
Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada

Lisa Johnston, , George Brown CollegeLeah Shoemaker, , Ryerson University

Nicole Land, , Ryerson UniversityAurelia Di Santo, Ryerson University

and Susan Jagger, Ryerson University

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Summary

The field of early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Canada has been informed by a myriad of influences and these factors continue to shift and shape the curriculum, pedagogy, research, and practice in Canadian ECEC. Historically, following many of the theories and practices embraced by the United States, early child-care centers, day nurseries, and kindergartens were established to alleviate pressures on overcrowded schools and allow for mothers to work outside of the home. At the same time, Canadian child care took on a broader role in social welfare and later social justice, working to reduce inequities and inequality. These motivations have not been shared across all ECEC, and this is particularly evident in Indigenous early education. Here, Indigenous children and families have endured the horror of the residential school system and its legacy of colonialism, trauma, and cultural genocide. Along with these underpinning histories, Canadian ECEC has been informed by, is continuing to be shaped by, and is beginning to be guided by a number of models and movements in early learning. These include developmentalism, child-centered pedagogies, Reggio Emilia approaches, children's rights, holistic education, the reconceptualist movement, and postdevelopmentalism, and many of these approaches are not mutually exclusive. Finally, the policies and practices at federal, provincial, and municipal levels and the unique tensions between these levels of government structure Canadian ECEC policy and practice. Provincial and Indigenous early learning frameworks are created to enhance educator understandings and application of program principles, values, and goals, and these embrace responsive relationships with children and families, reflective practice, the importance of the environment and play in learning, and respect of diversity, equity, and inclusion, to name but a few shared principles. Taken together, the complexity of ECEC in Canada is clear, with historical approaches and attitudes continuing to preserve structures that devalue children and those who work with them, while concurrently efforts continue to honor the rights and voices of all children, advocate for professionalization in the field of ECEC, and reveal and reconcile past and current truths and injustices in Indigenous children's education and care, in order to support and heal all children, families, and communities.

Keywords: early childhood education and care, Canada, history, theory, frameworks, Indigenous early learning, policy and advocacy, research, professionalism

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Canada, in a Euro-Western context, has been evolving since before the country's Confederation in 1867. It is complex and shifting, ethical and political, and continues to be subject to particular theoretical perspectives, ideologies, and policies as much as it questions and challenges them. This article begins with an overview of the histories that ground ECEC in Canada including child care, day nurseries, kindergartens, and Indigenous early learning. Next, the models and movements guiding Canadian ECEC are critically examined. Finally, the policies and practices that frame ECEC in Canada are detailed. While this article does not claim to provide a complete picture of Canadian ECEC—that is impossible within the page limits of a single article—this overview traces the colonial foundations as well as the feminist and activist roots which continue to shape and shift understandings of childhood, early learning frameworks, research, Indigenous early learning, policy, advocacy, and professionalism in Canadian ECEC. There is a growing urgency for us to question and unsettle the entrenched theories, beliefs, values, and practices of ECEC in Canada. Growing economic disparity, neoliberalism, and the climate crisis put the sustainability of the current understandings and ways of providing early childhood education into question and demand new theories, language, and ways of responding to the issues faced collectively by Canadian children, families, and educators. In order to move forward, one can first look back and around at the histories, models and movements, and policies and practices that underpin, guide, and frame ECEC in Canada.

Histories Underpinning ECEC in Canada

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Canada has historically been modeled on and extended upon the basis of the practices and theories underpinning ECEC in Europe and the United States. Meeting a range of needs, from reducing overcrowding in schools to enabling mothers to earn a wage outside of the home, and dating back to before Confederation in 1867, Canadian ECEC has evolved in response to social, economic, political, and educational movements and motivations. The following provides a brief overview of the history of ECEC in Canada. For a more in-depth exploration, along with detailed examples of historical Canadian ECEC sites, please see Prochner and Howe (2000).

Kindergartens, Child Care, and Day Nurseries

At the time when Canada became a united country in 1867, it was becoming widely recognized that children can flourish in formal early education and that mothers can benefit from support with child rearing. Private kindergartens were created that embraced child-centered approaches to teaching and that were led by educators trained in Froebel's methods. By the end of the 1870s, private kindergartens were common in large Canadian towns and cities and were identified as sites of social reform and mission work. As with earlier early childhood education models, public school kindergartens served to relieve overcrowding brought on by compulsory school legislation in many provinces and to engage children in a curriculum that was suited to their age and developmental level. However, public school kindergartens were a largely urban phenomenon, often with inconsistent or absent funding (Prochner & Howe, 2000).

As early as the 1890s, day nurseries were established in major eastern cities to provide child-care support for wage-earning mothers. When school attendance was made mandatory in some provinces in the early 1890s, schools became overcrowded with children, as those who would have otherwise stayed home to care for their younger sisters and brothers while their parent(s) worked were now attending school. Again, and as with other formal ECEC structures, Canadian day nurseries followed the curricular and pedagogical approaches of their American counterparts. Growth in the number of day nurseries in Canada was slow, and informal arrangements of child care by relatives and neighbors was common (Prochner & Howe, 2000).

In the early 20th century, and in addition to its custodial support and ease of crowding in schools, child care in Canada began to take on a broader social welfare role. Some child care centers supported mothers by also helping them to locate and secure employment outside of the home. Day nurseries began to respond to the increased social needs and pressure on health and social services stemming from immigration and migration from rural areas into urban centers (Prochner & Howe, 2000). However integration often translated into assimilation, as highlighted by Atkin (2001), who identifies the assimilationist agenda of upper-middle-class white women in the establishment of a day nursery in Toronto known as the West End Crèche in the early 20th century. She notes the influence and funding provided to that crèche by the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire (IODE), whose goal was to “Canadianize” immigrant children and their families into adopting British imperial values (pp. 32–33).

Prior to World War II, most day nurseries were operated by charitable organizations, but with the start of the war, the Canadian federal government initiated a child-care scheme to encourage women to work in war-related industries. The need for child care was considerable; in 1939 there were 200,000 wage-earning women in Canada and by 1944 that number had risen to 1,000,000 women working outside of the home. Despite the need, only Ontario and Quebec entered the child-care agreement with the federal government. However, the impact on perceptions of and practices in Canadian child care was significant, as group child care was promoted as a beneficial support in which children were able to learn with highly trained and skilled teachers and mothers were able to freely work outside of the home (Prochner & Howe, 2000).

After World War II, child care took up a renewed social welfare role and in the 1950s, teachers, administrators, and child development experts created nursery schools in child-care centers. At the same time, contemporary research was stressing the importance of children’s healthy emotional development through a secure attachment to their mothers and bringing into question the benefits of having young children in care outside of the home. Furthermore, group child care was identified by some as overstimulating for young learners. Day nurseries came to be viewed as insufficient social agencies, with poorly trained staff who were careless with casework. Following a social-work approach, nurseries began to require that mothers demonstrate needs beyond the financial, and child-care professionals worked closely with other services including child welfare and healthcare agencies. Some nurseries began to embrace inclusion and worked to meet the needs of children with disabilities in the content of curriculum and context of programs. However, most nurseries in practice continued in a primarily custodial role (Prochner & Howe, 2000).

Since the 1960s, new programs have been introduced, some in new locations. The kindergarten movement has been renewed once again, and schools have become sites for social justice and the reduction of social inequities, inspired by a variety of models. The Canadian Assistance Plan (1966) placed children at its center as a national concern, and child care itself grew in that period, with the increase in wage-earning Canadian women and the rediscovery of early childhood education in North America. Currently, education, health, and social services are integrated in child care. Since the early 2000s, many provinces have even moved the governance of child care and early childhood education from social services to education (McGrane, 2014). Full-day kindergartens have become widespread across provinces and territories, and kindergarten itself is seen by many as a national preschool program.

Indigenous Early Education

According to Canadian census data, Indigenous people make up approximately 4.9% of the population and of this, almost one-third are children and youths under age 14 (Statistics Canada, 2017a). *Indigenous*, an umbrella term used to recognize the first people of what is known as Canada, refers to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people. Children hold great importance in Indigenous cultures, and decision makers are expected to consider how action will affect seven generations past their own, a principle found in the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee (Duhamel, 2018). Across Canada, Indigenous populations hold diverse and sophisticated knowledge about the land, cultural traditions, and languages, which has been passed down from generation to generation (Ball, 2012; Hare, 2011; Johnson, 2013). However, Canada remains a settler-colonial state whose influence has disrupted this transfer of knowledge, and the history of colonization transcends generations and continues to impact the health, education, and well-being of Indigenous children (Duhamel, 2018; Hare, 2011; Peterson, Jang, San Miguel, Styres, & Madsen, 2018).

Starting in the 1870s, the Government of Canada mandated Indigenous children to attend residential schools, state and church-run schools that were separate from their families and communities, with the intended goals of removing Indigenous culture from children and youths, and assimilating them into Canada's Eurocentric society. It was only in 2008 that a formal apology to former students of residential schools was issued by the Government of Canada (Government of Canada, 2008). The apology recognized the failures and abuse that took place at these schools, as well as the continued impact of this legacy of trauma. Following the formal apology, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established in order to address the history of residential schools. In 2015, the TRC produced a document which called all levels of government in Canada to 94 points of action. Several of these calls to action address education for Indigenous children, as governing authorities are urged to address education gaps and funding discrepancies for Indigenous populations, and specifically "develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 2). As early childhood education and care moves forward with reconciliation, it is clear that the Eurocentric education systems that are dominant in Canada do not meet the needs of Indigenous families and children (Ball, 2012; Hare, 2011; Johnson, 2013; Peterson et al., 2018).

Education is considered to be a holistic aspect of Indigenous children's health and well-being (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012); however, a mistrust in government-run operations can make Indigenous caregivers hesitant to participate in early learning programs (Gerlach, Browne, &

Greenwood, 2017; Hare, 2011). Both the historical and persisting impacts of colonialism in Canada affect this concept of trust. The 2016 census reported that despite accounting for only 7.7% of children aged 0–4 years in Canada, Indigenous children represent just over half of all children in foster care (Statistics Canada, 2017b) and comparisons have been made between this and the Sixties Scoop, a term which refers to the forcible removal of over 20,000 Indigenous children from their families, which occurred over a period spanning from the 1960s to the 1980s (Johnson, 2013; Sinclair, 2007). Canada has been found to be “willful and reckless” (Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, 2019, p. 73) in its discrimination against First Nation children in the current foster care system and has been charged under the Canadian Human Rights Act with compensating Indigenous children who have been removed from their homes on reserves and taken into care since 2006 (Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, 2019). Furthermore, Gerlach et al. (2017) found that Indigenous caregiver relationships with the welfare system contributed to concerns regarding the cultural safety within Aboriginal Infant Development Programs (AIDPs) specific to the province of British Columbia.

Models and Movements Guiding ECEC in Canada

In early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Canada, theoretical perspectives are typically enacted within the field through the images or conceptualizations of childhood—the beliefs about childhood or views on who the child is—that inform pedagogy, the curriculum, and relations with children and families. Accordingly, theoretical advances often lead to shifts in the dominant conceptualizations of childhood that are integrated into pedagogical and curricular decision making or that inform quality initiatives and regulatory mechanisms. This section outlines seven conceptualizations of childhood that are currently circulating within Canadian ECEC practice, research, and policy. It is important to note that these images of childhood do not encompass the full array of understandings of childhood that diverse children, families, educators, and communities hold, because dominant images of childhood in Canada remain largely grounded in Euro-Western theoretical paradigms. Further, these conceptualizations of childhood are not fully divisible from one another, often sharing similar theoretical underpinnings that are entangled in practice.

Developmentalism

Developmental psychology is a dominant paradigm for both conceptualizing and interpreting children’s experiences in ECEC in Canada. Owing to canonical developmental theorists, including Piaget and Vygotsky, developmentalism sets forward as fundamental the idea that young children are in a critical period of growth. This emphasis on the importance of childhood as the foundation for a person’s life positions the child at the core of educational practice and as the site and unit of development (Burman, 2016). An emphasis on the linearity of children’s development, whereby children are positioned as adults-in-progress who must achieve particular developmental milestones that sustain their trajectory toward becoming skilled, productive, mature adults and citizens, continues to be a powerful discourse in ECEC in Canada (Elliot, 2012; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Kummen, 2016). Children are often understood in terms of their future activities and value, as is evident, for example, in popularized approaches to school readiness which argue that ECEC should prepare children for academic achievement (e.g., Geoffroy et al., 2010). Here, early education is positioned as a preparatory

stage for equipping young children with the predetermined literacy, numeracy, and behavioral skills they will need to conform to the expectations of primary education (Ashton, 2014). Founding developmental psychology theories emphasized the relational aspects of development, centering the importance of parents, educators, and peers who had already acquired desired skills in supporting children's achievement of developmental milestones. This locates the educator as an expert in supporting children's learning, an understanding of the educator's role that continues to dominate in ECEC in Canada (Bjartveit, Carston, Baxtor, Hart, & Greenidge, 2019; Harwood & Tukonic, 2017). Developmental milestones are often positioned as universals: all children should demonstrate these skills within this temporal period. Sequential conceptions of development continue to inform developmental images of childhood in Canadian ECEC, as is evidenced by age- and stage-based assessments of children's development. Recent advances in developmental theory attend to the complexities of growth and maturation, unsettling the universality of developmental psychology. Sociocultural and social relational approaches to development, as well as insights from the bioscientific and neurological sciences, highlight an intermingled array of factors that influence and support children's development in Canada, including maternal health, nutrition, socioeconomic status, race, gender, ability, urbanization, access to nature, displacement and immigration, ongoing settler colonialism, and relational connections to place and community.

Critiques of how developmentalism understands the child in Canada highlight how this universalizing function serves to position an idealized (i.e., white, able-bodied, socioeconomically privileged, heteronormative) child as the referent against which diverse children's experiences are measured (Kirova & Hennig, 2013; Pence & Benner, 2015; Whitty, 2017), perpetuating minoritization and devaluing the diversity of children's experiences (Ball & Pence, 1999).

Child-Centered Pedagogy

Child-centered pedagogy, which echoes developmentalism's contention that the child is the central focus of education, is a popularized approach to ECEC in Canada (Wien, 2012). Child-centered practice disrupts taken-for-granted adult-child power dynamics and places children's unique needs, preferences, opinions, and contributions at the center of their own learning. Langford (2010) contends that child-centered practice weaves together "Froebel's notion of the child at the centre of his world; the developmentalist notion that the child is the centre of schooling; and the progression notion that children should direct their activities" (p. 114).

Reggio Emilia Approach

The image of the child as "capable and competent" has become a popular refrain in ECEC in Canada. This conceptualization of childhood derives from the Reggio Emilia philosophy which was created as a response to the intense violence of fascism and the need to open up democratic educational processes in postwar Italy (Rinaldi, 2005). Reggio Emilia educators, scholars, *pedagogistas*, and *atelieristas* assert an image of the child as a capable, confident, competent co-creator of knowledge and an active participant in educational commons (Wien, 2015; Wood, Thall, & Parnell, 2015). Threads of Reggio-inspired practice are evident in multiple curricular frameworks across the country (for example, the British Columbia Early

Learning Framework, and Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework) and are well represented in ECEC literature (e.g., Atkinson, 2012; Fraser, 2006; Wien, 2011; Wien & Halls, 2018). Typically, the image of the child as capable and competent is aligned with constructivist paradigms where children are positioned as constructors of knowledge. Children are understood to have the skills and relations necessary to construct their own understanding of the worlds around them through experiencing, documenting, and reflecting upon their experiences (Wood, Speir, & Thall, 2012). In Canadian ECEC, the image of the child as capable and competent relays the assertion that the child is the central actor in educational experiences. The emergent curriculum is an increasingly popular approach to learning in ECEC in Canada that draws upon an image of the child as capable and competent (Wien, 2015). As an iteration of child-centered practice, the desire to "follow the child" means that educators tune in to children's interests and constructed understandings, working alongside children, who are capable of actively participating in their own learning to build upon their desires and curiosities. Critiques of Reggio-inspired conceptualizations of children as capable and competent question how this understanding re-articulates the normalizing and disciplining functions of universalized approaches to development. If children are capable, what are the criteria for establishing capability? When children are deemed to be competent, what skills and dispositions do they perform?

Children's Rights

Right-based approaches to understanding childhood recognize the child as an active participant in achieving social justice by enacting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; United Nations, 1989). As Di Santo and Kenneally (2014) describe, maintaining an image of the child as a rights holder conceptualizes children as "active social agents who should participate in decisions that affect their day-to-day lives" (p. 397). Understanding children as rights holders situates children within their relational networks, framing them as central actors in working with community and policy stakeholders to enact their rights in locally meaningful ways (Caplan, Loomis, & Di Santo, 2016; Wood, 2018). Di Santo and Robichaud (2019) outline four general principles to support the implementation of the UNCRC: (a) "the right to non-discrimination"; (b) "the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration"; (c) "the right to life, survival, and development"; and (d) "respect for the view and feelings of the child in matters that affect the child" (p. 127). Children are understood to have many rights, including the right to participation (Howe & Covell, 2005), expression and identity, education, protection (Covell, Howe, & Blokhuis, 2018), and access to services and structures that can support their growth and continued participation in social spaces (Underwood, Frankel, Spalding, & Brophy, 2018). Importantly, some scholars argue that Canada's positioning of children as rights holders requires sustained advocacy in order to bring into realization an image of the child as a rights holder equivalent to that of other Western states (Paré, 2017). Amid ongoing settler colonialism, this is especially salient to understanding Indigenous and racialized children as rights holders (Caputo, 2016).

Holistic Education and Multimodalities

Increasingly popular in Canadian ECEC is the contention that a child's learning relates to their entire self. Education is not simply an intellectual endeavor but should attend to a child's whole experience and well-being (Miller, 2010). This enacts an image of the child as a holistic learner, one who integrates multiple modalities of knowing the world within their learning (Fung, 2019). Positioning children as mindful and spiritual actors, these approaches often stress meaning making over rote assessment. They weave together sociocultural developmental theory, ecological theories, and Reggio-inspired philosophies as children make meaning within the unique contexts they live in, and with the unique learning styles and relations they bring with them. Children's literacies are a leading-edge field in understanding children's emergent (Bell, Copage, Rogers, & Whitty, 2018; Heydon, Crocker, & Zhang, 2014) and holistic learning in Canada, as scholars detail the multimodal communicative practices with which children learn and share their funds of knowledge (Binder, 2017; Heydon, 2012). Focusing on expanding children's communication modalities, these curricular approaches position children as creative communicative beings within complex social and material education spaces (Heydon, Moffatt, & Iannacci, 2015).

The Reconceptualist Movement

Emerging in parallel to the reconceptualist movement founded in the United States and Europe, reconceptualist scholars and educators in Canada argue that ECEC needs to develop pedagogies and curricula that attend to the political complexities of children's lives in the 21st century (Berger, 2013; Iannacci & Whitty, 2009). Concerned with the disciplinary and minoritizing consequences of developmental theory, reconceptualists, as Berman and Abawi (2019) describe, "argue that dominant narratives about early childhood and educating young children have been conceptualized through Western norms of child development that are standardized, colourblind, ahistorical, apolitical, and supposedly, neutral" (p. 166). In settler-colonial Canada, reconceptualists interrogate how taken-for-granted developmental images of childhood perpetuate inequities and impose Euro-Western worldviews on diverse children and communities (Ashton, 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Nxumalo, & Rowan, 2011). Utilizing poststructural and postmodernist theories, advocates for a reconceptualist approach to ECEC contend that taken-for-granted developmental images of children as adults-in-progress are paternalizing, because they assume that children are innocent and in need of protection from complex political conditions (Berman, Daniel, Butler, MacNevin, & Royer, 2017). In response, they argue that childhoods are political. Children are understood to constantly engage with the fraught political contours of their own lives (Escayg, 2018; Nxumalo, 2019). Building on the image of the child as capable and competent, reconceptualist scholars advance this toward an image of the child as one who is both embedded in, and an active participant in, complex ethical and political negotiations (Atkinson & Elliot, 2013; Berman et al., 2017). This is especially salient in Canada, where reconceptualist scholars argue that children continually grapple with the consequences of ongoing settler colonialism and rampant neoliberalism, which children experience as, for example, heteronormative gender binaries and white privilege (MacNevin & Berman, 2017; Nxumalo, 2018). Because reconceptualist scholars put at risk the developmental underpinnings of much of Canadian ECEC, they rethink many taken-

for-granted discourses in the field, including care (Hodgins, Yazbeck, & Wapenaar, 2019; Langford & White, 2019) and child–adult segregations (Whitty, Hewes, Rose, Lirette, & Makovichuk, 2018).

Postdevelopmentalism

Extending upon the work of reconceptualist scholars and educators, postdevelopmental conceptualizations of childhood stand against the universalizing, normalizing, and disciplinary functions of developmental theory in settler-colonial Canada (Clark, Pacini-Ketchabaw, & Hodgins, 2014; Taylor, Pacini-Ketchabaw, de Finney, & Blaise, 2016). In Canada, postdevelopmental scholars often work to decenter the child by attending to how children and humans are implicated in complex common worlds (Jobb, MacAlpine, & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2019). Some postdevelopmental scholarship draws upon posthuman theories, which are oriented toward imagining relationality beyond the dictates of humanism and anthropocentrism (Hodgins, 2015). Postdevelopmental scholars argue for modes of noticing and responding, with children, to the borders of human bodies and lives, and for experimenting with ways of relating with place and materials with children that attune to situated politics (Kind & Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2016; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Clark, 2016).

Policies and Practices Structuring ECEC in Canada

Early Learning Frameworks

Many Canadian children spend time in some form of early years child care. According to Canada's 2019 *Survey on Early Learning and Child Care Arrangements*, 717,317 children from birth to age 5 attended early learning and care centers (e.g., child-care center, preschool, or *centre de la petite enfance*) (Statistics Canada, 2019). Furthermore, 60% of families accessing child care, including regulated and unregulated care, on a full-time basis reported that their child spent an average of 30 hours per week in their program (Sinha, 2014). Given the amount of time that many young children spend in early childhood education settings, the provincial governments and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation Indigenous communities have introduced early learning frameworks for early childhood educators and practitioners working with young children.¹ These frameworks provide an innovative and contextual approach in order to enhance the quality of early learning and care for young children. All Canadian provinces and several Indigenous communities have established curricula outlining their pedagogical approaches to early learning and care. Each framework is distinct and represents the specific context of their respective Provincial, Territorial, or Indigenous communities.² The frameworks outline educators' responsibilities for implementing a program reflective of their community's underlying philosophy and approach to early learning and care. The frameworks are not identified as standardized curricula but instead are intended to enhance educators' understanding and application of program principles, values, and goals. It is important to note that individual regulated early learning and care centers also have their own stated philosophies (e.g., inquiry-based, Montessori, Reggio Emilia approach). Given these differing philosophies and practices, the manner in which educators organize their classroom environment and guide children's learning varies

significantly across centers. Nevertheless, these curriculum frameworks share government and Indigenous communities' expectation that educators will provide young children with experiences that will support their learning.

A review of provincial early learning frameworks, listed in Appendix A, highlights that, for the most part, they are based on similar principles including:

- responsive relationships
- working with families
- educators engaging in reflective practice
- the importance of the environment
- the role of play in children's learning
- supporting children to grow to their full potential
- nurturing confident and active learners
- children and educators co-constructing knowledge and working together as co-researchers
- respecting the differing childhoods that children experience depending on their context
- respecting diversity, equity, and inclusion
- viewing children as strong and capable citizens

These early learning frameworks provide insights into how educators should view children within Canadian early learning settings. However, a number of questions must be considered to understand the complexities of early childhood education and care in Canada (ECEC) and the early learning frameworks that are guiding educators' practices in these spaces. Research must be undertaken to determine: (a) whether educators have shifted their pedagogical approaches as they come to understand their early learning documents; (b) whether and how these frameworks have created systemic shifts in pedagogical approaches used to shape the landscape of early childhood education provincially and within Indigenous communities, and federally across Canada; and (c) whether the quality of early learning and care has been enhanced provincially, federally, and within Indigenous communities as a result of the implementation of these frameworks. These questions allow for the influence of the Provincial, Territorial, or Indigenous learning frameworks on early childhood education in Canada to be realized.

While it is clear that these frameworks have the best interests of the child at the core of their philosophies, one glaring gap is the lack of children's participation in the consultation and creation of Canadian early learning frameworks. It is important to ask why children were not consulted given that the implementation of these documents affect children's lived experiences and that Canada ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991 (United Nations, 1989), which commits all levels of government to developing laws and policies in fulfilling the treaty. Article 12, states that:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (United Nations, 1989)

The article includes curricular documents that affect children's learning and development. If children are stated to be active citizens whose voices should be heard, then it follows to advocate that children be provided a platform to contribute their views and ideas in a matter as important as their ECEC experiences. One way to meaningfully engage children in these processes is through conducting social research with children themselves.

Depending on the nature of children's involvement in research, ideally as taking "action, and not merely responding to an adult-defined agenda" (Lansdown, 2005, p. 15), and on the creation of a space where they feel comfortable and are invited to take an active role in the research (Bronström, 2012), children can realize the uniqueness and impact of their voices. Researchers and policy and curriculum developers need to consider children's participation in their work, as curriculum, policy, and research shifts from understanding children and their experiences of childhood solely through an adult lens to gaining a deeper and richer understanding from a child's perspective. Griffin, Lahman, and Opitz (2016) call attention to the fact that "it is as though we [have] forgotten children can communicate with adults and want to communicate with adults" (p. 22). Using a multimodal approach with children, such as child conferencing, photography, child-led tours, mapping, role play, and drawing (e.g., Clark & Moss, 2015) to document their ideas and perspectives can result in beneficial contributions to the Provincial, Territorial, and Indigenous curriculum frameworks. In fact, shifts in early childhood education practice have been initiated as a result of listening and responding to children's perspectives (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009). Listening to and taking the time to notice children in their environments will add to understandings of the complexity and multifaceted aspects of childhood.

Indigenous Early Learning

Discussion around Indigenous early learning must address its history and the impact of intergenerational trauma caused by residential schools and the dismantling of culture and language through Canadian policy (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2012). However, Tuck (2009) warns that this damage must not be the center of research. More accurate accounts of colonization have started to appear in mainstream education, and yet preservice ECEC programs do not require courses specifically on the impacts of the Indigenous history of what is known as Canada.

The federal Government of Canada administers three programs for Indigenous children and families: (a) First Nations and Inuit Child Care Initiative; (b) Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve; and (c) Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (Government of Canada, 2019). Additionally, the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (IELCCF) was coproduced by the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations, Métis National Council, and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, and focused on supporting distinct Indigenous sovereignty within ECEC for Indigenous children (Government of Canada, 2018). Across the country, various Indigenous-led early learning programs are run from Indigenous nation to nation; however, discrepancies in funding for these programs continue. Long-term sustainable funding is addressed as a priority within the IELCCF as a measure to address accessibility, location, and culturally distinct child care. The IELCCF also identified issues concerning "limited information about the ELCC (Early Learning and Child Care) programs that Indigenous children are attending, access or barriers to accessing services, the training

of staff, the language and cultural content, and the quality of the services available” (Government of Canada, 2018, p. 24). The lack of Indigenous children’s perspectives in research and policy is held in unison with the consideration that Indigenous people have historically been exploited through research (Tuck, 2009).

The interrelation of historical and ongoing colonialism against Indigenous people cannot be ignored in conversations on Indigenous ECEC in Canada. However, as a part of continued resistance against this oppression, early learning that can incorporate Indigenous knowledge, culture, and language that supports the well-being of Indigenous children (Ball, 2012; Gerlach, Browne, & Greenwood, 2017; Greenwood, 2016; Peterson et al., 2018). Two-Eyed Seeing, a pedagogical framework developed by Elder Albert Marshall of the Mi’kmaq Nation, promotes the weaving together of traditional Indigenous knowledge with Western knowledge to support the well-being of all people and the earth (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012). Similarly, Hare (2011) found that incorporating Indigenous knowledge strengthened school-based literacy practices for Indigenous children. Callaghan, Hale, Leonhardi, and Lavallee (2018) share how distinct Indigenous knowledge can be implemented in ECEC by both Indigenous and settler educators, urging the sector to decolonize pedagogies. Hare (2011) notes that “rather than seeing indigenous knowledge and its various forms as an anthropological curiosity or even entertainment, places of learning should come to see indigenous knowledge as a legitimate source of knowledge” (p. 408).

Federal and Provincial ECEC Policy in Canada

The complexity, variation, and inconsistency of ECEC in Canada has been described as a patchwork of policies and programs, pieced together and tattered, with many holes and bare spots (Bezanson, 2017; Friendly & Prentice, 2009; Langford et al., 2013). ECEC generally refers to programs for children from birth to school age, including family resources, licensed and regulated nonprofit and for-profit child care, and before- and after-school programs. Federal and provincial policies related to early childhood also encompass parental leave policies, child tax benefits, and tax credits. While this overview is only able to draw on data provided by regulated child-care programs, it is important to note that unregulated child care, such as most home child care and informal family arrangements, is a significant part of the patchwork of ECEC in Canada (Varmuza, Perlman, & White, 2019), though a lack of data on it precludes it from the conversation. (For more detailed data on ECEC in Canada, see Friendly et al., 2018, and Flanagan, Beach, & Varmuza, 2013.)

The responsibility for child-care policy and funding in Canada lies with all three levels of government. While the federal government provides the main source of funding to provinces and territories, the majority of the policy making takes place at provincial and territorial levels. Municipalities must work with the provinces to ensure there is enough money in their budgets to provide child-care subsidies and support the operation of programs in their jurisdictions. This decentralized, federated model of government presents ongoing challenges in enacting a national, universal child-care policy. Provincial and territorial governments do not always agree with the federal government’s mandate and prefer a level sovereignty over their jurisdictions. In 2005, the federal Liberal government signed the last of the provincial agreements, which was soon replaced by the succeeding Conservative government’s direct monthly child-care payment to families. After 10 years of child care being absent from the

national agenda, in 2017 the newly elected federal Liberal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (re)created the Multilateral Early Learning and Child Care Framework for Canada (MELCCF) with the mandate that provincial and territorial governments work with the federal government toward its overarching principles of quality, accessibility, affordability, flexibility, and inclusivity for child-care programs (Child Care Now, 2019). Through the MELCCF, the provinces and territories, except Quebec, entered into bilateral agreements with the federal government that outlined their priorities regarding the overarching principles along with how funding would be spent (Child Care Now, 2019). Quebec signed an asymmetrical agreement with the federal government which recognized its sovereignty over its own child-care system.

Though the MELCCF is a step in a positive direction, it falls short in its lack of transparency, accountability, adequate funding, and its emphasis on targeted instead of universal programs (Child Care Now, 2019). Without a national, publicly funded, universal system in Canada, child care remains largely in the market system (Halfon & Langford, 2015), though some provinces and territories, such as British Columbia, New Brunswick, and Northwest Territories, are moving toward more universal-type systems (Child Care Now, 2019). Prince Edward Island has also moved to a standardized fee structure for child care as well as a wage grid for educators (McGrane, 2014). British Columbia has piloted a \$10-a-day child-care model but has yet to fully implement it province-wide. In 2017, Ontario was poised to have free preschool and a workforce strategy for educators, including a wage grid, but this was soon scrapped under an incoming oppositional government. Quebec, however, has moved the farthest in this direction by directly funding child-care programs and originally charging only \$5 a day for child care. Though fees have increased slightly since the program began and have evolved into a sliding scale, Quebec's child-care system still offers the lowest fees for this service in the country (Child Care Now, 2019; McKenzie, 2014). Leaving child-care policy up to each province and territory, however, opens the door to inequities and inconsistencies in its provision across the country.

In a comparative analysis of child-care policy across the 10 provinces, Pasolli (2015) noted that the importance of child care on the agenda of each province is plainly evident in how much it spends per child. After Quebec, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island spend the most per child while New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Alberta spend the least. More government spending in Quebec and Manitoba translates to high affordability, yet in Prince Edward Island, affordability dips to mid-range and is on a par with New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador, who spend the least. Affordability is at its lowest in British Columbia and Ontario, where government spending per child is in the medium range and where the highest fees for child care are reported, in Canada's largest city, Toronto, even though Ontario spends the most on subsidies. Staff wages on the other hand, which are an important indicator of quality in child care, are highest in British Columbia and Ontario alongside Quebec, Manitoba, and Prince Edward Island, whereas Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland and Labrador pay the lowest wages to Early Childhood Educators (ECE) (Pasolli, 2015). It must be noted that Canadian ECE wages are considerably lower than teacher salaries across all provinces and territories. The availability of child-care spaces is relatively consistent across the provinces with all but two provinces, Prince Edward Island and Quebec, providing spaces for less than a quarter of children aged 0–5 years.

Similar to staff wages, ratios of staff to children and the percentage of nonprofit delivery of child-care programs are also correlated with quality, and vary greatly across the provinces and territories. Though New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador spend significantly less per child, they have some of the country's highest staff ratios, while Quebec, surprisingly, has some of the lowest. Nonprofit child care makes up less than half of all child care in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Alberta and British Columbia's child-care sectors are split nearly equally between nonprofit and for-profit delivery. This is in stark contrast to provinces like Saskatchewan, which reports nearly 100% nonprofit child care due to a ban on for-profit delivery, followed by Manitoba, Quebec, and Ontario respectively (Pasolli, 2015). This snapshot of the variation, complexity, and inconsistency of child-care policy across the provinces also highlights the problems that persist within ECEC in Canada, namely high parent fees, low wages, limited access to spaces, and low quality of programs.

Advocacy at the Federal and Provincial Levels

Coinciding with feminist movements, women have been pushing for a national universal child-care system since the late 1940s, when the federal government dismantled a national child-care program that had been implemented during World War II to support women who went to work while men were away fighting the war (Friendly & Prentice, 2009). Since then, arguments for universal child care that centered on women's equality and gender parity have either been rejected in favor of a welfare rationale which targets low-income, newcomer and immigrant families, and families otherwise deemed at risk, or muted strategically to maintain already hard-won gains in policy (Mahon, 2000). Rationales for universal child care continue to shift from arguments for women's equality to those supporting childhood development to those emphasizing its high economic returns, as advocates try to appeal to governments and policy makers. Advocates continue to push for a national universal system of child care which would address issues of affordability, accessibility, decent work and professional pay for educators, and quality in ECEC, while acknowledging that child care is an important means of closing the gender wage gap and increasing women's equality, alleviating poverty, setting a foundation for children's learning and social emotional development, integrating children with special needs, and working toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (Prentice & White, 2019).

National and provincial advocacy movements in Canada take the form of either grassroots organizations or professional associations that directly support the ECEC workforce (Langford, Prentice, Richardson, & Albanese, 2016). Child Care Now (formerly the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada) is a national grassroots organization that can take a more political stance as a non-governmental organization. Its counterpart, the Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCCF), is a collection of provincial professional associations that directly support educators, and which tends to take a more neutral, nonpartisan position (Langford, Prentice, Richardson, & Albanese, 2016). All provinces except for Quebec have associations in the CCCC (The Canadian Child Care Federation, 2012–2018). Ontario and British Columbia have established coalitions of stakeholders who are also automatically members of the national Child Care Now organization. Membership of Child Care Now is open to a wide range of stakeholders including parents, child-care workers, unions, researchers, organizations, and citizen groups (Child Care Now, n.d.).

Messaging is key to strategizing for change for advocates and social movement organizations. As mentioned, feminist arguments for universal child care tended to be ignored or silenced in favor of liberal social investment models, to the point where advocates in the early 2000s adjusted their tactics from conflictual to more cooperative messaging in order to successfully move the federal Liberal government of the time toward committing to a national child-care system (Langford, Prentice, Richardson, & Albanese, 2016; Richardson & Langford, 2015). This win was short-lived, however, as the Conservative government succeeded the Liberals soon after the promise was made, and the incoming government was blind even to economic rationales.

McGrane's (2014) study of child-care policy and advocacy in the Atlantic provinces further found that strong relationships between "bureaucratic champions" in more progressive governments (p. 2) and child-care advocates and stakeholders were key components in moving governments toward more progressive and democratic child-care systems. McGrane (2014) also noted that social movement organizations which included a broader range of stakeholders, as opposed to fragmented and siloed organizations, were also more successful in achieving progressive policies.

In the absence of a universal system to address wages and working conditions for educators, and alongside the devastating child-care policies of the federal Conservative government in power from 2006 to 2015, professionalization emerged and continues as an advocacy strategy both provincially and federally in Canada (Langford et al., 2013). Provinces with progressive agendas updated their child-care legislation, created new early learning curriculum frameworks, increased some training requirements and levels of education, and moved their child-care services out of social services departments and into departments and ministries of education. In Ontario, professionalization also took the form of increased quality assurance measures and the establishment of a regulatory body, the College of Early Childhood Educators, which governs the profession of early childhood education through the establishing of a code of ethics, standards of practice, and expectations for continuous professional learning (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2019). This has led to growing tension and a professionalization gap, as regulations and expectations have increased for early childhood educators without a corresponding increase in wages and improved working conditions.

Langford et al. (2013) note that advocacy messages continue to be influenced by the professionalization of the child-care sector, maintaining a focus on the economic rationale for universal child care, though some argue that these arguments in fact perpetuate neoliberal principles that ultimately work against the democratic ideal of a universal child-care system (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2006).

Although there is a growing body of research and analysis focusing on the changing child-care policy and advocacy movements in Canada, there is more work to be done. Richardson and Langford (2018) note that researchers and advocates are eager to work with all levels of government in the implementation of the MELCCF. Pasolli's (2015) comparative analysis provides a starting point to begin to theorize the causes of Canada's "consistently inconsistent child care policy" (Richardson & Langford, 2018). Despite being particularly salient given the increasing professionalization of ECEC, there are also large gaps in information about the ECEC workforce, since that information has not been collected since 2013 (Flanagan, Beach, & Varmuza, 2013). Prentice and White's (2019) research on child-care deserts and

distributional disadvantages only begins to scratch the surface of the regional challenges of child-care services and policies, and studies of advocacy movements and strategies (Langford et al., 2016; Langford, Prentice, Richardson, & Albanese, 2017), political lessons learned (Bezanson, Langford, & Banks, 2019), and imaginings of a Canadian ECEC system (Langford, Bezanson, & Powell, 2019) provide critical insights into how to effectively bring about significant change in policy at the federal and provincial levels. Furthermore, the mandate for all governments to actively implement the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) call for ongoing examination, documentation, and accountability.

Conclusion

Theory, research, policy, and practice in Canadian early childhood education and care (ECEC) is heavily influenced by Euro-Western perspectives and history. This context streams into the philosophies and pedagogies that are dominant across the country. As social attitudes continuously shift, a greater need for children's perspectives that honor children as people is necessary in all levels of ECEC. Congruently, there is a need to take account of young Indigenous children's perspectives in a manner that highlights their educational strengths rather than the deficit outcomes traditionally found through colonial systems of measurement. All systems of ECEC for Indigenous children should be working toward supporting Indigenous sovereignty within education. As research continues to critique and question dominant aspects of Canadian ECEC, including developmental attitudes and neoliberal economic arguments, change is slow to take place within the field. Despite work done across the sector, the issues of high child-care fees for families and low wages for early childhood educators remain across most of the country. Small pulses of resistance can be found in the attitudes of research and practice that question the taken-for-granted ideologies that transpire within the field of ECEC. The changing social context within Canada calls for ECEC that meets the needs of our diverse children, families, and communities.

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Appendix A

Early Learning Frameworks in Canada

Provinces and Indigenous Communities	Title	Citation
Newfoundland Labrador	Navigating the Early Years: An Early Childhood Learning Framework	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development < https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/files/Early-Learning-Framework.pdf >. (2019). Newfoundland and Labrador.
Prince Edward Island	PEI Early Learning Framework: Relationships, Environments, Experiences	Flanagan, K. (2011).
Nova Scotia	Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework	Department of Education and Early Childhood Development < https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/nsecurriculumframework.pdf >. (2018). Province of Nova Scotia.
New Brunswick	New Brunswick Curriculum Framework for Early Learning and Child Care	Early Childhood Research and Development Team: Early Childhood Centre, University of New Brunswick < https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/elcc/content/curriculum/curriculum:framework.html >. (2008). Department of Social Development. Fredericton, NB.
Québec	Meeting Early Childhood Needs: Québec's	Forest et al. (2007)

Provinces and Indigenous Communities	Title	Citation
	Educational Program for Childcare Services (Update)	
Ontario	Early Learning Framework (formerly titled Early Learning for Every Child Today) How Does Learning Happen? How does learning happen? Ontario's pedagogy for the early years. Queen's Printer for Ontario	Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning < http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/oelf/continuum/continuum.pdf > (2007). Ministry of Education. (2014). How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years < http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/HowLearningHappens.pdf >. Queen's Printer for Ontario.
Manitoba	Early Returns: Manitoba's Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework for Preschool Centres and Nursery Schools	Manitoba Child Care Program. (2011). Early Learning and Child Care Program < https://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/resources/pubs/early_returns.pdf >. Winnipeg, MB.
Saskatchewan	Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide	Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2013). Regina, SK: Early Years Branch, Ministry of Education < https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/#/products/74066 >.

Provinces and Indigenous Communities	Title	Citation
Alberta	Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework	Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework <http://flightframework.ca/> .
British Columbia	British Columbia Early Learning Framework	Ministry of Education (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/early-learning/teach/early-learning-framework> (2019).
First Nations	First Nations Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework	Government of Canada (2018). Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework (<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/indigenous-early-learning/2018-framework.html> .
Inuit	Inuit Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework	
Métis Nation	Métis Nation Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework	

Note: At the time of the writing of this article, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon Territory did not have early learning frameworks.

Notes

1. For the purposes of this chapter, the term educators will be used to include both early childhood educators and practitioners.
2. For a list of Provincial, Territorial, Indigenous early learning frameworks, please refer to Appendix A.

Related Articles

Ethnography in Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Teacher Education in Global Perspective

School Leadership Challenges in Canada