

A TALE OF TWO CANADAS

Implementing Rights in Early Childhood

OVERVIEW

“A great change is coming over childhood in the world’s richest countries” (UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre [IRC], 2008, p. 1).

So begins UNICEF’s 2008 Report Card 8, *The Child Care Transition*, which observes that “this is the first generation of children in which a majority will be in some form of out-of-home child care” (UNICEF Canada, 2008). UNICEF Canada’s (2008) comments on this Report Card advise that “this child care transition at once offers an enormous potential for the child and a risk if key quality issues are not considered in the planning and delivery of early childhood care and education.” Report Card 8 “advances the idea of a ... set of minimum standards by which the rights of young children might be protected as the transition to child care gathers momentum” (UNICEF IRC, 2008, p. 7).

So, how is Canada doing at protecting the rights of young children? To what extent does public policy in Canada recognize the social and economic changes and challenges facing families today? This paper explores two fundamentally different answers to this question which, together, tell *A Tale of Two Canadas*.

On the one hand, both federal and provincial governments suggest in their public reports that the measures they are taking to support young children and their families are generally adequate. For those families that may be struggling, governments indicate that (1) they’re doing as much as they can and (2) conditions are improving over time.

On the other hand, the evidence paints a different reality. The fact is that Canada’s public support for young children and their families is the weakest among the world’s rich countries, such that Canada’s policies and investments fall far short of the commitments made under multiple agreements. To highlight two key concerns:

1. Child and Family Poverty — almost 10% of young children and their families are living in poverty (LICO After-Tax), despite the fact that more than one-third of these families have at least one parent working full-time, full-year (Campaign 2000, 2010).
2. Lack of Access to Quality Early Care and Learning Programs — there are only enough regulated spaces for about 20% of young children, despite the fact that more than 70% of Canadian mothers are in the paid labour force (Beach, Friendly, Ferns, Prabhu, & Forer, 2009, Tables 6 & 9).

This paper organizes the evidence of Canada’s weak public policy for young children and their families as follows:

- Part 1 outlines the various commitments Canada has made to families with young children, both at home and abroad.
- Part 2 summarizes the findings of several international reports, including the UNICEF report referenced above, which rank Canada’s policy poorly relative to other developed nations.
- Part 3 highlights the public input shared by an unprecedented range of Canadian civil society groups in recent years, including recommendations for improving public support for the early years.

Taken together, these three parts tell a comprehensive and consistent tale of one Canada — a wealthy country whose support for young children is poor relative to identified family needs, international comparisons and signed commitments.

- Part 4 briefly reviews public reporting by Canadian governments, showing that their focus on promoting existing policies, rather than demonstrating the effectiveness of those policies, tells the tale of a different Canada. Furthermore, the lack of clear, relevant, timely and consistent information in Canada’s public reporting prevents both the Canadian public and the international community from reconciling and resolving the *Tale of Two Canadas*.

This paper’s analysis begins in 2003, when the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Rights of the Child issued ‘concluding observations’ on the implementation of child rights in Canada (Committee on the Rights of the Child [CRC], 2003). These observations were based on reports issued prior to that time both by governments and by non-government or civil society organizations. The analysis in this paper includes public reports issued by both groups generally through November 2009, when the Governments of Canada filed the most recent report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child¹.

In order to resolve *A Tale of Two Canadas* and fulfill Canada’s commitments to young children and their families, the paper concludes with comprehensive and integrated recommendations. With public funding support for meaningful involvement by non-government organizations, federal and provincial governments are urged to:

1. **Inform** — undertake a broad public education strategy to inform Canadians about Canada’s commitments to early childhood, demonstrating the progress to date and acknowledging the areas that require further action.
2. **Plan** — develop comprehensive plans to realize the rights of young children, with timelines and targets to measure success along the way.
3. **Invest** — increase funding to both parents, particularly those with lower incomes, and to community services. Specifically, invest 1% of GDP in early care and learning, ensuring accountability for achieving service quality and access targets.
4. **Monitor** — publicly and transparently report on actual results compared to plans, incorporating key indicators of success.

1 However, this analysis only addresses actual program activity and expenditures between 2003 and 2007, which is the period covered by Canada’s most recent reporting to the UN Committee.



COALITION OF
**child care
advocates**
OF BC

The Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada (CCAAC) and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) are non-profit, membership-based and regionally representative organizations working collaboratively to promote a publicly funded, inclusive, high-quality, affordable, publicly-owned and operated child care system. For more than 25 years, both organizations have worked with families, early childhood educators, community organizations and partners from multiple sectors in order to advance child care as a cornerstone of progressive family policy. The pan-Canadian CCAAC and the BC-based CCCABC have jointly undertaken the “Child Care is a Right” project, which seeks to raise public awareness about, and promote government action on, Canada’s commitments to child care services.

For further information about this joint project and to download a complete copy of *A Tale of Two Canadas*, please see www.ccaac.ca/resources/projects/CCisaRight.php or www.cccabc.bc.ca/res/rights.html