

**Looking Back From Winnipeg:
Considering the National Child Care Conferences
of 1971, 1982, and 2004**

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The occasion of ChildCare2020, only the fourth national conference of its kind in Canada, invites historical reflection on the previous three conferences held in 1971, 1982, and 2004. In many respects, the plans for ChildCare2020 suggests it will be very similar to the others, particularly in the ways that the themes of funding, quality, auspice, and the creation of a national child care program figured centrally into all of them. Furthermore, delegates will and have descended on these conferences with a significant degree of frustration at the inadequate state of child care in Canada. In the years immediately preceding the 1971 conference, for example, fewer than 3% of Canadian children were in licensed day nursery or day care services; by 2004, reports indicated that regulated child care spaces existed for only 12% of Canadian children. As the 2014 conference approaches, that proportion sits around 22.5% – an increase, to be sure, but one that still indicates a “sizeable gap between need and provision.”¹ These conferences were a chance for concerned citizens to articulate their demands for more and better child care. As in Winnipeg, advocates at all three of these previous conferences sensed an opportunity to change the national conversation about child care.

¹ Canadian Council on Social Development, *Day Care: Report of a National Study* (Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development, 1972), iii; Martha Friendly, Jane Beach, and Michelle Turiano, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada, 5th ed.* (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, February 2013); Carolyn Ferns and Martha Friendly, *The state of early childhood education and care in Canada 2012* (Moving Childcare Forward Project, June 2014), 2.

As this paper shows, however, each of these three previous national conferences took place amidst different political circumstances, at different moments in the evolution of the national child care movement, and were informed by different public views about the meaning and purpose of child care in Canadian society. Examining more closely the conferences of 1971, 1982, and 2004, then, draws attention to important moments in the history of child care in Canada and particularly to the shifting trends and fortunes of child care advocacy. As Rianne Mahon has said, the fight for better child care in Canada is a “never-ending story” that spans at least forty years.² These conferences were important markers in that story and deserve more attention than they have so far been given because of the role they played in mobilizing child care supporters, underlining federal and provincial policy inadequacies, and proposing policy solutions.³ They acted as flashpoints for issues that defined the terms of child care debates in their respective historical eras, both between advocates and governments and within advocacy circles. At all three conferences, we can see evidence of advocates, parents, workers, and others grappling with the “competing meanings” of child care that over the years have both united and divided the child care community: the relationship between day care and welfare; day care’s part in securing women’s equality and rights; the roles for governments and markets in providing child care services; and the relative importance of “care” and “education” objectives in early childhood services. These conferences highlight the fact that calls for better child care have a long history in Canada, but they also remind us of the multiple dilemmas that have long been embedded in that struggle.

Child Care’s Contested Meanings and Frames

Scholars of social policies in Canada have recently become interested in the “framing” of child care policy. Policy frames, Susan Prentice explains, “simplify and condense the world by selectively punctuating and encoding objects, situations, experiences, and sequences.”⁴ Linda White describes frames as “persuasive devices” meant to “fix meanings, organize experience, [and] alert others that their interests and possibly their identities are at stake.” In other words, frames are meant to “sell” particular policy solutions to the public. A certain frame is successful – it leads to social action and shifts in policy – when it aligns with dominant cultural values and “tap[s] into deep-seated public sentiment” about the issue at stake.⁵

² Rianne Mahon, “The Never-Ending Story: The Struggle for Universal Child Care Policy in the 1970s,” *The Canadian Historical Review* 81, 4 (December 2000): 582-622.

³ Scholars have given only passing mention to the conferences, and have focused mostly on 1982. See, for example, Mahon, “The Never-Ending Story,” 614-615; Annis May Timpson, *Driven Apart: Women’s Employment Equality and Child Care in Canadian Public Policy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001), 88-90; Alan R. Pence and Allison Benner, “Child Care Research in Canada, 1965-99,” in *Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada*, ed. Larry Prochner and Nina Howe (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 141, 144.

⁴ Susan Prentice, “High Stakes: The “Investable” Child and the Economic Reframing of Childcare,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 34, 3 (2009), 689.

⁵ Linda White, “The Internationalization of Early Childhood Education and Care Issues: Framing Gender Justice and Child Well-Being,” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions* 24, 2 (April 2001), 287; Linda White, “Constructing Paradigm Change in Early Childhood Education and Care: Rational and Cultural Influences on Policy Change,” paper prepared for the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, September 2011, 5, 8. See also David A. Snow et al., “Frame Alignment Process, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation,” *American Sociological Review* 51, 4 (1986): 464-481.

Prentice, White, and others have suggested that two frames in particular characterize contemporary child care politics: the childhood development frame, and the business frame. The two are closely related. Since the late 1990s, the child care community has focused much of their energy on the need to support the development and education of young children, buttressed by new research in brain development and the growing international attention to childhood needs and health determinants. The resonance of this science-based frame was particularly apparent in 2003 and 2004 when the federal and provincial governments came to a series of agreements, including the Multilateral Framework Agreement, that represented an unprecedented commitment of \$5 billion of funding to early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs over 5 years. The language and rhetoric around this policy shift, as White has shown, centred on “early learning” and developmental objectives – “not daycare.”⁶

The “business case” for child care goes hand-in-hand with this focus on childhood development and education. If the early years are so important to the development of a well-educated and robust citizenry, then it stands to reason that heavy investment in those years will produce long-term dividends. The rationale of “human capital development” has been marshalled by a range of private, corporate, and governmental interests who insist that a comprehensive child care system would provide the foundation for a productive workforce and long-term economic prosperity.⁷ TD Bank economist Craig Alexander’s 2012 report is just one example of this. In it, he argued that an early childhood care and learning program had the potential to “reduce poverty, address skills shortages, improve productivity and innovation,” and address “a host of other national priorities” with respect to economic prosperity.⁸ Support for ECEC based on this logic is part of a broader social policy shift towards the social investment state, which has been carefully documented by Jane Jenson and others.⁹ The dominance of neoliberal thought and austerity measures throughout the 1980s and 1990s led to a wariness around any kind of social spending and thus a belief that social programs should achieve particular objectives, including the promotion of individual responsibility and an emphasis on the market for “generating life-chances.” Child care, like other programs, thus had to be framed as “productive” spending and as an investment in human capital.¹⁰ This economically-centred frame leads to arguments that child care programs will enhance labour force attachment in the short- and long-term, and that they will prevent poverty and welfare dependency.¹¹

These contemporary frames were certainly at play in the 2004 conference which, as we will see, celebrated the government’s \$5 billion promise as a sound economic investment in human capital. But as Susan Prentice reminds us, the meaning of child care services have

⁶ Linda White, “Trends in Child Care/Early Childhood Education/Early Childhood Development Policy in Canada and the United States,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* (Winter 2004), 671-672; White, “Constructing Paradigm Change,” 11-12.

⁷ Prentice, “High Stakes,” 687-693.

⁸ Craig Alexander and Dina Ignjatovic, *Early Childhood Education has Widespread and Long Lasting Benefits* (TD Economics Special Report, 27 November 2012).

⁹ Jane Jenson, “Writing Gender Out: The Continuing Effects of the Social Investment Perspective,” in *Women and Public Policy in Canada*, ed. Alexandra Dobrowolsky (Don Mills: Oxford, 2009), 25-47; Jane Jenson and Denis Saint-Martin, “New routes to social cohesion? Citizenship and the Social Investment State,” *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 28, 1 (2003): 77-99; Rianne Mahon and Susan Phillips, “Dual-Earner Families Caught in a Liberal Welfare Regime? The Politics of Child Care Policy in Canada,” in *Child Care Policy at the Crossroads*, ed. Sonya Michel and Rianne Mahon (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 202.

¹⁰ Jenson and Saint-Martin, “New routes to social cohesion?” 77-78, 82-83.

¹¹ Jenson, “Writing Gender Out,” 38; Prentice, “High Stakes,” 693.

been “breathtakingly malleable.”¹² Taking a closer look at the 1971 and 1982 conferences, along with 2004, provides glimpses in the range of the meanings and frameworks that the child care community have used to jockey for position over the years in their demands for more and better child care. The conferences were high-profile opportunities for advocates, ECEC workers, parents, politicians, and others to articulate their visions of a Canadian child care system. In doing so they reflected, reinforced, and challenged the dominant frames of child care politics as they have changed over time.

Perhaps the most significant shift that these conferences reveal is the fading of feminism from child care advocacy. At the 1971 conference feminist activists were a powerful – if small – force in setting the direction for child care policy, positioning universal, publicly-funded child care as one of the social rights required for gender equality. The legacy of their advocacy was certainly felt in 1982, when a minority of activists sought to protect the “public” aspect of policy proposals and resisted government support for market-based, profit-generating day care services. But an explicit women’s rights agenda had largely disappeared in 1982 in favour of a focus on children’s interests. By 2004, the economic reframing of child care largely overshadowed feminist frameworks. The “disappearing woman” in child care is part of a larger trend in the social investment state to “write women out.” Claiming a space in this competitive policy environment means that both policymakers and child care lobbyists have had to dilute gender-based claims in favour of ones that focus on children and on gender-neutral labour force attachment – a tactic that is a “high stakes gamble” for women, despite the new business alliances it has forged.¹³

Large-scale trends like the fading of feminism are relatively easy to map across the years. This paper also, however, gives close attention to the “internal lives” of these three conferences.¹⁴ Doing so reveals the sometimes-deep divisions within the child care community about the mobilization of particular frameworks and about the meaning and purpose of child care in Canadian society. It is perhaps easy to take for granted that those concerned about child care have, and always have had, the common goal of a universal, publicly-funded, not-for profit program. The 2004 conference certainly seemed to reflect consensus about this target, and about the business frame’s ability to attain it. In 1982 and 1971, however, conference attendees – reflecting a larger swath of the child care community and the Canadian public – were far from a consensus about the meaning and purpose of child care, let alone whether a national universal program was the best way to achieve their objectives. More and better child care were undoubtedly the goals – but there was rarely consensus about what constituted “better” child care or who was responsible for creating “more” of it. In 1971, feminist challenges to day care’s long-standing welfarist orientation prompted questions about who was entitled to day care: all mothers? Or just the most

¹² Prentice, “High Stakes,” 687.

¹³ Alexandra Dobrowolsky and Jane Jenson, “Shifting Representations of Citizenship: Canadian Politics of ‘Women’ and ‘Children,’” *Social Politics* 11, 2 (2004), 173; Jane Jenson, “Writing Gender Out”; Cheryl Collier, “The Disappearing Woman? Locating Gender Equality in Contemporary Child Care and Anti-Violence Debates in Canada,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, June 2010; Prentice, “High Stakes,” 703-704; Cheryl Collier, “Do Strong Women’s Movements Get Results? Measuring the Impact of the Child Care and Anti-Violence Movements in Ontario 1970-2000,” paper presented at the CPSA, June 2005; Glenda Wall, “Putting family first: Shifting discourses of motherhood and childhood in representations of mothers’ employment and child care,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 40 (2013): 162-171; Ann Shola Orloff, “From Maternalism to “Employment for All”: State Policies to Promote Women’s Employment across the Affluent Democracies,” in *The State after Statism: New State Activities in the Age of Liberalization*, ed. Jonah D. Levy (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2006), 230-268.

¹⁴ Dobrowolsky and Jenson, “Shifting Representations of Citizenship,” 156.

“needy”? Did stay-at-home mothers fit into any kind of national scheme for day care? In 1982, advocates and day care providers disagreed sharply about the relationship between auspice and quality, and the conference highlighted deep divisions about whether child care was a purely public responsibility or whether there was a role for the market in service provision. 1982’s conference also reflected the tension between “care” and “education” that had long infused the child care movement and which would continue to do in subsequent years. The goal of this historical overview is to account for the most significant of those friction points, which remind us of the competing meanings of child care that still need to be addressed today.

1971: The First Canadian Conference on Day Care

Approximately 350 delegates including child care providers, early childhood educators, representatives of social agencies, health and welfare bureaucrats, Indigenous child welfare groups, parents, researchers, and advocates gathered at the University of Ottawa from June 20 to 23, 1971 to discuss and debate the state of child care in Canada and future directions for policymaking. With financial support from the Department of National Health and Welfare, this group was brought together by the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD, formerly the Canadian Welfare Council). The CCSD had long been involved in the day care field and thus its organization role in the first national conference was not surprising. Back to at least the 1930s it was quietly involved in a number of day care studies, and then during the Second World War it played an important role in the establishment of child care services for working mothers under the Dominion-Provincial Wartime Day Nurseries Agreement.¹⁵ When mothers starting entering the workforce in increasingly numbers during the 1960s – after 1964, the majority of employed women in Canada were married – the CCSD was one of several national agencies that became very concerned with monitoring and evaluating their access to child care.¹⁶ The Department of Labour Women’s Bureau was another: they published two important studies in 1964 and 1967, *Day Care Services of Children of Working Mothers* and *Working Mothers and Their Child Care Arrangements*, which identified an alarming lack of child care services and mothers’ many inadequate and ad hoc provisions.¹⁷ The release of the 1967 spurred the CCSD to take careful stock of the day care provisions that actually existed across the country. In 1968, consultant James Gripton began to work on behalf of the CCSD by sending out questionnaires to child care centres and services, asking for demographic analyses, facility and equipment profiles, the extent of community coverage, and information about the legislation under which they operated.¹⁸

¹⁵ Lisa Pasolli, “I ask you, Mr. Mitchell, is the emergency over?” Debating Day Nurseries in the Second World War” (forthcoming).

¹⁶ Department of Labour, “News Release: Consultation on Working Women with Family Responsibilities,” 19 February 1965, Library and Archives Canada [LAC], MG 28 I 10, v. 370, file 15.

¹⁷ Canada, Department of Labour, Women’s Bureau, *Bulletin*, January 1964, Number XI, “Day Care Services for Children of Working Mothers”; Canada, Department of Labour, Women’s Bureau, *Working mothers and their child-care arrangements* (Ottawa: 1970).

¹⁸ C.W. Portal-Foster, “The Day Care of Children in Canada: A Study by the Canadian Welfare Council,” 11 March 1968, LAC MG 28 I 10, v. 370, file 15; L.T., “A Statement prepared by the Canadian Welfare Council for Department of Labour Canada regarding Studies of Day Care, to be conducted over a two year period, 1965-67,” 5 November 1965, LAC, MG 28 I 10, v. 370, file 15.

One preliminary finding of the CCSD survey was the “real need on the part of persons responsible for the services, and users of these services, to exchange their views and experiences with others across Canada.”¹⁹ The 1971 conference was designed to meet this need. As conference chair Anne Barstow explained, the practical matters of providing day care would occupy much of the delegates’ time, but the conference also had a larger goal of articulating a “clear idea of the philosophy behind day care and our view that day care is a major social issue for Canada at this time.”²⁰ The topics on the agenda of the conference were largely determined by the preliminary results of the CCSD survey. During the first two days of the conference, delegates met in discussion groups organized around four themes: legislation, financing, training, and community resources.²¹ On the conference’s final day, each working group presented their recommendations at a plenary session; those recommendations were then submitted to the CCSD executive which was charged with passing them along to the federal and provincial governments.²²

A “basic premise” emerged from the conference: that a wide range of day care services should be available for children of all ages and for “all families who need or want” to use them.²³ The working groups also arrived at more specific recommendations that included more CAP funds for operating and capital costs for day care centres and the creation of new administrative structures within the public education system.²⁴ Arriving at that recommendation and the others that accompanied it, however, was not without friction. Indeed, an official who attended on behalf of the Ontario Day Nurseries Branch characterize the conference as “one of frustration for a great many of the participants.” Points of conflict developed around provincial control of day care services, especially from Quebec delegates, as well as debates about whether day care was harmful to the healthy development of young children.²⁵ A bigger and more fundamental tension permeated the conference, however, one shaped by the context of child care policies and the emergence of second-wave feminism in Canada. The traditional and long-standing welfarist orientation of day care, with its emphasis on targeting services to the ‘neediest’ families, was challenged by an emerging women’s rights interpretation which called for a universal child care program as a key element of gender equality. In framing it either a welfare service or as a gender-based social right, delegates were articulating very different meanings of child care.

The welfarist framework that still featured strongly at the conference was the legacy of several decades of inadequate child care services. Rooted in a deeply-held political uneasiness with mothers who worked outside the home, the child care programs that had developed prior to the 1960s were designed around the belief that working mothers signalled some kind of family “failure.” Child care services were thus tools to prevent poverty and poor families’ welfare dependency. This belief endured even through the Second World War day nurseries for working mothers, and was institutionalized in 1966 with the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). Provinces used the money made available through CAP to fund child care programs, mostly in the form of subsidies and capital grants, but only for families who

¹⁹ Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), “Proceedings: Canadian Conference on Day Care,” 20-23 June 1971, i.

²⁰ CCSD, “Proceedings,” 1971, ii-iii.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 36-51.

²² Baetz to Wells, 22 October 1971, Archives of Ontario (AO), RG 29-117, Box 202046, file 2-5.

²³ CCSD, “Proceedings,” 1971, 43-44.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 36-39.

²⁵ Beverley Bernier, “Report of the Canadian Conference on Day Care – Ottawa – June 1971,” AO, RG 29-117, Box 202046, file 2-5; “Little known about infants in group care,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 22 June 1971.

were in need or likely to become in need.²⁶ At the conference, many delegates continued to express the view that public child care provision was most appropriately reserved for families that required social intervention. The community resources group recommended, for example, that the focus of day care development should be in “those communities where the social needs of the people are most evident.”²⁷ The experts called upon as keynote speakers were particularly invested in the welfare rationale. Dr. Frederick Elkin, a sociologist from York University who spoke on opening night, clearly positioned day care as a solution to juvenile delinquency, broken homes, and poverty, as well as the many “deviant paths” down which youth had started to head in the 1960s. In this troubled society, he said, it was more important than ever to ensure that children were given the opportunities to become productive citizens. In Elkin’s view day care played a “necessary supervisory or semi-custodial role...for those parents who, for whatever the reason, are living without spouses, or who have *no choice* but to work and leave their children somewhere...”²⁸ In the closing plenary, Mrs. William Bell, an American social work consultant, conveyed similar views: that day care was something that could ensure better outcomes for disadvantaged children. Bell called on delegates to form a national lobby group she called the Children’s Concern Advocacy Lobby, whose focus, as the name suggested, was not working parents but potentially neglected children.²⁹

An emerging strain of feminist thought repeatedly challenged these views, however. The conference represented an opportunity for many delegates to articulate a vision for a universal child care program as a standard social right for women, one that ensured their equal opportunities in the workforce. Their efforts were buttressed by the larger context of the women’s movement, which in 1971 was beginning to transform the way that Canadians thought about women’s roles in the public and private spheres. One important signal of this transformation was the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW), released in 1970. One of the central recommendations of the RCSW was the creation of a national day care program. Based on submissions from thousands of individuals and organizations, the RCSW had made a national day care program a central feature of their recommendations. “For the federal government to fail to proceed with a specific child-care programme, removed from welfare legislation of a more general nature,” the commissioners said, “would be to deny the claim which Canadian women have made for concrete assistance in the the burden of responsibility which they have been compelled to carry.”³⁰ Lower-profile but equally important child care ferment was also taking hold across the country in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Grassroots efforts towards establishing child care co-operatives, campus activism from New Left student groups, and calls for public child care from within citizen-led welfare rights groups were all part of the feminist challenge to the old philosophy of day care.³¹

²⁶ See Michael Krashinsky, *Day Care and Public Policy in Ontario* (Toronto: Ontario Economic Council by University of Toronto Press, 1977), 20-21.

²⁷ CCSD, “Proceedings,” 1971, 44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 11. Emphasis added.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁰ Florence Bird, *Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada* (Ottawa: September 1970), 271. Joan Sangster, “Invoking Experience as Evidence,” *Canadian Historical Review* 92, 1 (March 2011): 135-61; Annis May Timpson, “Royal Commissions as Sites of Resistance: Women’s Challenges on Child Care in the Royal Commission on the Status of Women,” *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 20 (Fall 1999): 123-48.

³¹ See, for example, Wendy Atkin, “‘Babies of the World Unite’: The Early Day-Care Movement and Family Formation in the 1970s,” in *Family Matters: Papers in Post-Confederation Canadian Family History*, ed. Lori Chambers

The impact of the RCSW was certainly felt at the conference, including through mention of specific recommendations from the report.³² The influence of the feminist frame was also evident in the general recommendation that “day care should be accessible to all who want and need to use it,” a vaguely-defined position that nevertheless marked an acceptance of universal services.³³ Most explicit, however, were the direct challenges to the conference proceedings by self-identified feminist groups. A group identifying themselves as the Women’s Liberation Movement from Toronto, supported by the Italian Community Development Council, submitted a minority report calling for the removal of day care from the welfare bureaucracy, the creation of a new national department to coordinate day care administration, and a guarantee from government that day care would be a public utility. “The urgent need of Canadian parents and children for day care can only be met by a government public financial system of free universal day care,” they insisted. “Profit should have no place in any day care system and we object to recommendations which seek government subsidies for private enterprise.”³⁴

Despite the efforts of the Women’s Liberation Movement group and those that supported them, the thrust of the recommendations that emerged from the conference were dominated by the perspective that stayed away from an idealistic overhaul of child care programs and tended toward piecemeal reforms within existing welfare structures. One delegate worried that the conference’s proposed reforms were “simply an enlargement of the Canada Assistance Plan,” with its focus on families with “social needs.” The chair of the financing group Kay Shimizu explained, however, “that there was more hope of getting increased financing by modifications of existing legislation than by new legislation.”³⁵ By adopting what she called the “pragmatist” view, Shimizu’s group was able to sway the majority of conference participants. No doubt this was because such arguments “could be readily heard,” as Rianne Mahon suggests, “within the wider universe of political discourse.”³⁶ CCSD director Rueben Baetz likewise admitted that any calls for a national, universal day care program would be “whistling in the dark.” “I don’t think that with the present climate regarding social services,” he said, “that the federal Government would dare go for that.”³⁷

Baetz was likely referring to government funding cutbacks, but his comments could also apply to the deeply-held public and political values around child care in the early 1970s and beyond. The “pragmatist” and piecemeal recommendations, in other words, resonated with the wider welfare view of day care which endured despite feminist challenges. “Familialist” discourse, for example, remained prominent in day care discussions in the Interdepartmental Committee on the Status of Women, which was struck to study the potential implementation of the RCSW recommendations. CAP provisions were made more

and Edgar-Andre Montigny (Toronto: Canadian Scholars’ Press, 1998); Jason Ellis, “‘This is not a medieval university attended by celibate clergy’: Contesting the University of Toronto’s First Daycare Sit-in,” unpublished paper, York University, May 2005 [on file with the author]; See Nancy Adamson et al., *Feminist Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women’s Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 46-47.

³² The community resources groups, for example, recommended implementation of 180 and 181.

³³ “Discussion Group Reports: Legislation,” CCSD, “Proceedings,” 1971, 36-38.

³⁴ Women’s Liberation movement and the Italian Community Development Council, “Minority Report,” in CCSD, “Proceedings,” 1971, 39-40.

³⁵ CCSD, “Proceedings,” 1971, 46-47.

³⁶ Mahon, “The Never-Ending Story,” 595.

³⁷ “Day-care for all children, not just poor, urged as delegates told to put pressure on Ottawa,” *The Globe and Mail*, 24 June 1971.

generous in 1972, but those fell far short of universality and were still guided by notions of “needy” families.³⁸ Prime Minister Trudeau introduced the Child Care Expense Deduction in 1971, but advocates characterized this as a half-hearted compromise that might actually increase the costs of private child care.³⁹ When the CCSD released the results of their survey – the one that had inspired the national conference – in 1972, the report identified the “persistence of early attitudes associating day care with “welfare” and abnormal social situations,” which was impeding acceptance of day care as a “normal community service for the normal child in the normal family.”⁴⁰ Despite this government intransigence, the Canadian child care landscape shifted during the 1970s. The 1971 conference signalled a push for universal child care that would continue to unfold throughout the decade. Child care remained an important part of the feminist agenda through actions like child care co-ops, the organization of day care workers and union negotiations for better day care provisions, the lobbying efforts of national liberal feminist organizations like the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, and calls for day care from within welfare rights groups concerned about the economic security of low-income mothers.⁴¹ The 1970s also saw the creation of several provincial lobby groups formed to capitalize on and then to protest the cancellation of the Local Initiatives Project.⁴² These ongoing struggles about the meaning of child care, and the competing frames that they represented, formed the backdrop of the 1982 conference.

1982: The Second National Child Care Conference

Concern for women’s issues, particularly around paid work, experienced something of a resurgence in the early 1980s, and along with it came renewed interest in day care. Between 1969 and 1979 the number of women in the labour force had increased by 62 percent, but day care services were nowhere near adequate to meet the demand: there were only 109,135 licensed spaces in Canada for the estimated 1.5 million children who needed child care.⁴³ After the tumultuous 1970s, when feminists sought to redefine the meaning and purpose of child care services, there was a sense in the early 1980s that day care had come of age as a public issue. A major report by the Status of Women Canada Interdepartmental Committee on Day Care in 1981 helped to reaffirm its importance. “I do believe,” as one of

³⁸ Mahon, “The Never-Ending Story,” 607-613.

³⁹ “A new tax era,” *The Ottawa Citizen*, 19 June 1971; “Tax proposal would increase day-care cost, woman says,” *Globe and Mail*, 22 June 1971.

⁴⁰ The Canadian Council on Social Development, *Day Care: Report of a National Study by The Canadian Council on Social Development* (CCSD: January 1972), i. This report gave the results of the national study that started in 1968. They surveyed all centres providing day care and nursery school programs in Canada in early 1968: 1,412 centres serving 54,100 children. Only 15,000 of those children enrolled in full-day programs. The half-day programs included those for mothers who were not employed outside the home. The study, to be clear, wasn’t about assessing the need for day care services – they point out that the Women’s Bureau ‘Working Mothers and Their Child Care Arrangements’ did that – but to get a sense of the programs that existed already. Based on these other studies the CCSD does confirm, though, that there exists a “striking gap” between need and availability of child care services (vii).

⁴¹ See, for example, Susan Colley, “Free Universal Day Care: The OFL Takes a Stand,” in *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement*, eds. Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz (Toronto: Women’s Educational Press, 1983), 312–314; Vappu Tyyskää, *The Politics of Caring and the Welfare State: The Impact of the Women’s Movement on Child Care Policy in Canada and Finland, 1960-1990* (Helsinki, Finland: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1995), 130-35.

⁴² See Timpson, *Driven Apart*, 88; Martha Friendly, *Child Care Policy in Canada: Putting the Pieces Together* (Don Mills, ON: Addison-Wesley, 1994), 146.

⁴³ Ellen Roseman, “Day care ‘highly inadequate,’” *The Globe and Mail*, 24 September 1982.

the provincial ministers of the status of women said at the first federal-provincial conference on women's issues in May 1982, "that the time for arguing about whether day care is necessary is long past."⁴⁴ But if everyone agreed that child care was "necessary," there were deep divisions within the child care community about what those services should look like: how they were funded and who administered them. Furthermore, the state of day care remained abysmal. Despite the dramatically changed labour force and the attention to working women, many feminist activists characterized the day care situation in 1982 as worse than it had been in 1972.⁴⁵

These factors lent a feeling of "much greater urgency" to the 1982 conference than the 1971 one.⁴⁶ Conference co-organizer Howard Clifford, who was the head of the Child Care Programs Division in the National Health and Welfare, said that the 1982 conference "generated the most excitement of any child care conference held in Canada."⁴⁷ About 750 delegates – more than double the number than 1971 – gathered at the Winnipeg Convention Centre from September 23 to 25, 1982. The Canadian Council on Social Development once again spearheaded the conference, with support from Health and Welfare. Over the course of three days, delegates organized around issue-focused workshops, including affordability and accessibility, creative programming and nurturing environment, staff training, unique aspirations, variety of delivery models, and parent involvement.⁴⁸ Reflecting the more professional nature of child care research and advocacy, conference delegates were also given a number of background papers in advance of the Winnipeg gathering that proposed ideas around issues like the relationship between parents and child care workers, standards and accessibility, and auspice and delivery systems.

By all accounts, the 1982 conference was "electrically-charged," "suspense-filled," and "clamorous."⁴⁹ The planning committee's goal was to come out with a small number of formal resolutions to present to the federal government, but even the matter of how to arrive at those resolutions was contested: participants disagreed about whether a simple majority or two-thirds majority was required, and whether polling should take place to record strong opposing views. By the end of the conference, 36 resolutions had been passed with the support of 75 percent of delegates. At the centre of their demands was a recognition of the right of every parent and child "to universally accessible non-profit day care, notwithstanding their right to choose other existing options." The resolutions called for the federal government to immediately pass legislation to "provide for a child care supplement of \$5.00 per day" to every non-profit licensed centre and caregiver, matched by provincial grants, and the creation of new federal government department to administer a national program. They also called for attention to wages and conditions of child care workers, the creation of a specially parliamentary standing committee to study

⁴⁴ *The Globe and Mail*, 12 May 1982.

⁴⁵ *The Globe and Mail*, 15 March 1982.

⁴⁶ Jane Stinson, "The Day Care Fight Goes On: Report on the second national conference on day care," *The Facts*, Dec 1982/Jan 1983, 16-18; Barbara Huck, "Day-care conference seeks answers to many concerns," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 24 September 1982.

⁴⁷ Friendly, *Child Care Policy in Canada*, 149.

⁴⁸ "Plenary Issues and Workshops," Canadian Women's Movement Archives [CWMA], X10-95, Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada fonds, Box E108, file "2nd National Day Care Conference (September 1982)."

⁴⁹ Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), *Second Canadian Conference on Day Care: Proceedings and Reflections* (Winnipeg, 1982), 141, 144; Friendly, *Child Care Policy in Canada*, 148.

implementation of a National Day Care Act, and the establishment of an advocacy-led steering committee to provide continuous pressure on the federal government.⁵⁰

But these resolutions were accompanied by at least eight minority reports, as well as a significant “fracturing” of the day care community. As Howard Clifford said, “the day care community has been stirred like it has never been stirred before.”⁵¹ To some extent the conflicts of 1982 were reminiscent of 1971, particularly in several organizations’ rejection of day care “as a service for the needy” and a “welfare service for families in extreme poverty.”⁵² But shifting public attitudes had made the welfare frame of day care less resonant in the early 1980s, and thus less of an issue at the conference.⁵³

Just as in 1971, though, the 1982 conference revealed certain types of tension around the best way to fund, deliver, and administer high-quality day care services. On the one hand, there was a strong thrust for the framing of day care as a public service universally available as a matter of right – a position that for the most part mapped onto a feminist viewpoint, though an explicit identification with feminist objectives was not much in evidence at this conference, as we will see. On the other hand, a significant number of conference delegates embraced a role for the market, and insisted that high-quality child care was just as capably provided by the commercial sector. At times altogether resisting the notion that day care was a political issue, the private sector defenders were much more likely to frame child care as an issue of family choice and children’s interests. The tension point between these two frames hinged on a debate about public funding for profit-generating commercial day care services. This auspicious debate resulted in “bitter fights” and ultimately became the “bellwether issue” of the conference.⁵⁴

The Ontario-based group Action Day Care most vigorously took up the mantle of defending public, non-profit child care. Action Day Care had formed in 1979 to pursue new, more radical lobbying efforts after years of being discouraged with ineffective “individual lobbying” tactics and “participation on government advisory committees,” which after all had not led to many meaningful changes in child care policy. Rather than constantly engage in “defensive” struggles, group members – including parents, day care workers, trade unionists, and women’s groups – decided to go on the offensive with demands for free universal quality day care.⁵⁵ Pat Schulz, one of the key leaders of the group, explained that concerns about quality was the reason that Action Day Care supported a universally-accessible not-for-profit child care system. “For profit day care as a strong incentive to skimp on quality,” Schulz insisted, in large part because they provided lower wages and fewer

⁵⁰ “Resolutions Passed at the 2nd Canadian Conference on Day Care,” CWMA, X10-95, Box E108, file “2nd National Day Care Conference (September 1982).”

⁵¹ CCSD, *Second Canadian Conference on Day Care*, 145.

⁵² British Columbia Daycare Action Coalition, “Preamble and Platform Statement,” CWMA, X10-95, Box E108, file “2nd National Day Care Conference (September 1982);” Ellen Roseman, “Day care ‘highly inadequate,’” *The Globe and Mail*, 24 September 1982.

⁵³ See Friendly, *Child Care Policy in Canada*, 140. Though as Friendly points out, there were still some federal officials who had a very “social-work notion” of child care. Sue Colley et al., “The National Daycare Conference,” in *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution*, ed. Judy Rebick (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2005), 66.

⁵⁴ Ellen Roseman, “Day care for profit is criticized,” *The Globe and Mail*, 25 September 1982; Friendly, *Child Care Policy in Canada*, 150. One of the background papers hinted at the controversy around auspice: Sheila Campbell, “Auspices and Delivery Systems in Day Care,” CWMA, X10-95, Box E108, file “2nd National Day Care Conference (September 1982).”

⁵⁵ Susan Colley, “Free Universal Day Care: The OFL Takes a Stand,” in *Union Sisters: Women in the Labour Movement*, ed. Linda Briskin and Lynda Yanz (Toronto: Women’s Educational Press, 1983), 312-314.

benefits to staff. “Scarce government funds should be given for the delivery of day care services to organizations which are publicly approved and publicly accountable, rather than being spent to encourage the expansion of service by profit-oriented care of dubious quality.”⁵⁶ Action Day Care’s concerns were backed up by several recent studies, including the Status of Women report which found that commercial day care centres did “not appear to be providing as good a quality of care as non-profit centres...”⁵⁷

Pat Schulz and the other members of Action Day Care saw the 1982 conference as an “enormous opportunity” to spark a national campaign for universal child care.⁵⁸ Worried that the conference would focus too heavily on the mechanics of early childhood education and leave politics aside, in the weeks leading up to Winnipeg the group made plans to organize delegates around their “radical campaign platform.”⁵⁹ When the conference kicked off, Action Day Care members were a powerful force behind the creation of a Universal Access Caucus, which sought in every discussion group to ensure the resolutions did not reflect public support for private day care services. Prominent child care activist Sue Colley declared that Action Day Care (of which she was also a member) had “taken over the conference,” giving them the confidence to push for the adoption of the platform of universal child care.⁶⁰ Their organizational efforts and in-conference lobbying ensured that 75 percent of delegates voted in favour of the resolution stating that “public funding only go to non-profit, community-based day care.”⁶¹

Action Day Care’s explicitly political agenda, however, made many other delegates very uneasy. As ADC’s Martha Friendly explained, “[i]f you supported for-profit child care, you weren’t for public funding, universality, quality or paying workers decent wages.... That’s what the conference was really about.”⁶² This marking out of enemies led to resentment from delegates who thought that for-profit services had a role to play in day care provision, and who resisted Action Day Care’s stance on the unionization of day care workers and characterized their actions as “manipulation” of the conference. One group of delegates claimed that they had been “outvoted and overrun” by the disproportionately “vocal” group; another claimed to have been “bamboozled, intimidated, and confused by the procedural implications” introduced by a “cult-like” small minority.⁶³ Private day care operators and their supporters insisted that the “monolith[ic]” model of non-profit child care should be avoided.⁶⁴ The Association for Early Childhood Education Ontario (AECEO), a particularly outspoken critic of Action Day Care, insisted that “diversity” in service delivery was the key to improving day care in the country.⁶⁵ At the core of these

⁵⁶ *The Globe and Mail*, 25 September 1982, 16.

⁵⁷ Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, *Better Day Care for Canadians: Options for Parents and Children* (Ottawa, August 1982), 37.

⁵⁸ Timpson, *Driven Apart*, 89.

⁵⁹ Colley et al., “The National Daycare Conference,” 65.

⁶⁰ Colley et al., “The National Daycare Conference,” 67.

⁶¹ “Resolutions Passed at the 2nd Canadian Conference on Day Care”; Timpson, *Driven Apart*, 89-90.

⁶² Colley et al., “The National Daycare Conference,” 67.

⁶³ See *Globe and Mail*, 25 September 1982, 16; Christie McLaren, “Day-care delegates divided, angry,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, 25 September 1982; “The Minority Report to the 2nd Canadian Conference on Day Care 1982, National Conference Planning Committee from The Silent Majority,” 27 September 1982, CWMA, X10-95, Box E108, File “2nd National Day Care Conference (Sept 1982).”

⁶⁴ *The Globe and Mail*, 25 September 1982, 16; “National standards urged for day care,” *Globe and Mail* 27 September 1982, 1. This second article makes reference to for-profit operators feeling like their needs were being ignored.

⁶⁵ “The Minority Report to the 2nd Canadian Conference on Day Care 1982.”

arguments was the rhetoric of parent *choice*. For the Day Care Society of Alberta, government intervention in day care would stifle the rights of parents to choose how their children were raised and the type of care they received. “Are we to accept,” this group asked, “the socialistic mentality that the state cares for the citizen from the cradle to the grave? This country was developed by free enterprisers which is the basis of a democracy.... We must encourage the free market system, and in doing so give a voice and a choice to our parents.”⁶⁶ Things got so acrimonious by the end of the conference that thirty private operators walked out, promising not to return until their perspectives were represented on the steering committee being formed. Though their request was met, observers noted that in general “[t]here was little sympathy for the financial needs of large, commercial day care enterprises....”⁶⁷ The 75% percent passage of the non-profit resolution certainly suggested as much. Nevertheless, the conflict between these two positions represented a significant split in the day care community.

To some extent the fractures highlighted at the 1982 conference reverberated throughout the following years, particularly in the way that national advocacy unfolded. For one thing, not one but two national organizations grew out of the conference: the Canadian Day Care Advocacy Association (CDCAA, later the Canadian Child Care Advocacy Association) and the Canadian Child Care Federation. The latter was a network of early childhood educators, and distanced itself from the highly politicized nature of child care advocacy, preferring to focus on issues of programming, training, and professionalization.⁶⁸ The CDCAA, on the other hand, announced to the government and to the Canadian public that the standard to which the child care movement would strive was universal child care. But they did so in a way, Annis May Timpson argues, that reproduced the conference’s overlooking of women’s equality issues. The “thrust of the resolutions” at the conference focused on parents’ and children’s rights to high quality non-profit day care. A feminist understanding of the right to day care was certainly implicit within those resolutions, but it became even more subtle in the work of the CDCAA whose “*primary concern*,” Timpson argues, “was not to lobby for child care in order to promote gender equality in the workplace but rather to pressure governments to develop a *universal public service for children*, with decent employment conditions for child care workers.” Child care as a gender equity issue was instead dealt with through public processes like the Royal Commission on Equality in Employment.⁶⁹ The 1982 conference may have signalled new energy for the child care movement, but the trends it revealed – particularly a deteriorating feminist frame and discordant notions of auspice, care, and education – highlighted the ongoing divisions within the child care community about how best to achieve quality care for the most Canadians. The lobbying of private interests continues to be an issue that challenges the child care community.

⁶⁶ Day Care Society of Alberta, “Parent Rights and Involvement,” CWMA, X10-95, Box E108, File “2nd National Day Care Conference (Sept 1982)”;

“Parental involvement crucial for day care,” *Globe and Mail* 30 September 1982.

⁶⁷ Jane Stinson, “The Day Care Fight Goes On,” 17.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Eva Roche, “Listening and Learning, or, Will the children get lost amidst the politics?” CWMA, X10-95, Box E108, File “2nd National Day Care Conference (Sept 1982).” This helped to set the course for “long historical split between early childhood education and childcare [that] continues to shape the national political debate about how to meet the needs and rights of Canadian families and children today.” Martha Friendly and Susan Prentice, *About Canada: Childcare* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2009), 114.

⁶⁹ Timpson, *Driven Apart*, 90-92.

2004: The Third National Child Care Conference

In the twenty-two years between the second and third national conferences, child care politics experienced dramatic highs and lows. Prominent members of the advocacy community credited the 1982 conference with convincing Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to strike the Katie Cooke Task Force in 1984, which recommended the creation of a “comprehensive, accessible and competent” national system of child care.⁷⁰ Before Trudeau’s government had a chance to respond to the Cooke recommendations, however, the Brian Mulroney Conservative government replaced them. Not keen to take advice from a Trudeau-appointed commission, Mulroney struck his own parliamentary committee on child care. This committee’s position was blunt: “A universal day-care system,” they insisted, “is not the solution to the problem.”⁷¹ Instead, Mulroney pushed forward with his own “National Strategy” on child care, whose main feature was Bill C-144, the Canada Child Care Act. Advocates met this plan with mixed reviews, but in the end it did not matter: citing fiscal restraint, Mulroney abandoned most aspects of the National Strategy and Bill C-144.⁷² Through the 1990s, Jean Chretien’s Liberal government made some overtures towards child care, but not in any serious way. Child care was essentially pushed off the political agenda in the 1990s amidst controversy around new federal-provincial social spending arrangements.⁷³ There were exceptions, of course, at the provincial level, most notably Quebec’s introduction of \$5-a-day child care.⁷⁴ For the most part, however, the intervening years had been ones of disappointment for the child care community. Reflecting in 2004 on the 1982 conference, CCSD chair Patrick Flanagan said that delegates were left with a sense of optimism that policy change was on the horizon. “Unfortunately,” he lamented, “nothing could have been further from the truth. Since then, child care has either lost ground or at best, survived by turning into a patchwork of services of varying costs, availability and quality, except in Quebec.”⁷⁵ Statistics also revealed a bleak state of affairs: for every 100 Canadian child, for example, there were only 12 licensed child care spaces.⁷⁶

When 650 delegates gathered, however, on November 12 to 14, 2004 in Winnipeg for “Child Care for a Change!,” the third national conference, there was “room for confidence.”⁷⁷ For one thing, public opinion had shifted dramatically towards acceptance of government responsibility for child care: in 2003, 85% of Canadians indicated support for a publicly-funded system. The success of the Quebec program certainly contributed to this (though its cost was also a warning that much more than \$5 million was needed to sustain a national child care program).⁷⁸ For another, there was a sense among conference delegates that Canada had to keep pace with international trends in the provision of child care as part

⁷⁰ Katie Cooke, *Report of the Task Force on Child Care* (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 1986), 373.

⁷¹ Martha Friendly, “It was twenty years ago today...March 8, 1986,” Childcare Resource and Research Unit Briefing Note, 3 March 2006, <http://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/BNtwentyyears.pdf>.

⁷² Alexandra Dobrowolsky and Jane Jenson, “Shifting Representations of Citizenship: Canadian Politics of “Women” and “Children,”” *Social Politics* 11, 2 (2004): 167.

⁷³ Friendly and Prentice, *About Canada: Childcare*, 81-83.

⁷⁴ Jane Jenson, “Against the Current: Child Care and Family Policy in Quebec,” in *Child Care Policy at the Crossroads: Gender and Welfare State Restructuring*, ed. Sonya Michel and Rianne Mahon (New York: Routledge, 2002), 309-32.

⁷⁵ Patrick Flanagan, “Child Care: Room for Confidence,” *Perception* 27, 1&2 (2004), 2.

⁷⁶ Marcel Lauzière, “Child Care for a Change!” *Perception* 27, 1&2 (2004), 5-6.

⁷⁷ Flanagan, “Child Care,” 2.

⁷⁸ Lauzière, “Child Care for a Change!” 5-6. Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD), *Child Care For a Change! Shaping the 21st Century* (Winnipeg, MB, 12-14 November 2004), 35-36.

of the broader goals of reducing child poverty, enhancing gender equality, and supporting child development.⁷⁹ Most importantly, though, the recent federal government announcement of significant financial support for child care services had advocates, parents, and workers hopeful that real change was on the horizon. In 2003, Human Resources Minister Jane Stewart had negotiated with the provinces the Multilateral Framework Agreement on Early Learning and Child Care (MFA). This represented the first time since WWII that the federal government made a commitment to funding child care services.⁸⁰ Then during the 2004 election campaign, Liberal leader Paul Martin promised to spend \$5 billion over 5 years to support a “truly national” child care plan.⁸¹ When the Liberals were elected (with a minority), advocates sensed that “Canada was closer than it had ever been to a national early childhood education and childcare system.”⁸² Federal and provincial ministers agreed that such a system would be designed around the QUAD principles: quality, universality, accessibility, and (childhood) development.⁸³ Minister Ken Dryden’s presence at the conference also buoyed advocates hopes; in a keynote address, he promised that a national child care program “will be a reality.”⁸⁴

In a format very similar to previous conferences, participants met in thematic workshops that included topics like trends in research, the particular needs of rural communities, and child care in Indigenous communities. Delegates did not pass formal resolutions, but they did meet on the final day for a town hall session attended by several senior politicians. Throughout the conference numerous speakers made reference to the “sheer diversity” of rationales for child care, reflecting the maturity of a child care community that was at that point more than forty years old. Child care was talked about as something that could support goals like “labour rights, women’s equality, community development, social inclusion, and the alleviation of poverty,” as well as social equity, economic development, urban planning, the prevention of crime, and reduction of racism.⁸⁵ There was a sense that the 2004 conference represented the culmination of decades worth of research, leading to a point at which the child care community had reached a consensus about the “need for transformative change from a user fee/subsidy approach to a universal, publicly-funded, not-for-profit child care system.”⁸⁶ Even auspice debates, so divisive in the 1980s, had largely disappeared, replaced by general agreement about the need to keep child care public and prevent a “two-tier system” but to do so by gradually transitioning existing private centres into a public system.⁸⁷ Delegates also agreed on the need for the QUAD principles, for sustainable federal leadership within which provinces had a degree of

⁷⁹ See, for example, “Stephen Lewis: Into the Future – Where to from here?” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 34.

⁸⁰ Friendly and Prentice, *About Canada: Childcare*, 83.

⁸¹ White, “Trends in Child Care,” 668.

⁸² Friendly and Prentice, *About Canada: Childcare*, 84; Laurie Monsebraten, “National law on child care sought,” *Toronto Star*, 15 November 2004.

⁸³ See, for example, “Ottawa, provinces agree on child-care principles,” *The Globe and Mail*, 3 November 2004.

⁸⁴ “Dryden warns against squabbling over daycare,” *The Globe and Mail*, 13 November 2004; Laurie Monsebraten, “Act fast on child care, forum urged...” *Toronto Star*, 13 November 2004.

⁸⁵ “Opening Plenary,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 1; “Tony Martin: On the Road – Stories from a Pan-Canadian Fact-finding Tour,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 17; No Author, “Early Childhood Education as a Crime Prevention Measure,” *Perception* 27, 1&2 (2004), 14-15; “Judy Rebick: Equity and Inclusion,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 8.

⁸⁶ “Report from the Workshops: Here is what you said,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 21-23.

⁸⁷ “Stephen Lewis,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 38.

autonomy, that Indigenous communities should have ownership over their own programs, and that serious attention needed to be paid to the conditions of child care workers.⁸⁸

It was significant that universal, publicly-funded child care was the agreed-upon goal of conference delegates – the child care movement had come a long way since 1971, when the welfarist version of child care largely dominated debates. But the nature and character of this support for universal child care was also significant. As several scholars have pointed out, child care in the 21st century is increasingly “sold” as a sound economic investment – a framework that is mutually enhanced by policy and by advocacy groups, and one influenced by the new direction of social policy that gives priority to “social investment” and enhancing the labour force.⁸⁹ There was ample evidence of this at the 2004 conference. Underlying the “business case” for child care was a convincing body of evidence pointing to the importance of the first five years of life: that human development was “fixed” in those years and thus had to be supported adequately. A recurring theme at the conference was the ability of high-quality child care programs to enhance language and cognitive skills, communication skills, physical health, and emotional security.⁹⁰ It followed, then, that investing in those early years would have long-term benefits, including economic ones. Businessmen, politicians, and economists made just such an argument at the conference and leading up to it. For example, Charlie Coffey of the Royal Bank of Canada, who also sat on the Commission on Early Learning and Child Care for the City of Toronto, made the case that businesses need to collaborate with and pressure governments to invest in child care for the short- and long-term health of the workforce: “The contribution of early learning and child care to the creation and nurturing of human capital cannot be ignored.”⁹¹ Similarly, Minister Ken Dryden framed child care as an “economic, competitive, and anti-poverty issue,” and Tim Sale, a minister in the Manitoba government, characterized child care as “an investment in quality human capital” and an “economic benefit.”⁹² A number of speakers, furthermore, made reference to the well-known Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky study which showed that every dollar spent on child care resulted in \$2 worth of benefits – an investment that was a no-brainer.⁹³

As Susan Prentice and others have pointed out, though, this developmental focus and the “business case” frame had the effect of burying an important goal of child care: the support and protection of women’s rights.⁹⁴ An explicitly feminist strain of advocacy was not much in evidence at the conference. In other words, there was very little mention of child care as a vehicle for women’s equality in the workforce or in the home. Some delegates paid lip service to this framework – Judy Rebick said that child care was a “key plank” in the women’s movement, for example, and another speaker gave credit to Quebec feminists as a force behind the \$5-a-day program – but did not go beyond superficial mention.⁹⁵ This “disappearance” of women from the child care movement, and from social policy objectives

⁸⁸ Report from the Workshops: Here is what you said,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 21-23.

⁸⁹ Prentice, “High Stakes.”

⁹⁰ Martha Friendly, “Looking Backward, Moving Forward,” *Perception* 27, 1&2 (2004), 18-20; “Donna S. Lero: Healthy Child Development,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 6-7.

⁹¹ Charlie Coffey, “Count business in...” *Perception* 27, 1&2 (2004), 10-13.

⁹² “The Honourable Ken Dryden, Minister of Social Development Canada,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 3.

⁹³ Lauzière, “Child Care for a Change!”

⁹⁴ Prentice, “High Stakes.”

⁹⁵ “Judy Rebick,” 7; “Nancy Neamtan: Economic/Community/Social Development,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 9.

in general, has serious implications, because it is a “high stakes” gamble for women. These implications, however, received virtually no attention at the conference.

At the end of the 2004 town hall, one delegate rose to express her “determination” that the “vast network for support” for a national child care plan would be successful. As one conference reporter related, “She said she did not want to attend the next national conference only to say, ‘We lost again.’”⁹⁶ Unfortunately, in 2006 the Stephen Harper Conservatives were elected and immediately cancelled the Liberals’ plans for a national child care system. Citing concerns about the expense and bureaucracy such a program would entail, Harper instead instituted the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB), which provided families with \$100 per month for all children up to 5 years of age. This cash benefit, he insisted, provided parents with “choice” in child care. Since 2006, national policy with respect to early childhood education and child care has been dominated, Prentice and Friendly observe, “by funding to individuals rather than programs, with little consideration of the early childhood dimension of childcare or the work-family balance needs of parents.” This lack of attention has left Canada with one of the poorest records on child care compared to other developed countries.⁹⁷

Advocates, parents, ECEC workers, and others hope, once again, to change the national conversation about child care at the fourth national conference, ChildCare2020. Recent announcements from NDP Leader Thomas Mulcair provide a source of hope. So too have provincial advocacy models. In British Columbia, for example, child care advocates and early childhood educators have developed a comprehensive plan for \$10-a-day child care, which has secured endorsements from thousands of individuals, social agencies, businesses, city councils, politicians, researchers, and child care providers.⁹⁸ This plan, along with other current advocacy efforts, signals the enduring dominance of the early childhood development and economic reframing of child care. Such frameworks will no doubt be in evidence at ChildCare2020.

Taking stock of the history of national child care conferences reminds us how far advocacy has come. In 1971, attendees struggled to even have universal child care recognized as a valid policy choice and a serious topic of conversation for the conference agenda. In 2004, the need for a universal, high-quality, accessible early childhood care and education program was the starting point for the conference, and the same is true of 2014. As these 21st century conferences demonstrate, advocates have deepened, broadened, and enriched their arguments in favour of a national child care program in ways that are savvy to political and social contexts, and which speak to the needs and rights of children, mothers, and child care workers, among others.

Yet taking stock of these conferences also reminds us what has been left by the wayside as child care debates have unfolded over 40+ years. They remind us that feminism was key to the launch of the child care movement, and to getting universal child care on the public agenda. But changing political opportunities and advocacy strategies have meant that feminists often now “remain in the shadows” of child care advocacy, as Sonya Michel explains, “while other social actors lobby for child care on behalf of interests that are not explicitly feminist, such as child development, poverty reduction, labor shortages, or demographic crises.” Michel points out, as do others, that such alliances have “ambiguous

⁹⁶ “Discussion,” CCSD, *Child Care For a Change!*, 30.

⁹⁷ Friendly and Prentice, *About Canada: Childcare*, 85-86.

⁹⁸ Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, *Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Early Care and Learning* (April 2011), <http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/integrated.html>.

implications for women on the whole.” While policymakers may respond well to seemingly gender-neutral child care schemes, the bigger feminist cause is undermined by the lack of attention, for example, to child care workers and to maternity and parental leave that such schemes potentially entail.⁹⁹

Finally, these conferences remind us of the debates and dilemmas that have been, and likely always will be, part of national conversations about child care. Accounting for these frictions forces us to question assumptions about a “one-size-fits-all” child care program. The child care community encompasses, and has always encompassed, many political actors, many citizens, many meanings, many competing frames, and many objectives. The welfare debates that were part of 1971 conference, for example, remind us that some women felt it was more important to be able to be compensated for staying home with their infants and young children – a view that is echoed today in proposals for the “right to care” and discussions about whether caregiving is a burden or a privilege for women.¹⁰⁰ The recurring insistence from Quebec delegates on autonomy over provincial child care programs – not to mention the introduction of their \$5-a-day plan in 1997 – reminds us that in Canada’s federal system, the needs and desires of particular provinces have to be measured against national objectives. The auspice debates remind us of the need to confront fundamental questions about how to find a balance between the care responsibilities of states, markets, and families. Certainly, none of the questions raised by these debates preclude the existence of a universal child care program, but they do remind us that the child care community must still continue to grapple, as they have done for at least the past 40 years, with the meanings and frames of child care that create the most opportunities, choices, and supports the rights of the most Canadian women, children, and families.

⁹⁹ Sonya Michel, “Dilemmas of Child Care,” in *Child Care Policy at the Crossroads*, ed. Sonya Michel and Rianne Mahon (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 333, 335.

¹⁰⁰ Some feel today that child care programs enable the “commodification” of women and the undervaluing of care work, and would instead like to see policy solutions that don’t focus on child care as a lever for workfare, but that values the caregiving work that women do – for children, the elderly, the disabled. Michel, “Dilemmas of Child Care,” 336; Susan Prentice, “Childcare and Mothers’ Dilemmas,” in *Gendered Intersections: An Introduction to Women’s and Gender Studies*, 2nd edition, ed. C. Lesley Biggs et al., 342-46 (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2011).