Recruitment and Retention of Early Childhood Educators & Care Givers:
The Policy Factor

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Introduction:
The recruitment and retention of qualified early childhood educators and care givers is a challenge that is intensifying across this country. This is a complex issue that is affected by many factors that intertwine and influence each other. In an attempt to identify these factors and their complexities as they pertain to Nova Scotia, a study was completed in April of 2000. This study determined “five broad areas of causes for the lack of qualified early childhood care staff to meet the current demand ... training, policy, practice, work force and attitudes.”

The purpose of this paper is to examine the issue of “policy,” and to further identify its impact on the issue of recruitment and retention of early childhood educators and care givers. As mentioned above, policy is intertwined with the other factors in varying degrees of complexity. Arguably, policy and attitude are the most closely related, often to the point where it becomes difficult to determine the measure to which policy is either reflecting social attitude or shaping it. Still, there are some key aspects of Canadian policy that can be determined and evaluated for impact.

Thus, this paper starts with the broadest of examination and looks at the liberal ideological framework from which Canadian social policy is born. Once one becomes familiar with this broad base of social policy, and comes to understand the impact of liberal ideology on social policy in general, then it becomes possible to peel through the layers of policy that such ideology creates and examine the particular issues of early childhood education.

Liberal Ideology- The Foundation Of Canadian Public Policy:
In order to gain some insight into the effect that Canadian policy has on the issues of recruitment and retention for early childhood educators and care givers, it is important to first look at the ideological theory on which Canadian policy is generally based. Canadian policy tends to follow liberal ideology. This, of course, does not refer to political party, but rather to the belief system that pervades government thinking in its policy making. All Canadian federal government parties have historically followed this same ideological framework, albeit some more moderately than others, and at times more strenuously than others.

So what is meant by a liberal ideological framework? Simply put, liberal ideology believes in individual choice and individual responsibility. This means that liberal thinking governments (such as Canada, USA and Britain) refrain, as much as possible, from universal policy and government intervention.

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2. Ibid, pg. 3


2./Miller/Policy/Attracting & Keeping Qualified Staff in Child Care/ Child Care Connections, 2002
Thus, for child care policy, Rianne Mahon, describes it as follows:

*In the liberal pattern, the main burden of care provision falls on families who can choose to ‘self-service’ the majority of their care needs or to buy substitute services on the market. And their market power very much affects the kind of care they can purchase. The government’s role is largely limited to a mode mitigation of labour market ‘risks’ - e.g., unemployment, sickness and maternity/parental leave insurance. Such limited public support, however, is not enough for everyone and liberal regimes usually recognize that some will fall through the holes in its modest safety net. Thus, supplementary measures may be provided, targeting the most disadvantaged, including their children. Identification of who can claim these benefits is made through various types of needs-tests, which can be quite invasive and degrading.*

This can be compared to social democratic policy ideologies of governments (such as Sweden) which are based on a more egalitarian approach. Social democratic policies follow the thinking that all social services, including child care and early education, must be part of an universally organized system. Mahon describes it like this:

*Recreation and culture are seen as a citizen right, not something either to be purchased according to market power - or maybe available on a subsidized basis for those considered ‘at risk,’ in the hopes of keeping them out of trouble.*

In Canada, then, one finds that policies round the child care issue tend to take the form of market place concerns and how these concerns relate to individual adults, not around children and their care givers. We find that such liberal policies focus on the family (and this definition is primarily the traditional nuclear family) as being responsible for children with limited government intervention. Thus, Canadian policies tend to focus on tax breaks for working parents in a variety of forms or around getting mothers off social assistance programs and into the workforce. Other policies tend to target “at risk” groups of children who governments have classified as special interest groups.

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*Ibid, pg. 9.*


3. Miller/Policy/Attracting & Keeping Qualified Staff in Child Care/ Child Care Connections, 2002
The one other factor that enters into the Canadian policy mix, and is a direct result of liberal policy ideology, is that because of the resistance to universal social services, one finds that most policy generation is placed in the hands of the individual provinces and territories (which also are primarily liberal ideological governments). Here one can find many possible policy making combinations from provincial to city or municipal, or some form of responsibility splitting between them. Thus, when one peels through the layers of policy making and comes to rest on the child care policy issues, one finds a mishmash of approaches that follow the general liberal pattern.

What Does This Mean For The Early Childhood Educator?

What does it mean, then, for the early childhood educator and care giver when the policies upon which their profession is built is based on liberal ideology?

a) Liberal Ideology Fragments the Sector:

First, one finds that functioning under such ideology greatly diminishes the possibility for the child care givers and educators to come together in solidarity. The profession is left fractured by territorial and provincial policy, all of which serves to keep child care professionals focused on their own area and concerned with their own individual, or localized, issues. If there is to be an attempt to look at the national picture, it is undertaken through private means, either by volunteer agencies or individual researchers, who are able to gather valuable research information, but who do not have the strength of an organized group of professionals who work in solidarity towards a common goal.

One of the issues that arises from this system of fragmentization is the commercial versus the non-profit organization of child care centres. In Canada, based on 1998 figures, all of the provinces experience this split, although some much more so than others. Although both types of centres, regardless or their organizational structure, are subjected to whatever licensing regulations are imposed by their respective governments, generally only the non-profit centres are eligible for government funding to help offset operational costs. Generally speaking, as well, employees in non-profit centres receive a higher wage than those in commercial centres. This is a source of tension between the personnel working within the two early childhood structures. Thus, early childhood educators and care givers tend to see themselves, and are perceived by others, as part of the structure for which they work, rather than a collective of same-minded professionals.

b) Liberal Ideology Blurs the Training Standard:

From the fact that individual provinces are left to develop and regulate the child care systems within their

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xi. Ibid, pg. xix.

xii. Ferguson, Elaine and Connie Miller. pg 11.

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jurisdictions, comes another source of stress on the retention and recruitment of early childhood educators. This is the training regulation. Minimum training requirements are established by the individual provinces and territories for early childhood educators and care givers working within their licensed, regulated centres. Although these vary from province to province, and this is problematic in itself, this variance is not the main focus of this discussion. What is particularly problematic from this paper’s point of view is the stress that training regulations place on individual practitioners. It is understood that proper training is essential for quality care, however, the stress comes from the increased cost that is associated with obtaining training and education for a profession that offers neither assistance with the cost of such training nor adequate remuneration to offset such costs.

c) Liberal Ideology Devalues Caring Work:
A third matter for consideration under this system is that of respect for women’s work, and in particular, work that has a nurturing base. In a longitudinal study that covered fifteen years of occupational data it was determined that any occupation that was considered women’s work was valued at considerably less than traditional men’s occupations. However, what is even more interesting is the discovery that when the occupation required “nurturant social skill ...there is a loss in pay of over 4% for each one unit increase in nurturant social skill” Thus, with the high nurturance quotient that is associated with the early childhood education and care giving profession, the work of these people would be expected to be highly undervalued in such a social system.

d) Liberal Ideology Creates Individual “Choice” Discourse:
The fourth point that must be made with regards to liberal policy ideology in this context is the premise that it is based on providing true choice of child care services for women, and the end result this premise has on the women actually providing the service. The idea that our current system of child care delivery offers true choice for women is an interesting one. Although this paper does not delve deeply into this issue, even a brief examination produces an intriguing result. In our current system(s), women on social assistance or low income earners are not encouraged to nurture their own children at home but to place their children in formalized care through a system of subsidies and back to work programs. Middle class income earning women, however, are encouraged to either stay home through a series of tax breaks and care for their children or are forced to look for unregulated and informal care due to the prohibitive costs of non-subsidized child care spaces. This point is also well discussed by Rianne Mahone in “No Small Matter;”

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xii. Doherty, Gillian, et al. You Bet I Care, pg. 36.


xvi. Ibid, pg. 703.

xvii. Teghtsoonian, Katherine. “Promises, Promises: Choices for Women in Canadian and American Child Care Policy Debates.” Feminist Studies 22(1) Spring, 1996. This article offers an excellent overview of just how limiting the choices option is for women and their children.
Stroicke Jenson in *What is the Best Policy Mix for Canada’s Young Children?*; and Beauvais and Jenson. *Two Policy Paradigms: Family Responsibility and Investing in Children.* There seems to be, at least, two meanings for the word “choice” when it comes to child care and the socio-economic class of the women “choosing.”

The result of this for the early childhood educators and care givers (besides the fact that many of them are, or will be, mothers who will be faced with the same ‘choices’) is simply that this further serves to place them at the mercy of the market. Under this system of attempting to provide “choice”, instead of a unified system that is uniformly accessible to all, the child care professional is left dependent upon the wages of other working women (or families) to provide them with their salaries and benefits. This places them in a vulnerable position without the benefit of standardized work environments and benefits that come with public service positions.

**Must It Be This Way?**

This leads to obvious questions like: Must it be this way? Is it hopeless? The answer to both these questions is - No, of course not! In searching for the answer to these questions, it is important here to reiterate that in an attempt to understand the implications that policy has on the child care profession, and in particular the issues of recruitment and retention, this paper has tried to look at the broad spectrum of policy making and its foundations. However, one must be careful to remember that this discussion is general and that no government has ever acted strictly, and only, in either a liberal or a social democratic fashion.

For example, Canada’s federal government has enacted universal social policy - the Canada Health Act being the most obvious case in point. Although the individual territories and provinces are left to manage this system, they must ensure that all Canadians have “continued access to quality health care without financial or other barriers.”

Although this system has come under great stress and pressure in recent years and is being subjected to ongoing reviews, to date the federal government, and the people of Canada, have remained firm in their commitment to uphold the Canada Health Act.

At the provincial and territorial level of government, there too is evidence of more egalitarian approaches to the delivery of social policy. All provinces have adopted a policy of delivering public school education to children. Although the delivery of this system, too, is varied, the key issue here is the fact that both the government and citizens work under the ideology that public education is a right for all citizens.

At the provincial level there is also evidence of some forms of universal delivery of child care policy. For example, Manitoba, up until the 1990’s was considered a leader in child care policy in Canada: “prior to 1991, many centres operated at 100% trained staff, ... but as salary enhancement grants were eliminated, many centres reduced their complement of trained staff to the minimum.”

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xviii. Canada Health Act, Chapter C-6, S-1, 1984 (Preamble).


6./Miller/Policy/Attracting & Keeping Qualified Staff in Child Care/ Child Care Connections, 2002
2001. This publication offers a comprehensive look at child care policy in Manitoba and the negative impact that policy changes have had on the profession and professionals during the past decade. Although this province is currently experiencing problems with its child care policy changes, it is important to note that more egalitarian policies had been the norm, prior to the last decade of fiscal restraint and short-term budgetary policy visions.

One, too, must look at the example of Quebec and the way it has made child care a part of its overall family policy, which will see regulated child care offered to families, regardless of income, for $5.00/day. Jocelyne Tougas describes this policy as follows:

*Government is expanding and diversifying Quebec’s child care system; this means more regulated child care options, resulting in more job opportunities. Since the announcement of the strategy in 1997, some 18,000 new spaces have been created. Expansion is around 12,000 spaces a year. There are about 80,000 regulated spaces now and the projection is 175,000 spaces by 2005. It is also good news for the field because government is not only putting more and new money into the infrastructure but also in wages and working conditions. 148 million dollars to increase salaries over the next four years. Child care workers can even foresee a time when they’ll have access to a pension plan and to pay equity.*

Obviously, then, one can see that such a policy can have a positive effect on both the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators and care givers. Although this Quebec policy is relatively new and there are ongoing challenges that come from the implementation of such policy, the main point, for the purpose of this paper, is to note that we in Canada do not have to look beyond our own country to see examples of universal child care policy and its positive implications for child care professionals.

**What’s New?**

On September 11, 2000 the Federal government announced an Early Childhood Development (EDC) agreement had been reached with the provinces and would focus on (1) promoting health in pregnancy, birth and infancy; (2) improving parenting and family supports; (3) strengthening early childhood development, learning and care; (4) strengthening community supports, with the provinces and territories choosing if, and how, each of these four areas of concern would be addressed. $2.2 billion will transfer from the federal government to the provinces and territories over the next five years in order to sustain this agreement. Thus, the current challenge for governments is the distribution of these funds. In Nova Scotia, for example, it has been determined that wage supplements will be made available to full-time early childhood educators who are currently working in either commercial or non profit centres. These funds must be applied for by the Directors of their centres and agreements must be struck that ensure staff

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xxi. First Ministers’ Communique on Early Childhood Development, Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, News Release, Ref. 800-038/005 (11.09.00).
become the recipients of this money. Money has also been designated to assist with training of early childhood educators, although the form that this will take is yet to be determined.

The effect that this will have on retention of early childhood educators in Nova Scotia is too early to measure, but, at best, one might expect that, at least in the short term, this may act as an incentive to remain in the field. As far as recruitment to the profession is concerned, it is more difficult to assess. It will take some time before those who may be considering entering the profession feel confident that this salary enhancement is adequate enough, or sustainable enough, to make the training investment required a worthwhile endeavor. Also, it is too soon to know if and/or how the training money will affect new recruits.

But, as one looks more closely at the Nova Scotia example, obvious questions begin to emerge. Why wage supplements? Why not set standard wage scales for ECE personnel? Why must funds be applied for through center directors? What is it in the Nova Scotia policy making ideology that designed this system as the comfortable and the doable?

Here, we must come back to liberal ideology. To offer wage supplements removes government from any sort of universal policy setting with regards to wages as would be the case if a standard was created. It leaves the issue of appropriate remuneration in the hands of the individual structures and systems for which ECE personnel work. To set standardized wage scales would break from the liberal system of “patching up holes in the safety net” and move it more towards the social democratic egalitarian ideology. To make centres (or their directors) apply for these funds for staff salary enhancements, removes responsibility for ensuring that all staff receive this funding from the policy makers. It makes funding requests an individual effort on the part of centres, rather than ensuring that funding will reach all those in the field. The filing of formal requests, filling out of forms, and meeting deadlines for application all serve to reinforce the comfort level that policy makers feel with liberal ideology; it makes its application an individual responsibility. If reinforces the idea of personal choice - if centres do not apply, then staff will not receive their wage supplement.

The challenge over the next five years will be for early childhood educators and care givers to find a way to encourage Nova Scotia policy makers to expand this agreement so that it becomes a sustainable and affordable service to families and an attractive and viable profession for child care staff. For such policy to truly have a positive, and long term, benefit for the profession, force must be placed upon the policy makers to understand the importance of an egalitarian system. Once again, the example of Quebec and Manitoba’s move to standarized and assisted wage scales need to be reviewed as examples for the Nova Scotia government.

In light of this EDC agreement, it is expected that policy scenarios are playing out in each of the provinces and territories. The effect these policies will have on recruitment and retention of early childhood educators and care givers will vary throughout the country. Once again, this is a symptom of liberal ideology and the result will no doubt be a furthering of the mishmash of policy and policy implications.

Summary:
In summary, when trying to determine the impact that Canada’s child care policy(s) has (have) on the recruitment and retention of early childhood educators and care givers, it is important to remember the
following main points:

- Canada’s policies generally follow liberal ideologies of individual responsibility and ‘choice,’ and not a universal service model;

- The general tendency of liberally constructed child care policy(s) is that of a mishmash of regulations and service availability;

- Liberal ideology assists with fragmenting the ECE profession and inhibits solidarity of the workforce;

- Liberal ECE policies create a particular concern with regard to training; imposing standards of training help to ensure quality programs, but make such education costly, and there is a corresponding lack of financial support;

- There is evidence in the countries that follow the liberal ideology in particular, of devaluing of “women’s work” and especially work that has a nurturing component; in fact, the more nurturing is involved the less it is respected and remunerated;

- Liberal ideologically based governments have enacted some universal social policies, so a precedent does exist; Canada’s federal government and some provincial governments offer examples of this; it is not hopeless.

Conclusion:
When one comes to understand the broader perspective policy making, and in particular its effect on child care policy, one is better able to formulate a plan of action that can begin to address these problems in the context of the recruitment and retention concerns of early childhood educators and care givers across this country. As one begins the process of evaluating the effect such policy has on early childhood educators and care givers in one’s own territory, province or even region, it is important to seek the answers to some basic questions.

First, one must ask; “Who benefits?” Obviously, policy is not created, imposed and sustained if it does not serve or benefit some aspect or part of our society. The question we must answer is; “Who?” Who is the primary beneficiary of your child care policy? Is it the child care worker? Does your policy help you become a better and more qualified educator and care giver? If you find that the child care provider is not a primary beneficiary of a policy that needs them to be the central force that sustains its very existence, then one must find out why? Only then can an action plan be developed that addresses the issue of how to make our child care policy better serve our early childhood educators and care givers. Remember, information and knowledge are the keys to affecting positive change.
References


Canada Health Act. Chapter C-6,S-1, 1984.


“First Ministers’ Communique on Early Childhood Development.” Ottawa: Canadian Intergovernmental Conference Secretariat, News Release, Ref. 800-038/005 (11.09.00).


