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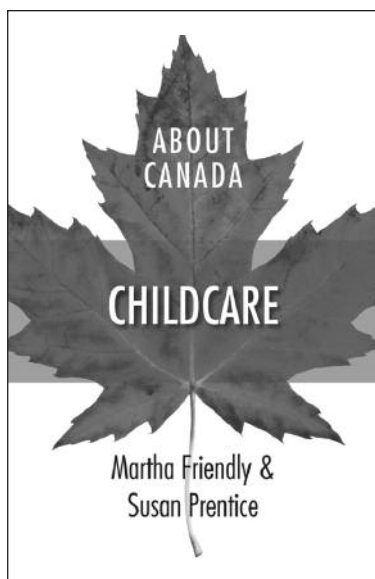
BY LAUREL ROTHMAN

Director of Social Reform, Family Service Toronto and
National Coordinator, Campaign 2000.

About Canada: Childcare

by Martha Friendly & Susan Prentice, Fernwood Publishing - Halifax & Winnipeg. 2009. 167 pages, ISBN 978-1-55266-291-5

In this tidy volume, Martha Friendly and Susan Prentice, two of the most knowledgeable and prolific researchers in the ECEC policy field in Canada, summarize what we know about the importance of early childhood education and childcare; what our current practices are; and what's needed in quality, access and financing for an ECEC system. It weaves together key historical trends, sharp political analysis including appropriate international comparisons, and the pertinent research on early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies and programs as it makes a strong case for achieving universal childcare in



Canada. The authors provide a fair and substantive explanation of how childcare in Canada has reached its current sorry state. More importantly, they propose a realistic action plan for making substantial progress on childcare in the coming decade. This book, very readable and well-organized, is a primer suitable for those interested in childcare and social policy in Canada; it's particularly useful for students who are seeking a thorough understanding and well-documented chronology of ECEC policy.

The book reminds us that the call for universal childcare began as early as 1970 when the Royal Commission on the Status of Women called for "immediate action" on childcare. Yet today we are far from meeting that recommendation. While Canada's child population (0 — 12 years) is approaching five million children, there are fewer than 900,000 regulated childcare spaces — that's about one space for every sixth child.

The following summary will ring true with most parents, early childhood educators, policy-makers and advocates:

Services are often unavailable and usually expensive. The quality of the care is frequently troubling: limited public financing forces programs to operate as cheaply as possible, and requirements for programs are low. The

early childhood educators who provide the care are underpaid and often undertrained. Overall, Canada's early childhood education and care situation suffers from chronic neglect. (p.1)

It is critical to understand the book's focus on the term "early childhood education and care" (ECEC) which is increasingly being used in Canada. The authors explain:

Good ECEC programs are neither babysitting nor schooling — they are neither solely early childhood education nor solely care. They are not just for children or only for parents. Well-designed ECEC services can meet a wide range of objectives, including care, learning, and social support for children and their parents. ECEC is about an integrated and coherent approach to policy. It is about providing care that includes all children and all parents regardless of employment or socio-economic status. (p. 4)

This book is particularly strong in succinctly tracing the distinct origins and purposes of childcare programs and kindergartens. Like many other community and health services, childcare services began as charitable interventions.

The nineteenth century pioneers were responding to changes in the social milieu including the impact of industrialization and the need for some women to work outside of the home. As these centres or “crèches” were developed across Canada, voluntary organizations, including religious ones, continued to deliver these services. Not until World War II, when the federal government passed the Dominion-Provincial Wartime Day Nurseries Agreement, did any public body intervene in the delivery or funding of these services. Since the end of that agreement, the role of the federal government in childcare has waxed and waned over the decades. Similarly, provincial commitments have varied widely, resulting in a patchwork approach where services in different provinces vary widely.

Parallel efforts of the 19th century social reformers resulted in the first “infant schools” which reflected the growing importance of early education. Voluntary groups who ran these “free kindergartens” aimed, among other things, at fostering assimilation of immigrant children. In contrast to the crèches, the public role in the delivery and financing of kindergartens began as early as 1883 when Canada’s first kindergarten was opened by the Board of Education in Toronto. By 1900 the Ontario government was funding kindergartens in many towns. The provision of kindergarten is now widespread, with most five year olds in Canada

attending public, mostly part-day kindergarten. This is in strong contrast to the low proportion of young children participating in childcare services across Canada.

The book’s call for a holistic approach to ECEC services in Canada is quite timely. The recent report to the Premier of Ontario by Charles Pascal, the Special Advisor on Early Learning, *With Our Best Future in Mind: Implementing Early Learning in Ontario*, outlines an implementation plan for a full-day, seamless and integrated system of early learning for four- and five-year-olds in Ontario to begin in 2010 (see www.ontario.ca/earlylearning). Premier McGuinty has endorsed this approach which blends the lessons learned from research and practice about full-day early learning and enables parents to choose what portion of these services they want to use. The report also recommends improved parental leave and family leave as well as a strengthened ECEC system for children under four years. By shifting policies and programs toward high quality ECEC services delivered by school boards, Ontario will lead the current movement toward universal ECEC in Canada.

The authors continue to probe the reasons why Canada is one of only a few industrialized countries that has not decided to develop an appropriate, effective ECEC system despite the needs

of families and the relative wealth of its resources. Canada's overall approach to social policy and the relatively decentralized federation in which policy is developed are key factors, the book contends. Canada is a "liberal welfare regime" as described by Danish sociologist Gsta Esping-Anderson who has identified three main approaches to social welfare in advanced capitalist states. Like other liberal welfare regimes, including Australia, United States, U.K. and New Zealand, Canada highly values the privacy of the family and the prominent role of the market in service provision. As a result, the provision of social welfare programs is left to the market in contrast to social-democratic welfare regimes (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark) in which governments play a lead role in planning, organizing and often delivering services.

Services in liberal regimes tend to be targeted to the most vulnerable, resulting in stigmatization rather than a view of entitlement to services. At the same time, liberal regimes value public education highly. Thus, it is not surprising that childcare (in Canada as in the other liberal regimes) relies on the market to develop services mostly delivered by private and non-profit organizations while kindergarten is publicly provided and financed by school authorities.

The role of Canadian federalism is thoughtfully considered in the

evolution of ECEC service and policies. In tracing federal/provincial policy-making from World War II day nurseries to Harper's Universal Child Care Benefit, the book demonstrates how both Liberal and Conservative governments used their capacity for policy leadership and the federal spending power to shape respective approaches to childcare. Interestingly, the structure of Canadian federalism has been maintained as the policy shifts have occurred. Most recently, the abrupt change from former Prime Minister Paul Martin's promise of a "truly national system of early learning and child care" in the 2004 federal election which resulted in signed agreements with all the provinces/territories by 2005, to Stephen Harper's Conservative government's decision to cancel those federal/provincial agreements in 2006 and to institute the Universal Child Care Benefit, an income transfer of \$100 per month to parents of children under six, is evidence of the wide range of movement that federalism allows. This shift in policy focus also emphasizes the importance of the federal role in social policy even in this era of downloading and devolution.

Friendly and Prentice address head-on the tough questions of "the great child care debates" with strong evidence from research and practice. Regarding the question of whether childcare is good or bad for children, the book emphasizes what solid research has firmly demonstrat-

ed: that childcare must be considered within the broader framework of family policy and that the quality of the childcare is an essential factor. Within family policy, there needs to be paid maternity, parental and family leave that enables parents to be with very young children and with ill children. As UNICEF expressed:

Most experts and most long-term studies agree that the effects of early education and care, for most children, become unequivocally positive at some point between the ages of two and three — providing the hours are not too long and that the quality can be assured. (p. 107)

The book concludes with a creative, optimistic look at ECEC in Canada, circa 2020, written from the parents' point of view. The description of the (fictional) Elsie Stapleford's Children's Centre in Regina illustrates clearly how an effective ECEC program can sup-

port a wide range of children and parents while benefiting the broader community. A ten-point action plan follows and spells out the steps to 2020. Beginning with a federal government commitment to a White Paper that publicly commits the government to developing an ECEC system with goals and principles, targets and timetables and a long-term financing plan, this prescription also addresses the key issues of collaboration among governments and key community partners, research and innovation and accountability.

The reader is left with an optimistic sense that this action plan can be implemented if federal political leaders take up this bold challenge. Statements from Opposition Leader Michael Ignatieff as well as NDP leader Jack Layton about the importance of ECEC in Canada and the need for proactive federal government involvement are indicators that a system of ECEC for Canada will, at some point in the near future, move from "the pram to Parliament Hill" as Friendly and Prentice recommend.



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Colonization, Sexuality and Communities of Colour



In this issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves*, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' quarterly education publication, editor Jessica Yee explores the connections between youth, sex education, the impacts of colonization and the realities of communities of colour. With contributions from several youth of colour and a section written by (and for) allies, *Sex Ed and Youth: Colonization, Sexuality and Communities of Colour* delves deeply into the trenches of what's happened, what's still not working, and what needs to take place for equitable sex education to become a reality for the next generation.

Each copy of *Sex Ed and Youth* costs \$12.00 plus 5% GST and shipping. Shipping within Canada: 1 book \$2, 2-3 books \$3, 4-6 books \$4, 7-10 books \$5, 11 or more \$6. Additional shipping charges apply for international orders.

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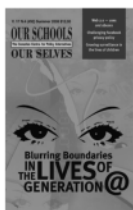
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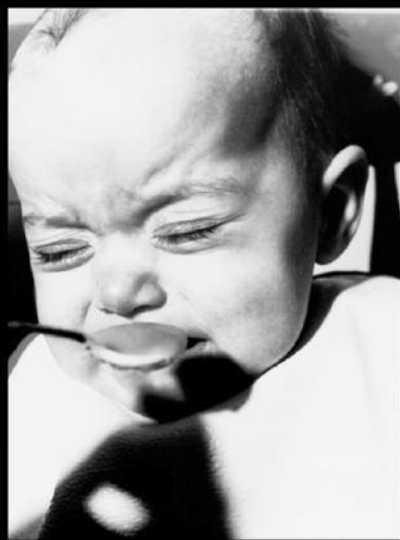
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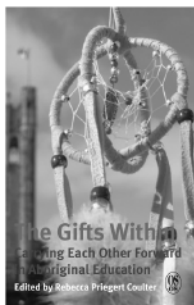
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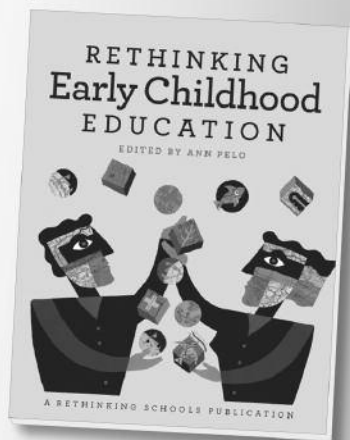
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