Caring About Care
An examination of care in Canadian childcare
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A Closer Look at Care in Canadian Childcare

Canada has a care crisis and a care deficit. Supports needed by children and families are absent (care crisis). Poorly developed services, or ‘childcare deserts’ of scarce, expensive and too-often dubious quality services are staffed by carers who receive low pay and poor working conditions, leading to compromised recruitment, retention and quality of care. The key premises of the Caring about Care project assert that:

• Caring for others should be viewed as a vital aspect of human existence and necessary for human flourishing and well-being.
• All human beings have care needs at different points in their lives. Therefore, needing care should not be viewed as a limitation, deficit or burden. However, caring for others can become burdensome when care responsibilities are poorly resourced, and are poorly compensated.
• Care is present in all encounters in early childhood settings. Early childhood educators make on-going ethical decisions about how to care for and meet children’s complex needs.
• Care practices and children’s caring experiences can be evaluated as promoting or inhibiting well-being.
• Good care must be central to childcare policy deliberations

For a fuller discussion of these premises please refer to:

An Analysis of Federal Childcare Policy Documents

To gain insight into current conceptualizations of care in the Canadian early childhood education and care context, we analyzed recently released federal government documents addressing childcare. Findings indicate:

- While these documents aim to restructure/revision the Canadian childcare sector, there is an explicit effort by policy makers to move beyond care to a description of services that embraces “learning” and “development” and “education”.
- Justification for government investment/leadership in the childcare sector is almost always achieved through a futuristic, outcome-based education focus.
- The term “childcare” is frequently used to refer to programs and services, themselves, not interactions between educators, family members and children. This suggests the focus of childcare provision is on basic custodial care.

Implications of Policy Analysis

The importance and value of respectful, responsive caring experiences for young children is downplayed in Federal documents.

The complexities of caring well for young children are overlooked.

Our analysis suggests the need to “highlight good care which focuses on the necessity of responsive, meaningful, human relationships between children, early childhood educators and families in early learning and childcare settings.”

Recommendations

Care scholar, Joan Tronto, (2013) envisions a ‘caring democracy’ in which care of citizens is the central task of the democratic state and caring responsibilities are fairly distributed to achieve better care and more freedom, equality and justice for all citizens. Barnes (2012) advocates for “care full” policy deliberation wherein policy makers take into consideration how stakeholders think and feel about caring experiences in childcare. Some questions that should be raised in policy deliberations are:

- What does it mean to care well for young children in childcare settings?
- How can we think about caring well for young children as a matter of ethics?
- What do early childhood educators need to care well for young children?

References and Further Readings


A note on project terminology: Our preferred term is early childhood education. However, the split systems of childcare and education in Canada requires a focus on the value of care in childcare. One of our policy goals is an integrated system of early years services within an educational system in which “relational ethics is central to all relationships and practices” (Moss, 2018, p. 262).