

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Our Children's Future**

(University of Toronto Press, 2001, 416 pages)

Edited by Gordon Cleveland and Michael Krashinsky

Reviewed by Nancy Mandell<sup>1</sup>

If Canada introduces non-parental child care, what sorts of policy decisions will arise? How will Canadians determine how much money to spend, on what aspects of care, for whom? Will child care providers be subjected to uniform educational training, salary adjustments, monitoring by external regulators?



Will care be available to all children, regardless of income? Within which political and cultural discourses will policy decisions be determined? These are some of the many questions debated by authors in an exciting new edited collection that ought to be required reading for all those immersed or concerned with Canadian child care policy. Book contributions include thoughtful pieces from social policy analysts, academics and child care advocates originally presented at a symposium entitled “Good Child Care in Canada for the 21st Century: Preparing the Policy Map”. The book includes edited papers, comment on those papers, summaries of floor discussions at the symposium, and introductions and conclusions by the editors. The result is a comprehensive, lively and accessible debate suitable for all those interested in the many policy issues that will arise if Canada institutes a system of non-parental child care for children aged two to five years of age.

Seven key issues are identified. In part one, “Child Care and the Social Union: Who Should Do What?” participants begin with the assumption that non-parental child care facilities ought to be expanded across the country. Contributors debate sources of funding, analyze federal-provincial responsibilities, consider the implications of implementing national standards and assess the political feasibility of diverse decisions. This represents one of the strongest sections of the book as it provides a reasoned and multi-

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disciplinary overview of key stumbling blocks, such as financing, control and standardization, in the implementation of a national child care system.

In the second part “What the Rest of Canada Can Learn from Quebec and from Other Countries” contributors examine both the Quebec and American and European models of child care delivery, assessing outcomes for children and families. British academic Helen Penn notes that three discourses are often invoked in drawing comparisons: national education, child care and welfare policies. Others consider exemplary the Quebec policy of providing child care at \$5.00 per day to all preschool and school-aged children in the province, making access to this subsidized system available by age, one year at a time. In part three, “What is Good Quality Child Care and How Do We Get It?”, contributors tackle the difficult questions of defining and quantifying “good” and “quality” child care. Conference organizers Cleveland and Krashinsky suggest that child care should cost about \$8,500 per year for each child between the ages of two and five years of age, which represents significantly more than governments pay right now. They stimulate lively debate by asking what policy trade-offs will ensue when fiscal debates arise. Issues such as the length and breadth of child care coverage, staff training and salaries, and possible regulation and subsidization of in-home care (currently the most popular form of child care utilized by Canadians), are rarely publicly discussed.

In “How Will Good Child Care Services Be Delivered: Education System or Community Services?”, the fourth section, participants consider the issue of private versus public funding of a national child care system. National standards subsidized with government funds imply a public system that presumably would co-exist with private non-profit or for-profit centres. Issues mirror those facing both the health care and education sectors: incentives, management, accountability, provision, and cost-effectiveness. What should the role of the community be in delivery? How are we to move from our current system to a national one? How are we to make such complicated delivery decisions? What are the implications of various decisions? Authors carefully lay out the implications and complications of various decisions.

In section five, “What Family Policies Are Needed to Complement Universal Child Care?” contributors introduce comparative material on a range of family policy issues that intersect with child care policy. How we design a national child care system grows out of and has a strong impact on other family care policies, including that of infant care, parental leaves, low-income supplements and in-home child care. International resolutions provide fascinating glimpses of dilemmas facing Canadians if a national child care policy is implemented. Dissecting family policies reveals gendered and raced assumptions. Authors remind us that family policy decisions are, at

heart, value-laden choices about how children ought to be cared for, by whom, during what time period in their lives.

The sixth section on “Single Parents, Child Poverty, and Children at Risk: What Special Child Care Policies are Needed?” allowed contributors an opportunity to raise concerns of children with special needs and circumstances who use child care. What are the implications of paying for child care through tax revenue in combination with parental user fees? Although Cleveland and Krashinsky propose that parents would pay 20 percent of the cost of a reformed child care program, they carefully dissect both the impact of user fees on low-income parents and possible work disincentives accrued through further taxation. Authors consider programming needs of disadvantaged children, arguing that the social investment in specialized child care saves money. Although it costs money initially to help families with special requirements, the long-term result is that they make use of fewer other services so that the public sector as a whole spends less. In the final section, participants focus on “Child Care Workers: What Qualifications, Pay, and Organizations Should They Have?” Most children are cared for currently in informal arrangements while only 20 percent are cared for in formally supervised facilities (day care centres). How might these two systems be integrated should Canada introduce a national child care policy? Issues arise as to what and how to train workers in both sectors, establishing wages, professional and union association, and the implementation and regulation of standards. Requiring one to two years of post-secondary training and higher wages would have the short-term effect of displacing current workers, creating a personnel shortage and introducing a two-tier system of care.

Cleveland and Krashinsky suggest that advancing the cause of child care requires sustained attention to the details of implementation as well as the broader advocacy issues of why better child care services are necessary. This carefully crafted collection reveals the practical and intellectual strength of bringing together experts and advocates from diverse backgrounds. Contributors are to be applauded for their systematic, coherent and very significant analysis of the varied policy issues inherent in the creation of a system of non-parental child care for children aged two to five years of age.