹¹ For example, many of the briefs challenged the conception that women chose paid work for "pin money", or as an unnecessary supplement to their husband's income. It was argued that for many women, entering the workforce was an economic necessity. Therefore, affordable child care was also essential. As the submission of the Business and Professional Women's Clubs of the Yukon and British Columbia stated:

Many are concerned that an increase in Day Care services only serves to encourage women to abandon their parental responsibilities and seek employment just to purchase unnecessary frills and extras such as a second car or a colour television for the rumpus room. This is largely a myth. Department of Labour reports indicate that most mothers work out of economic necessity.¹²

Other briefs asserted women's right to "fulfil their destinies 'economically and biologically'", and noted that women and men should have equal opportunities and responsibilities in both employment and child rearing, because "the fact that women must bear children does not presuppose that they must take most of the responsibility of rearing children".¹³ Recognizing, however, that many employers would not take this position, many women's organizations argued that the creation of universal child care services would help to alleviate some gender-based discrimination by employers when hiring, promoting and determining salaries, as some might be reluctant to hire or promote a woman that might have to sacrifice work responsibilities for caregiving responsibilities.¹⁴ Overall, while some women did recommend tax relief for mothers to afford private child care arrangements, many sought an increase in public child care centres with trained staff, subsidies to help women afford such programs and a national system of non-maternal child care in Canada. As a result, one of the core recommendations of the RCSW was the creation of a universal child care system that would be accessible to "all families who need and wish to use it".¹⁵

Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) argue that the proceedings of the RCSW, as well as the needs of mothers themselves, led to the prioritizing of child care within the women's movement.

¹¹ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004

¹² Timpson, 2001

¹³ Timpson, 2001

¹⁴ Timpson, 2001

¹⁵ Mahon and Phillips, 2002

Therefore, organizations such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women coordinated the child care lobby. By the 1980s, the movement had expanded to include labour activists and child care activists, as well as not-for-profit and for-profit child care centres.¹⁶ Throughout this period, reports and task forces advocated for a federal daycare system in the name of gender equality, and “femocrats”, or female bureaucrats within the government fought to promote the goals of the RCSW.¹⁷

However, not all women accepted the gender equality framing of child care during the 1970s and 1980s, as mothers held diverse views about the best system of child care for their children. Even within the women’s movement, some feminists struggled to characterize the relationship between motherhood and womanhood. Indeed, Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) note that “not all feminists were willing to name themselves mothers and forego the general nature of women”. Therefore, not all feminists were supportive of the link between child care and women’s rights as citizens. In addition, while many child care workers within the lobby were sympathetic to arguments relating child care to women’s equality of opportunity, their main objective was to secure better wages and conditions for child care workers and to develop a “universal public service for children”.¹⁸

Moreover, while public opinion in the 1970s was beginning to shift in favour of women’s labour force participation in general, many Canadians were reluctant to support the establishment of non-maternal child care. Polls conducted by the Trudeau Liberal government shortly after the RCSW report was released in 1970 indicated that whereas 77 percent of Canadians supported the notion that “married women should take a job outside the home if they have no young children”, 80 percent disagreed that they should do so if they did have young children.¹⁹ Timpson argues that this data contributed to the Trudeau government’s decision to take limited action in terms of creation of a child care system during this period. While eligibility for subsidized day care was expanded and coupled with a Child Tax Credit for lower income families, half of the federal child care budget was directed towards the creation in 1971 of the Child Care Expense Deduction (CCED), which allowed single parents or the lower income earning parent to deduct up to 1000 dollars from their taxable income for child care expenses. This program has since been criticized because the deduction

¹⁶ Newman and White, 2006

¹⁷ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004

¹⁸ Newman and White, 2006

¹⁹ Timpson, 2001

disproportionately benefited those with higher incomes and the requirement that applicants submit receipts of child care services received proved to be difficult for recipients of informal sources of non-maternal child care.²⁰ Moreover, rather than offering universally accessible services, the Liberal government's approach in the 1970s was to embrace programs offering "market choices" to parents requiring day care services.²¹

Therefore, the extent to which the women's movement actually influenced political decision making about child care during the 1970s and 1980s is unclear. In a recent paper arguing that there was a shift in the dialogue about child care by federal policy makers from one focused on women to one focused on children, Jenson (2009) argues that in the early 1980s, the Liberal government supported the gender-based construction of child care. She points to the appointment of Katie Cooke as chair of the Task Force on Child Care in 1984, as her credentials included a term as the first president of the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, but "zilch knowledge about childcare". In addition, she reported to the minister responsible for the status of women, as opposed to the Department of Health and Welfare Canada, where child care policy was normally contained. Similarly, Jenson notes that when the Conservative government was elected in 1984, it continued to support the work of the Cooke Task Force, and released its recommendation that a publicly supported child care system be created at a press conference on International Women's Day, 1986.²²

However, earlier papers by Jenson note that in their efforts to adopt a neo-liberal agenda, the Conservative government was eager to ignore the request for publicly funded daycare in favour of for-profit child care centres and tax deductions. Indeed, in 1987, the government released a report that contradicted the Cooke Task Force Report, and drafted Bill C-44, or the Canada Child Care Act, which proposed tax deductions to benefit for-profit child care centres, but was mute on the establishment of national daycare standards.²³ These papers describe how child care advocates, labour organizations and women's organizations mobilized to protest the bill resulting in the government neglecting to pursue it after it called the 1988 election.²⁴ However, while it is clear that these groups

²⁰ Timpson, 2001

²¹ Jenson, Mahon and Phillips, 2003

²² Jenson, 2009

²³ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004; Jenson, Mahon and Phillips, 2003

²⁴ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004; Jenson, Mahon and Phillips, 2003

still had some influence during this period, ideological differences constrained the government's responsiveness to their demands and their efforts to frame national child care services as superior to market choice in child care in terms of the achievement of gender equality.

While in opposition, Liberal MPs had been vociferous critics of the Conservative approach to child care policy. Therefore, the party returned to power in 1993 on a platform that promised affordable, regulated child care services. After an initial review of social security and child care, however, attention to these areas was eclipsed by economic concerns and strategies for deficit reduction. In 1995, the cost-shared CAP was replaced with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST), a block transfer which allowed the government to devolve more of its responsibility for health and social programs to the provinces. Child care was no exception from this effort at decentralization, and the federal government abandoned its commitment to create a national day care program.²⁵

Concurrently, women's groups lost influence in the child care movement, and new coalitions of advocates were forming with different perspectives about the best system. As an example, Jenson (2009) recounts the establishment in 1994 of the National Forum on Guiding Principles for Quality Child Care in Canada by representatives from local, provincial/territorial and national governments, child care organizations, training institutes for early childhood educators and First Nations groups but not women's organizations.²⁶

This organizational shift corresponded to a general shift in the way that child care and children's services more generally were framed by governments and child care advocates. Here the emphasis was not on child care per se, but on general programs related to children's early learning and development.²⁷ Specifically, representations of child care as a means of achieving gender equality were de-emphasized in favour of a focus on the rights and needs of children, especially poorer children.²⁸ Perhaps cynically, Prentice notes that "promises to combat child poverty garner all party approval and enjoy stronger buy-in than general anti-poverty measures".²⁹ Indeed, although many of the provinces were antagonized by the federal government's dissolution of CAP in favour of the

²⁵ Jenson, Mahon and Phillips, 2003

²⁶ Jenson, 2009

²⁷ Jenson, Mahon and Phillips, 2003

²⁸ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004

²⁹ Prentice, 2007

CHST and were reluctant to allow its intervention in areas of provincial jurisdiction, both levels of government agreed in 1996 that child poverty was an urgent issue requiring multi-lateral collaboration. This led to the creation of the Social Union, and the Social Union Framework Agreement (SUFA) was signed in 1999.

Two measures were taken in an attempt to eradicate child poverty. Created in 1997, the National Child Benefit involves an income supplement and the Child Care Tax Benefit a tax-free monthly payment for low-income families, regardless of whether or not they receive social assistance. The goal of this program was to discourage welfare dependency due to fear of losing all financial support and benefits such as child care by seeking employment. The provinces would therefore be required to pay less in social assistance, and could channel the revenue earned towards child care programs or alternative social programs for children. However, critics argue that while several provinces did commit to reinvesting in child care, there remained a dearth of national standards for child care programs.³⁰ Moreover, the program targeted only those at the lower end of the income scale, and no efforts were made to establish a universally accessible child care service.³¹

Further efforts at intergovernmental cooperation related to child care and children's development came in the form of the National Children's Agenda in 1997, in which the federal government and provinces (except Quebec) agreed to collaborate and share information pertaining to child policy and programming. Notably, through the Early Childhood Development initiative in 2000, the federal government agreed to invest 2.2 billion dollars over five years in the areas of health during pregnancy, birth and infancy; parental and family supports; early childhood development, learning and care and community supports. This agreement paid limited attention to specific child care programs, and the importance of such programs to parental labour force participation was not addressed. Therefore, child poverty was "de-gendered" and "individualized" and programs targeted poor children alone without considering the structural inequalities and disadvantages that caused them to be poor. In fact, this emphasis on child development instead of care was so notable that one federal official admitted that "child care just kind of dropped off the edge".³² Jenson, Mahon and Phillips (2003) argue that the voices of both women's rights supporters and child care activists were diluted during this period. Child care advocates allied with anti-poverty advocates, as each saw the

³⁰ Timpson, 2001

³¹ Jenson, Mahon and Phillips, 2003

³² Quoted in Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004

political advantage of incorporating the other's perspective. As a result, both had to sacrifice part of their message to accommodate the other. Poverty became "individualized". Overall, Prentice notes that in spite of the governmental and advocacy discourse related to child poverty elimination in the late 1990s and early 2000s, poorer children tended to have limited access to high quality child care relative to children that are better off. This lack of care has been shown to be detrimental to childhood development and later opportunities for socio economic advancement.³³

In addition, the decentralized nature of Canadian federalism, even in the context of the Social Union, has posed a challenge for child care and women's activists. For example, because the NCA and Early Childhood Development initiative were funded through the CHST, provinces had discretionary power over how they invested the money and were under no obligation to create parallel systems. Advocacy groups were forced to split their resources and efforts between the different levels of government in their attempts to influence change. Recognizing this, and desiring "a network of public watchdogs" to ensure that the provincial governments would be held accountable in their decision making, the federal government provided funding to the National Children's Alliance, a coalition of national organizations with the shared mission of promoting a child-centred national agenda, to allow them to enhance their capacities at the provincial and local levels. However, other groups such as those represented by Campaign 2000, a coalition of more radical national, provincial and local anti-poverty and child care activist organizations, were not given funding, causing their criticisms to be muffled.³⁴

Despite the federal government's rhetoric of intergovernmental collaboration and a National Children's Agenda, the Chrétien Liberals shied away from specifically addressing child care due to jurisdictional politics, instead relying on fiscal transfers to individual parents in order to breach the "welfare wall" and to promote labour force attachment. Moreover, in terms of parental employment, the federal government separately addressed employment equity through employment equity legislation, as this area was strictly a federal responsibility. In 1995, the Liberals introduced Bill C-64, the 1995 Employment Equity Act, which improved upon the 1986 Employment Equity Act by broadening the mandate of the legislation, and increased government and employer capacity to monitor and develop employment equity procedures. While Timpson notes that the fact that the

³³ Prentice, 2007

³⁴ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004

1995 act was introduced just months before a childcare initiative was proposed suggests “a symbolic link” between these areas of policy, the connection between the two was only made in the context of declining labour force participation of single mothers. Child care was not considered in terms of enhancing women’s equality of opportunity in the labour force.³⁵ Therefore, child poverty was considered in isolation. However, Timpson notes that this was not surprising given that this period did not see royal commission activity or persistent feminist activism forcing the government to consider the two phenomena in tandem. Therefore the government focused on more politically viable initiatives related to employment equity and to child poverty and development.³⁶

In the new millennium, arguments that investment in child care and children’s services was necessary for all children and not just for those in low income households persisted, but from new sources and still within a child-centred lens. The discourse further shifted from that of equality to that of “investment” and scientific rationales were presented for early childhood development programs including regulated day care services. Neuroscientists, population health analysts, and physicians argued that early childhood programs administered by trained professionals were crucial to the development of all children, especially but certainly not limited to poor children.³⁷ For example, in its report “Improving the Health of Canadians”, the Canadian Population Health Initiative emphasized the successes achieved by the US Early Head Start Program, which succeeded the 1960s Head Start Program in 1995, and involves the provision of centre and home-based parental skills training and early childhood development programs for low income families. An evaluation of three year old program participants found that they scored higher on various measures of cognitive, language and social-emotional development than non-participants in the same age group, with children who had received centre based care scoring the highest in all areas. Therefore, the report recommended that all pre-school aged children receive centre-based care in programs oriented towards early childhood development as opposed to “custodial” day care, through “low child to adult ratios, highly educated staff with specialized training and facilities and equipment that provide stimulating activities”. The report goes on to note that “research has linked quality care, defined in these terms, with linguistic, cognitive and social competencies of infants” (Canadian Population Health Initiative 2004). The benefits to parents in creating centre-based care were

³⁵ Timpson, 2001

³⁶ Timpson, 2001

³⁷ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004

mentioned, but in the context of promoting work-life balance. In contrast to the gender-based justifications for child care, the benefits of providing such services were quantified and monetized, with the report even presenting US research stating that for every dollar invested in early childhood development, a country could expect economic returns of up to eight dollars (Canadian Population Health Initiative 2004).

The “business case” for child care was also articulated by economists and corporate and private sector actors. For example, Charles Coffey, former vice president of the Royal Bank of Canada and David Dodge, former governor of the Bank of Canada, both championed the position that early childhood development programs were sound business investments that should be supported by the corporations. Furthermore, Coffey argued that the small and large businesses should lobby the federal government to establish integrated high quality nation-wide childcare, early childhood education and parent support programs, and Dodge noted that “more should be done to convince politicians of the value of investments in ECD”.³⁸ These arguments shifted away from social or justice based rationale towards economic towards economic and human capital models.

Admittedly, while much of the development argument centred around the positive effects of early childhood education on children’s cognitive, emotional and social abilities, discussion of the benefits of child care to working parents were integral to the corporate “investment” platform. However, rather than discussing gender equality in the workplace, child care programs were promoted as improving employee productivity due to lower levels of work-life conflict and allowing parents to enter the workforce. In fact, some economists have found that child care provides greater returns to parents than children because it allows mothers greater access to the paid workforce.³⁹ Nevertheless, such cost benefit analyses tend to be gender neutral and therefore they overlook gender inequality in parenting and the workforce. Instead, they are conducted based on statistical and fiscal calculations, because, as Coffey emphasized “facts, figures and return on investment are the kind of language business understands”.⁴⁰

Therefore, paralleling a similar trend in the U.S., businesses and economists in the 2000s have attempted to persuade the federal government to create national early childhood development infrastructure. True to Coffey’s observation that “shifts or changes in public policy don’t usually take

³⁸ Quoted in Prentice, 2009

³⁹ Prentice, 2009

⁴⁰ Coffey, 2004

off until the business community rallies behind them”, this recasting of child care issues struck a chord with the Federal Liberals in the mid 2000s. In his 2004 response to the speech from the throne, then-Prime Minister Paul Martin proclaimed that “a strong, Canada-wide program of early learning and care for our children is the single best investment we can make in their future and in ours”.⁴¹ Therefore, in 2004, Prime Minister Martin attempted to establish the foundations for a national day care system by negotiating individual child care agreements with the provinces to fund programs based on four principles: universal, inclusion, accessibility and development”. Aside from the agreement with Quebec, these agreements were framed in terms of the scientific and business cases for child care.⁴²

However, the return to power in 2006 by the Conservative Party saw Prime Minister Stephen Harper cancel the federal-provincial agreements in favour of the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) - an allowance of \$100 a month for each child under the age of six, regardless of whether or not he or she attends centre based day care (Canada Revenue Agency 2009). The UCCB was Harper’s deliverable of his campaign promise to dismantle the previous government’s “one size fits all plan to build a massive child care bureaucracy” and to “let parents choose what’s best for their children, whether that means formal child care, informal care through neighbours or relatives, or a parent staying at home”.⁴³ Therefore, once again, the government opted not to create a national child care system and ignored the need of the many parents- particularly mothers, who were in desperate need of such a service. Interestingly, women figured much less prominently in politics during this period than in previous governments. Fewer women were awarded cabinet positions in Harper’s first cabinet than in the previous cabinet of Prime Minister Martin, the Status of Women Canada experienced a drastic budget cut, and women’s groups were barred from receiving federal funds for advocacy or lobby-work. However, while there was intense mobilization against Harper’s decision to end the child care agreements, there was less of a backlash associated with these decisions related to women.⁴⁴

Jenson argues that the decision to unravel the plans for a pan-Canadian child care system, as well as the (virtually uncontested) decision to cut funding to women’s organizations were made

⁴¹ Quoted in Prentice, 2009

⁴² Jenson, 2009

⁴³ Quoted in Jenson, 2009

⁴⁴ Jenson, 2009

possible by the previous government's adoption of the child poverty and the child investment discourse, as these discussions caused women and gender equality to be "written out of the story".⁴⁵ In accordance with the philosophy that underlies many social programs, child care was framed in terms of its potential for human capital as opposed to a right of citizenship for women.⁴⁶ If anything, child care was redesigned as a citizenship right for children.⁴⁷ In terms of investment in children's programs, she notes that the child-centred perspective, which emphasizes long term benefits to children's future development, shifts the government's policy focus from present realities, whereas measures of gender inequality such as income, type of profession and participation in politics are examined in the present.⁴⁸ The child investment paradigm also ignores the way in which gender, class, and race intersect to exponentially disadvantage certain groups of people, intensifying their need for adequate child care and restricting their choice of providers.⁴⁹

In addition, both the investment paradigm and the UCCB ignore the disadvantaged position of child care workers and early childhood educators, the majority of which are female. Feminists have long advocated for the valuation of care giving labour, as child care workers usually experience poor working conditions and low salaries. This in turn sometimes affects the quality of service that they are able to provide.⁵⁰ The UCCB, which allows parents to choose their day care method, does not address this inequity.

Moreover, Prentice (2009) argues that by presenting the case for care in terms of developmental benefits to children, services, especially those provided by the commercial or third sector as is common in Canada, are often only part time or part day programs, yet considered sufficient to ensure the developmental benefits to children. The needs of parents- particularly mothers for full day- year long services to support their employment schedules have been marginalized.⁵¹ Similarly, prior to the implementation of the UCCB, Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) warned of the "slipperiness of the child investment language", as the emphasis on children

⁴⁵ Jenson, 2009

⁴⁶ Prentice, 2009

⁴⁷ Jenson, 2009

⁴⁸ Jenson, 2009

⁴⁹ Prentice, 2009

⁵⁰ Prentice, 2009

⁵¹ Prentice, 2009

paves the way for arguments that parents are in the best position to identify their children's needs and should thus be able to choose how they are raised.

As a result of the federal government's failure to create a pan-Canadian child care system, the provinces and territories have 13 disjointed "child care regimes", each according different weight to the role of governments, commercial child care operators, the third sector and parents in decision making about child care.⁵² Only in Quebec is child care considered a citizenship right for women.⁵³ Since 1997, regulated, educational child care has been universally accessible at a rate of less than ten dollars a day. Currently, one in three children has access to this program, which is almost twice the Canadian average.⁵⁴ While the program has been threatened with restructuring similar to the federal UCCB program, Jenson (2009) argues that the program has remained intact because governments and child care supporters in Quebec did not embrace the business case for child care and persisted to promote it in terms of gender equality. Although Jenson (2009) considers that Quebec Liberal premier Jean Charest embraced neo-liberal political ideals just as Prime Minister Harper does, she notes that exactly half of his cabinet was female, more than any federal or provincial cabinet. Moreover, although the government had considered merging the 30 year old *Conseil du Statut de la Femme* with the *Conseil de l'Égalité*, this did not occur. Most importantly, the universal day care program was shielded from a proposal by the Action Démocratique du Québec Party to dissolve the child care program in favour of a program similar to the UCCB. At the heart of the Liberals decision not to adopt such a program was a concern that it would "have the indirect effect of encouraging people to withdraw from the labour market and of reducing women's financial independence".⁵⁵ Social investment language was not employed in the Quebec Liberals' defence of child care. Moreover, during the 2005 child care negotiations with the Martin government, the Quebec agreement was the only one that did not emphasize the importance of child care to child investment. Rather, the accord outlined Quebec's own day care system and the constitutional division of powers in this area. Therefore, while the needs of children and the benefits to early childhood development were recognized, they were balanced with the needs of mothers and the goal of eradicating gender

⁵² Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004

⁵³ Jenson, Mahon and Phillips, 2003

⁵⁴ Prentice, 2009

⁵⁵ Jenson, 2009

inequality (2002). As such, Quebec feminists seem to have been much more effective in securing a universal child care program.

Therefore, it is clear that the child-centred investment approach as articulated by the Chrétien and Martin Liberal governments, the business community, and scientists de-emphasized women's equality concerns and child care needs. On the other hand, Quebec built a child care system based on maternal demands and the rights of women and citizens, and child care and women's rights advocates and femocrats in that province have had more success than those in the rest of Canada resisting a child care approach based on "choice". However, there is less compelling evidence that the UCCB can be classified within the social investment paradigm, even allowing for the "slipperiness" of the language used. As mentioned, much of the child care discussion, particularly within the scientific and business communities emphasized the importance of nationally regulated day care. From a child development perspective, centre-based care was found in US research to have better effects on children's cognitive, behavioural and social development than home-based, unregulated care. Moreover, the emphasis within the scientific literature on well educated and well trained staff to deliver educationally stimulating curricula would likely help to ensure that early childhood educators were better educated and, importantly, better paid. Moreover, the emphasis in the corporate arguments supporting child care services to enhance parental labour force participation and reduce work life conflict would suggest that they expected that child care services would follow typical employment schedules.

Interestingly, in an earlier work discussing the shift in Canadian child care politics from a "family responsibility" paradigm emphasizing parental choice in child care to the "investing-in children policy paradigm", Jenson (2004) notes that while child care campaigns in the 1970s and '80s did emphasize a feminist perspective, the child-centred investment frame in the late 1990s and early 2000s did result in increased program creation and spending by some provinces and the federal government. In fact, she notes that the most intense resistance to the creation of structured, nationally coordinated child care programs in this period came from provinces that did not support the child investment paradigm. Instead, these provinces, which in 2003 were Alberta and Ontario,

advocated an ABC, or “anything but childcare” approach involving tax credits to support parental choice in child care.⁵⁶

Admittedly, the social investment definition of child care overlooked issues of gender inequality and perhaps made it easier for the Conservative federal government to opt to provide the UCCB rather than honouring the child care agreements with the provinces. Furthermore, the UCCB also ignored the research supporting the economic case for regulated child care services. Instead it returned to the earlier approach of providing child care tax credits and allowances. Clearly, then, regardless of the frame used, proponents of a national child care program have to compete with the ideological perspective emphasizing choice and maternal child care. Moreover, feminists struggled to play a role in mainstream Canadian politics even at the height of their influence. Given the overwhelming support garnered for the child poverty and child development approaches to child care, it may be useful not to treat these perspectives as mutually exclusive. However, the child investment perspective should be expanded to incorporate a gendered analysis of poverty, the labour force and parenting.

Overall, while the underlying rationale for the creation of a pan-Canadian child care is constantly in flux, actual development of such a program has been stagnant since the 1970s, with perhaps the most devastating policy action being the cancellation of the Martin child care agreements with the provinces in favour of the UCCB. At that time Harper was effectively ignoring the social investment frame of child care, as women's poverty, equality and employment needs took a backseat to concerns about child poverty and development. Interestingly, while the social construction of child care as a fundamental women's right met with opposition from both men and women even at the height of the women's movement, the child investment paradigm, including specific arguments for centre based child care seemed to be less contested and widely supported. Nevertheless, it was vulnerable to the conservative ideology of minimal government interference in parental child care decisions. If the Conservative government remains in power and continues to emphasize a devolved federal role in social policy, achieving a national child care policy will be unlikely in the foreseeable future.

⁵⁶ Jenson, 2004

REFERENCES

- Canada Revenue Agency. 2009. "UCCB- Application and Eligibility". Accessed online at <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/bnfts/uccb-puge/pplctn-eng.html>.
- Canadian Population Health Initiative. 2004. "Improving the Health of Canadians." Report, Canadian Institute for Health Information, Ottawa.
- Coffey, Charles. 2004. "Early Learning and Child Care, the Cost of Not Doing Enough." Paper presented at the Economics of Child Care Conference, Fredericton, NB.
- Dobrowolsky, Alexandra and Jane Jenson. 2004. "Shifting Representations of Citizenship: Canadian Politics of Women and Children." *Social Politics* 11: 154-180.
- Jenson, Jane, 2004. "Changing the Paradigm: Family Responsibility of Investing in Children." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29: 169-192.
- Jenson, Jane. 2009. "Writing Gender Out: The Continuing Effects of the Social Investment Perspective." In *Women and Public Policy in Canada: Neo-Liberalism and After*, ed. Alexandra Dobrowolsky, Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Jenson, Jane, Rianne Mahon and Susan D. Phillips. 2003. "No Minor Matter: The Political Economy of Child care in Canada." In *Changing Canada: Political Economy as Transformation*, eds. Wallace Clement and Leah Vosko, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Mahon, Rianne. 2002. "Gender and Welfare State Restructuring Through the Lens of Child Care." In *Child Care Policy at the Crossroads: Gender and Welfare State Restructuring*, ed. Sonya Michel and Rianne Mahon, New York: Routledge.
- Mahon, Rianne and Susan Phillips. 2002. "Dual-Earner Families Caught in a Liberal Welfare Regime?" In *Child Care Policy at the Crossroads: Gender and Welfare State Restructuring*, ed. Sonya Michel and Rianne Mahon, New York: Routledge.
- Newman, Jaquetta and Linda A. White. 2006. *Women, Politics and Public Policy*. Toronto: Oxford University Press Canada.
- Prentice, Susan. 2009. "High Stakes: The "Investable" Child and the Economic Reframing of Childcare." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 34: 687-710.
- Prentice, Susan. 2007. "Less Access, Worse Quality: New Evidence About Poor Children and Regulated Child Care in Canada," *Journal of Children and Poverty* 13: 57-73.
- Timpson, Annis M. 2001. *Driven Apart: Women's Employment Equality and Child Care in Canadian Public Policy*. Vancouver: UBC Press.