

Labour Market Versus Child Centred Approaches to ECE Policy

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Becomings or Beings?

- Although children have moved to the heart of social policy, there is some concern regarding the way they are being positioned in the world of social investment.

This disquiet focuses on:

- 1) the understanding of children as '*becomings*' rather than '*beings*';
 - 2) the paid work-focused model of society;
 - 3) the possibility of the neglect of groups of children who are seen to not represent a good investment;
 - 4) casting a shadow over maternal workforce participation.
- How can social investment approaches be reformed to be both child-centred *and* with reference to gendered social justice principles.

Labour Market Versus Child Centred Approaches

Primary focus on the child welfare of social policy investment still occurs within a gendered framework

One consequence of child driven policy is that children are de-coupled from their mothers.

There are consequences of an approach that divorces children's wellbeing from that of their parents – critically, given the continued gendered division of household labour, that of mothers.

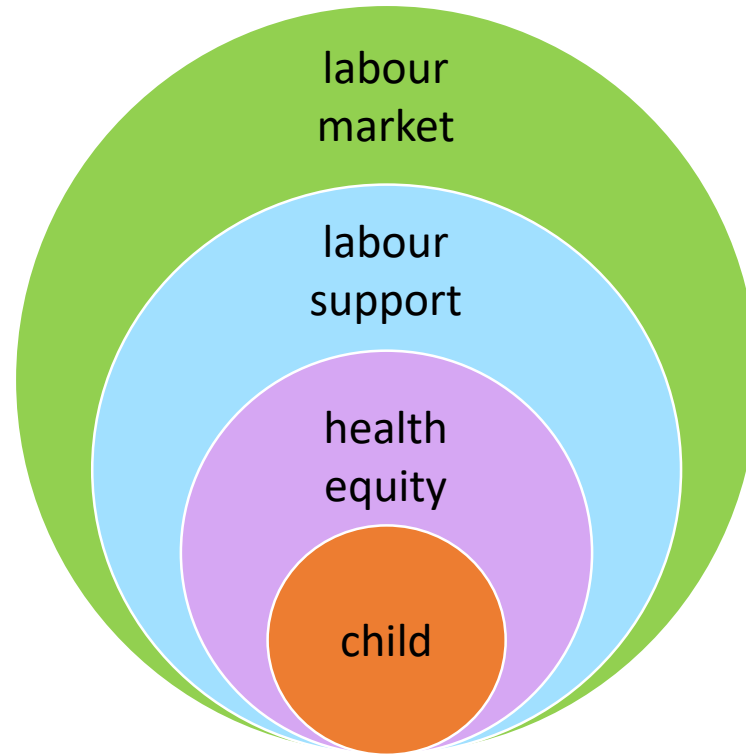
By pairing children with women in recognition of the latter's care responsibilities, we risk reinforcing the very gender partitions that some of our arguments challenge.

This tension between 'practical' and 'strategic' gender concerns is one that analysts, policy makers, and activists frequently have to navigate

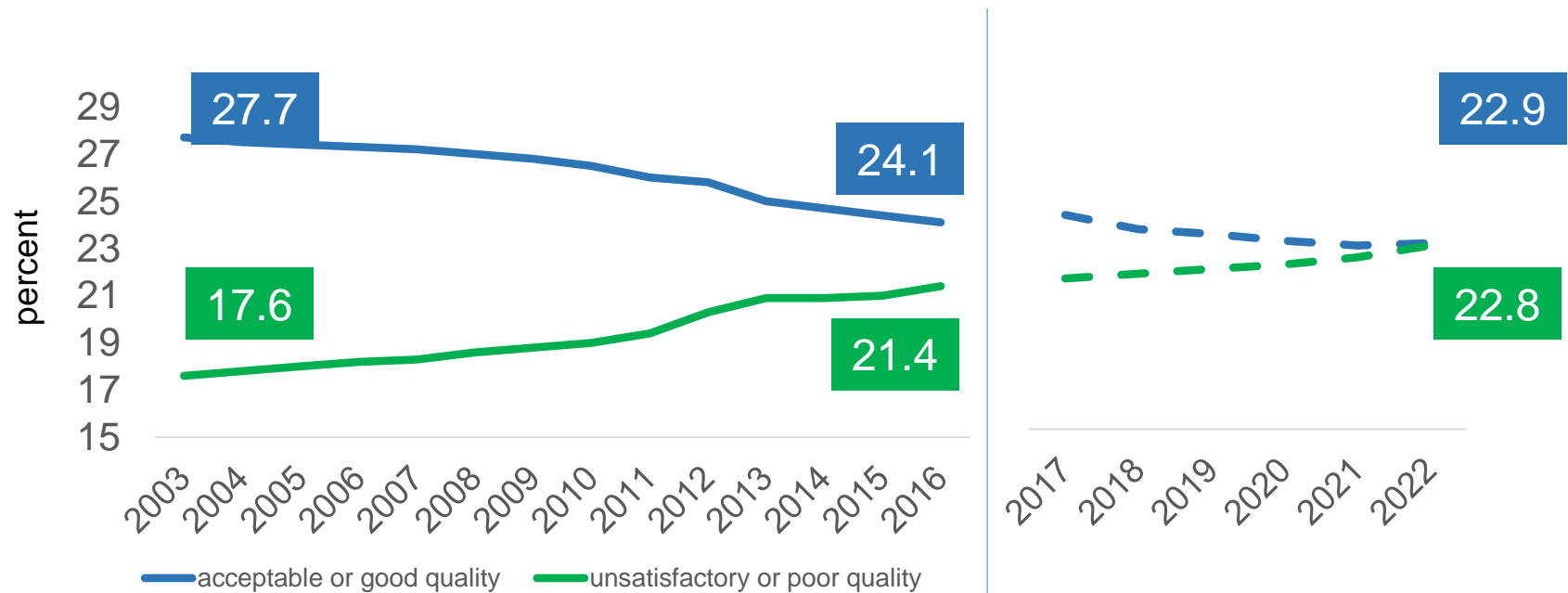


- Quebec is an important laboratory in Canada for ECE development
- 20 years of trial and error have demonstrated there is a considerable risk that rapid development and putting labour force participation at the centre on the effects of quality
- Lessons from Quebec demonstrate that fixing quality 'after the fact' is very difficult
- Supporting labour force participation doesn't have to be achieved at the expense of quality
- Putting children at the centre of policy development is key

Child and Quality at the Centre of Social Policy Approaches



Studies of Evolution of Quality Levels for all Types of ECE Services in Quebec Since 2003 and Projection to 2022



Child

Politically convincing
Labour market
Labour force participation
Women's rights



Child

Politically convincing
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There is a general consensus around the need to moderate the social investment approach in the interests of the well-being of children and acknowledgment of their status and rights as child-citizens of society.

A broad social justice agenda has to be a gendered one, recognizing the association between children's and women's well-being *and* acknowledging women's justice in their own right.

The *Status of Women Canada* report guides:

'it is important that women's equality remain a separate claim based on fairness and social justice' and that women's and children's agendas are not conflated, even though they may overlap given the 'actual interdependence between the lives of women and children'



Canada



How do Policymakers in
Canada Value the Human
Capital Theory (HCT)
Rationale for Investments
in Early Childhood
Education (ECE)?

What Does the Literature Say?

- As educational policy becomes and/or remains a consequence of HCT, it fails to be valued on its own merit, making it less likely to further political recognition for the field (Brown, 2014).
- HCT postulates a narrative wherein specious value is placed on the economic gains, thus hampering discussion about the social justice and equity benefits of ECE (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008).
- HCT can be used as an attractive pretext to legitimize government expenditure as it presents as a fix all solution to a nexus of social and economic issues (Bundy, 2012).

Methodology

Research Design

A qualitative semi-structured interview design.

Instrument

One-to-one interviews were conducted with Canadian ECE policymakers, which included questions about how and why policies are developed, and how HCT influences these decisions.

Procedure

- Participants were recruited via e-mail.
- 25-30 minute interviews were conducted by phone or in person.

Participants

Participants were six policymakers across three jurisdictions with the ability to directly influence decision-making in Canadian ECE policy, within the past five years

Findings

ECE policies are often developed to address short term issues that will generate immediate and measurable results, such as bolstering children's readiness for primary education and encouraging labor force participation.

“If you look at all the public policy around child care it is 95% led by labour market concerns. You know, the way it is funded, who has support to participate in childcare, it has [been] ...all tied to whether or not a parent or both parents are in the workforce.”

“None of the language in the government stream actually talks about what kids do in terms of the future. The most that they talk about is that they will be better ready for school. They are not making any claims that this will help kids get a better job. I mean those of us in the research community, we will talk like that. But it is rare that you find a public official that talk like that.”

Findings

ECE policy is heavily shaped by the government of the day. The amount invested in ECE was subject to the narrative and agenda of the political actor or party currently in power.

“The narrative that will back up whatever policy change takes place will be the narrative of the day... [Ontario] had great education ministers that really are gung ho about early childhood education, but it never happened. It always had to be the Premier who wanted to make this his or her legacy issue.”

“You use arguments that you think are actually going to work best, you know as a politician. So you know if investment, capital investment or investment in human capacity and so on, is the thing of the day, if that works politically then you’re going to use it regardless of whether you really believe it or not.”

Findings

The economic rationale can too heavily dominant adjudication processes in Canadian political/policy discourse, which in turn mitigates conversation and consideration to the social outcomes and benefits ECE offers to both children and families.

“Do economic arguments exist and take place in the context of a vacuum or barriers that keep out looking at the social outcomes? And the answer is absolutely yes.”

“I think [economic rationale] is over emphasized and not enough concern is given to the quality of the experience for the individual child and you know, it is essentially focused on building up a productive state.”

Findings

Highlighted economic rationale for investment as a necessary component of the argument to help advocate for policy development/reform. However, it should be accompanied by other reasoning, like gains to children's health and well being

“Why is it so important to look at the human capital argument? ...there just aren't enough people elected anywhere in the world who think that if you can't show that it is economically wonderful, you know, it won't get the kind of highlighting necessary around the cabinet table, and to secure the support of our finance minister....so we have the human capital argument is absolutely critical to join in with the social and educational and cognitive research”

Conclusion

Policymakers endorse policies that produce immediate returns, thus, it could not be substantiated that the foremost reason for investment in ECE is to bolster children's human capital and increase their future economic productivity. However, HCT may have been reason for supporting parent participation in the labor force and school readiness

Future Research

- Larger sample
- Varying levels of government
- Samples from various political leanings
- Political convincing policies

Looking Ahead

Endorse ECE policies that begin as an investment for children's well-being and health, as opposed to an investment for future economic returns

Re-evaluating the Anglo-American cultural ethos towards social and educational policy that looks to obtain financial return on policy



Thank You!

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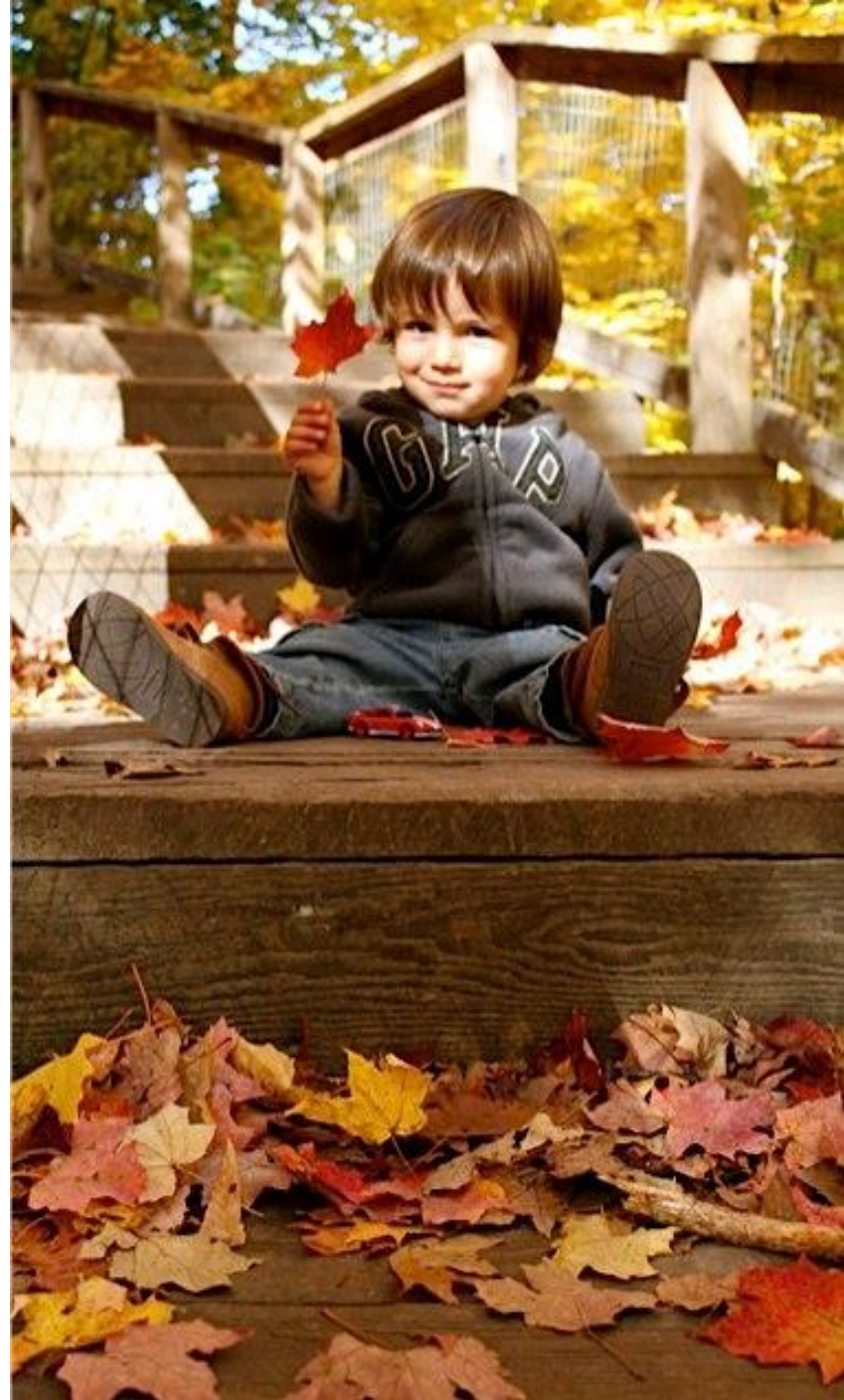
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Designing an ECEC Program

Design an ECEC program to support **working mothers**

Hours

Location

Service scope (i.e. take home meals)



Design an ECEC program to support **children**

Hours

Location

Service scope (i.e. curriculum)

