

The Internationalization of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Issues

by

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Introduction

After decades of resistance to state involvement in and funding of child care and early childhood education programs and services (ECEC), governments in conservative and liberal welfare states (Esping-Andersen, 1990) have recently demonstrated an increased willingness to invest more public money and to create an administrative apparatus to support ECEC programs (White, 2008b). Whether such public investment is indicative of paradigm change¹ regarding the respective roles of states, markets, and families in providing care is still subject to debate. Nevertheless, something is happening in these countries to spur policy changes that is worthy of social scientific attention.

In this paper I specifically investigate the extent to which the issue of care has been “internationalized” to become the focus of attention of international organizations (IOs) such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations (UN) agencies, as well transnational policy actors (policy advocates and communities of policy experts known as “epistemic communities”²). The scope and substance of internationalization can be an important explanatory factor in promoting policy change domestically (the subject of my broader research project) and is of interest to International Relations and Comparative Public Policy scholars generally. It should also be of interest to feminist scholars of the welfare state.

Because of the influence IOs could have in this policy area, feminist scholars and activists also need to scrutinize the way IOs and transnational actors are framing the policy debate. As Finnemore (1993, p. 594) argues, IOs can provide “an arena in which norms and convergent expectations about international behavior are developed.” They thus can provide crucial fora for new ideas around ECEC that transform it from a private to public responsibility. Furthermore, as Hall (1993, p. 280) argues, “issues of authority are likely to be central to the process of paradigm change.” International organizations, unlike traditional domestic-based social interest groups or social movements are perceived as more authoritative and thus carry more policy weight (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004), either because a. as in the case of the UN and ILO, they can facilitate the negotiation of conventions that are then binding on country governments that ratify; or b. as in the case of the OECD they provide advice to governments underpinned by their expertise and broader legitimacy on economic (among other) policies and perform peer review - examination and assessment of state policy by other states (Pagani, 2002); or c. in the case of the World Bank, they can build in policy requirements as part of loan conditions and have leverage owing to expertise and influence on bilateral lending policies and thus tend to be a norm setter for development policies. Country governments therefore tend to pay attention to what IOs have to say about a particular policy.

Policies related to the family, the role of women, and the care and education of children tend to be highly controversial and ideologically loaded (White, 2008a). Because of past normative disinclination in liberal and conservative welfare states to “defamilialize” social reproduction (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Esping-Andersen, 1999; Gornick and Meyers, 2004), it

¹ A policy paradigm is the “overarching set of ideas that specify how the problems facing them are to be perceived, which goals might be attained through policy and what sorts of techniques can be used to reach those goals. Ideas about each of these matters interlock to form a relatively coherent whole.” Thus, “Like a gestalt, [a paradigm] structures the very way in which policy-makers see the world and their role within it” (Hall, 1992, pp. 91-92). Paradigm change is typically measured as changes in governments’ overall goals, the policy instruments used to obtain those goals, and the precise settings of those instruments (Hall, 1993).

²Haas (1989, p. 384, n. 20) defines an epistemic community as a “community of experts sharing a belief in a common set of cause-and-effect relationships as well as common values to which policies governing these relationships will be applied.”

has proven difficult to persuade policy makers to act (and the public to accept) government funding of ECEC services; that is, to shift from seeing child care as a private good and early education as unnecessary, to seeing both as essential, integrated public services (Bennett, 2003). International organizations' and transnational policy actors' framing of these policies may thus overcome traditional antipathy to these programs and contribute to new norm creation. The frames being adopted, however, may not reap the rewards of gender transformation for which feminist scholars may hope.

The paper finds, first, that ECEC issues have been internationalized within a number of international organizations, including the European Union (EU) (e.g. European Commission Childcare Network, 1990; European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996), the International Labour Organization (ILO) (e.g. ILO Office of the Director-General, 2003; ILO Bureau for Gender Equality, 2006), the Organization of American States (OAS),³ the OECD (2001, 2006), UN (2007) agencies, particularly the UN Children's Fund (e.g. 2001) through the instrument of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (e.g. UNESCO, 2006), and the World Bank (e.g. Young, 2002; 2007). The effect of such attention is potentially transformative in shifting thinking on childhood, the nature of learning, and the kinds of programs necessary for successful childhood and adult lives, and in overcoming domestic normative resistance to state-funded child care and ECE programs; but the devil is in the details of the values being promoted. While human capital development arguments appear to be particularly resonant amongst IOs, no single set of ideas regarding ECEC has become paradigmatic at the international level. A case analysis of the OECD's thematic review of ECEC programs demonstrates that social pedagogic as well as human capital development norms are being promoted.

The gender implications of these IOs' work are less obvious. The second part of the paper tracks policy changes at the domestic level in liberal welfare states (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK, USA) where some of the biggest policy changes are occurring to discern whether any particular set of ideas has become paradigmatic and whether there is clear normative congruence between the ideas IOs promote and the domestic policy changes observed. The paper finds that while states adhere to the rhetoric of human capital development especially, the ECEC policy area exhibits so much fragmentation in terms of goals, instruments, and settings that it is difficult to claim that any new norms have been institutionalized. That is traditional liberal norms regarding ECEC provision (Bronfenbrenner, 2002) still dictate policy development domestically in liberal welfare states.

IOs and ECEC

ECEC policy – which broadly spans education, social development, and labour market policy – is not an area that has traditionally been subject to a great deal of international attention. The international aspects of ECEC policy seem less obvious than, for example, peace and security (e.g. Ruggie, 1998), trade and economic and financial sector coordination and management (e.g. Pauly, 1997), climate change and pollution control (Bernstein, 2001; Haas, Keohane and Levy, 1993; Young, 1997), immigration and migration (Barnett and Finnemore, 2004), and even science and scientific research coordination (Finnemore, 1993; 1996). Why,

³ In a plenary session on 16 November 2007, the Ministers of Education of the member states of the OAS adopted a hemispheric commitment to “increase quality early childhood comprehensive care and education policies and processes” (OAS, 2007).

then, should traditionally economic and financially-focused IOs such as the World Bank and the OECD care about these issues?

The IO that would appear to have the most potential interest in this issue because of the connection of ECEC to both effective parental employment and children's lifelong learning – the ILO – has paid attention to child care and early childhood education issues only as it relates to achieving gender equality at work; thus, its research program includes collection of data on maternity and parental leave but not a lot of detail on ECEC.⁴

In fact, a number of IOs came late to the issue of ECEC policy. Kamerman (2006, pp. 3-5) notes that while the International Bureau of Education carried out a cross-national survey of ministers of education in 1939 that included a survey of pre-primary education. In the same year UNESCO endorsed “child care facilities for the growing numbers of working mothers” as well as voluntary preschool programs. But UNESCO did not study ECEC in depth again until 1961. In a 1961 memorandum, it again endorsed preschool programs in countries where primary school was already in place. It also endorsed the idea that care and education should be included in such programs, but establishing primary education in all countries was ranked as the main priority. Beginning in the 1960s, UNESCO began to report pre-primary enrollment data at five year intervals, but it did not conduct a comprehensive review of ECEC developments at that time, claiming there were too many unresolved issues around pre-primary programs (Kamerman, 2006, p. 6). As late as 1978, a World Bank working paper concluded that ““on the basis of the available evidence, giving priority to support for preschool intervention could not be justified”” (Kamerman, 2006, p. 8). Kamerman (2006, p. 59) credits the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as the primary factor leading to “a re-assessment of the value of children.” And then in the 1990s “it was the Jomtien and Dakar conferences [discussed below] that both reflected and added to the growing public awareness of the value of preschool programs and provided a possible foundation for a new social movement” (Kamerman, 2006, p. 59).

The OECD also came late to ECEC issues. It only began its thematic review of ECEC policies and programs in the late 1990s. By then, many countries were already engaged in the process of ECEC expansion, although the OECD review came at a crucial point in that process (e.g. White, 2008c).

Ideational Fragmentation within IOs Regarding the Value of ECEC Policies and Programs

I have identified four sets of ECEC ideas IOs have been promoting detailed below:

ECEC as Part of Human Capital Development

On the one hand, it should be no surprise that IOs are paying attention to work-family policies such as child care. Labour market issues are increasingly seen as requiring coordinated action, both in the European Union (EU) and under international and regional trade agreements (O'Brien et al., 2000; Linos, 2007), forcing countries to examine the factors that encourage or inhibit employment. Furthermore, all of the IOs considered in this paper⁵ have endorsed to some extent the set of policy prescriptions that best reflect what Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003) call

⁴ See for example the ILO's social security database at <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/sesame/ifpses.home> and previously *The Cost of Social Security* (e.g. ILO, 1997).

⁵ The World Bank (Young, 2002, p. xi; Young, 2007, p. vii) lists a number of multilateral agencies involved in its early childhood development symposiums in addition to those mentioned here, such as the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) as well as development banks such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

the “social investment” or what I’m labeling the human capital development paradigm. For these IOs, education is increasingly recognized as an important foundation for a country’s economic success. Globalization prods governments to pay attention to education because, in order to be competitive in a globalized world of free-flowing capital, labour markets need to be flexible and able to adapt. A knowledgeable and adaptable workforce is necessary because “the only real asset that most advanced nations hold is the quality and skills of their people” (Esping-Andersen, 2002, p. 28). If schools fail to create that workforce, then a government needs to adopt strategies and policies to make sure its workforce adapts either through job retraining. But “Remedial policies once people have reached adulthood are unlikely to be effective unless these adults started out with sufficient cognitive and social skills” (Esping-Andersen, 2002, p. 30).

Attention has only recently been paid to *early* childhood education, however. For example, in 1990, the countries participating in the UN’s World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand,⁶ while declaring that “learning begins at birth” also stated that “early childhood care and initial education...can be provided through arrangements involving families, communities, or institutional programmes, as appropriate,” and that the “main delivery system for the basic education of children outside the family is primary schooling” (UNESCO, World Education Forum, 1990, p. 4). In 2000, in contrast, the countries participating in the UNESCO World Education Forum in Dakar, Sudan, committed to “expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children” as part of its six Education for All goals (UNESCO, World Education Forum, 2000, p. 8). That commitment to expanding and improving ECEC did not go as far as the explicit target of 2015 by which “all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to complete, free and compulsory *primary* education of good quality” (UNESCO, World Education Forum, 2000, p. 8, emphasis added).

UNESCO (2006, ch. 5) justifies the need for such programs based on arguments that the early years are important for children’s brain development, that early childhood programs can enhance development and provide an important way to equalize children’s primary education experiences and overcome economic disadvantage and exclusion, and that investments in early childhood produce economic gains for countries. The Organization of American States (OAS, 2007) justifies its hemispheric commitment to early childhood education because “childhood is a decisive phase in the human life cycle and a comprehensive approach to it will allow us to overcome the challenges of poverty, inequity and social exclusion.” The World Bank is the strongest proponent of the human capital development view of ECEC (see, e.g. World Bank, 2008c; Young, 2002; 2007) while at the same time endorsing a broad range of early child development (ECD) programs including child health, child nutrition, as well as early childhood education and care (Young, 2002, p. 1).⁷

The basis of this human capital development perspective includes a belief in the positive relationship between ECD and ECE programs and children’s success, not just in the primary grades of school, but throughout their lives in the form of higher high school graduation rates, improved employment and earnings, better health outcomes, less welfare dependency and juvenile delinquency (e.g. Cleveland and Krashinsky, 1998; Keating and Hertzman, 1999; Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000; Reynolds et al., 2001; Carneiro and Heckman, 2003; Lynch, 2004; Barnett and Masse, 2005; Heckman, 2006; Temple and Reynolds, 2007). As Esping-Andersen et

⁶ This conference was co-sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP and the World Bank.

⁷ The OECD’s position on human capital development and other perspectives is explored later in the paper.

al. (2002, p. 20) articulate the argument, “The quality of childhood matters ever more for subsequent life chances” because “It is in childhood that citizens acquire most of the capital that they, later, will activate in the pursuit of a good life.” Thus, “A social investment strategy directed at children must be a centerpiece of any policy for social inclusion” (Esping-Andersen, 2002, p. 30).

The social investment perspective rests heavily on scientific claims about the positive effects early learning and early childhood interventions have on children’s subsequent development. For example, the 2006 OECD *Starting Strong II* report (annex d) contains a summary of some of the international research that has accumulated that supports public investment in ECEC based in part on cognitive neuro-scientific claims about the benefits of early learning on young children, as well as the cost effectiveness of these programs (see also OECD 2002; OECD, CERI, 2007). In fact, the World Bank (e.g. Young, 2007, p. iii) states explicitly that “evidence- and population-based instruments and measures to monitor, evaluate, and compare ECD [early childhood development] interventions over time and across settings” are needed because “[t]he leveraging of enhanced policies and investments in early childhood development depends on being able to assess and document, consistently and rigorously, the need for ECD programs across communities and the outcomes for children and families participating in these programs.”

Those cost-benefits analyses also factor heavily into the persuasiveness of the policy recommendations (e.g. World Bank, 2008a), with the message being that if these programs did not deliver future positive economic returns, they would not be worth doing. In fact, half of the six judges on the Canadian-based Institute for Research on Public Policy’s (IRPP) Canadian Priorities Agenda recommended against the adoption of a national early childhood development program because there was not enough evidence “to justify adopting a national template at this time” (Tuohy, 2007, p. 527; see also Lipsey and Watson in the same volume).

Cost-benefit analyses are often at the root of whether programs should be delivered in a targeted or universal manner, and whether governments should commit resources broadly to early child development programs writ large such as child health and child nutrition, or specifically early childhood education and care. Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003, p. 87) suggest that human capital development is a government’s principal concern, then it will focus on targeted programs “to particular populations categories deemed to be at the margins, or at risk of exclusion” such as the National Child Benefit program in Canada, as well as Community Action Program for Children, Aboriginal Head Start, and so on, and Sure Start in the UK and Head Start in the USA. However, as Doherty (2007) and others (e.g. Evans, Hertzman, and Morgan, 2007) argue, it is often difficult for governments to clearly identify which populations are “at risk” and the populations that would benefit most from these programs can be much larger than and different from traditionally targeted populations such as low-income families.

All IOs but the World Bank have stated support for universally accessible ECE programs as a principal instrument in a human capital development strategy. While some, such as the EU (European Council, 2002) have established explicit targets by which they wish to see governments achieve comprehensive ECEC (discussed below), others such as the OAS’s (2007) hemispheric commitment to early childhood education merely asks governments to “Increase quality comprehensive early childhood education coverage, in accordance with each member state’s possibilities and with the long-term goal of universalizing its integral care for the very young.”

ECEC as Part of a Social Pedagogical Approach to the Child

Human capital development is not the only perspective underlying IOs' research and policy recommendations. This in some ways complicates the message IOs send and may affect the extent to which country governments adopt IOs' recommendations at all.

The early child development perspective promoted by the World Bank (Young, 2002, 2007) and researchers such as Keating and Hertzman (1999) can be interpreted to prescribe a targeted approach to ECEC services, or a universal approach with targeting for the most disadvantaged groups. But at root it emphasizes the promotion of children's overall developmental needs: their health and physical development; emotional well-being and social competence; positive attitude towards learning; good communication skills; and cognition and general knowledge (e.g. NEGP, 1997). As Bennett (2003) argues, that ECD concern for the "whole child" and childhood as a *sui generis* period in life underlies the social pedagogical approach, as does the notion of the child as learner.⁸ The child as learner means not just in the purely cognitive way that many human capital arguments conceive of learning as "school readiness" and achieving a certain level of literacy and numeracy by a certain age. As Bennett (2003, p. 31) argues, in many countries currently "Although the gradual extension of each child's competencies [is] a major pedagogical aim, emphasis [is] placed also on the well being of children, and on the importance of warm, affective relations."

Of course, those concerned with human capital development would not disagree that social pedagogy is important. Bennett (2003, 2005) thus develops a more sophisticated means of differentiating between what he calls the traditional pre-primary approach to early learning from a social pedagogical approach (see also OECD, 2006, ch. 6). Bennett (2003, pp. 31-32) argues that the following markers distinguish a social pedagogical approach:

Psychological and social development [is] the rule rather than formal instruction. Low child-staff ratios [are] practiced so as to ensure adequate interaction with each child. There [is] a trust in the child's own ability to develop and learn, but this trust [is] underpinned by the careful provision of learning environments run by professional staff, specifically trained to provide care and education in a manner appropriate for young children. Much emphasis [is] placed on the outdoor learning environment and on the child's freedom to explore and choose his or her own activities.

In contrast, the traditional pre-primary approach tends to "move away from the child and her developmental desires and rhythms, towards an adult-defined agenda. Group sizes tend[...] to be large, and because of numbers the adult-child pedagogical relationship predominate[s]. Teachers – often trained primarily as primary teachers – encourage[...] conformity and good behaviour through positive reinforcement..." (Bennett, 2003, p. 32).

Bennett (2005, pp. 6-7) differentiates these approaches by looking at countries' curriculum frameworks. He argues that a country's underlying approach to ECEC cannot be discerned simply from a curriculum, that is, the plan of instructional activities to inculcate learning, but rather from the overall framework that looks at three broad sets of quality indicators: structures, orientation, and interaction. Structural factors include the amount of investment in the system, child/staff ratios, staff levels of certification and professional development, and the infrastructure for programs i.e. buildings, resources, and so on. Orientation factors include the kinds of legislation, regulation, national curriculum, staff

⁸ It is relevant to note that John Bennett was co-author of the OECD's major publications from its cross-national thematic review of ECEC policy (OECD, 2001, 2006).

standards and so on in place, as well as that staff's understanding of the principles and purposes of ECEC. Integration factors include the quality of relationships in services and the interaction between staff and children.

The OAS's (2007) statement on early childhood education emphasizes some of these broader social pedagogical criteria. Objective e. recommends the coordination of "educational sectors and institutions with other national, local, and subnational authorities responsible for providing protection, nutrition, health, culture, and social welfare-related components in such a way as to guarantee the provision of comprehensive early childhood care." Objective f. speaks to strengthening the preparation and professional development of all educators, including "teachers, families, and communities." Objective g. calls for the formulation of "policies and educational, inter-institutional, and inter-sectoral coordination strategies for the successful transition of children between the different stages in early childhood." And Objective h. calls for mechanisms to evaluate the quality of ECEC programs. Similarly, in its review of ECEC policies around the world, the Education for All global monitoring report emphasizes issues of quality and effectiveness in ECEC programming (UNESCO, 2007, chs. 7, 8).

The World Bank, in contrast, is much less committal as to what the "right" ECEC program design is. On its ECD project website, it states explicitly that "because differences in culture and economic environments make it impossible to rely on just one approach in early child development, it is important to identify a range of effective models rather than emphasize a single program model. A community's first priority might be to provide child care to enable mothers to work, suggesting the need to deliver direct services to children in formal or informal care settings. Another community might not share the need for day care but still needs to improve children's development, suggesting the use of a parent or teacher education program" (World Bank, 2008b).

ECEC as Part of Children's Rights

The idea of ECEC as a human right tends to be promoted mainly by the United Nations. For example, the Dakar Framework for Action adopted by the participating countries of UNESCO's World Education Forum justified its Education for All commitments on the basis of a number of human capital investment rationales (as discussed above), but also articulated a rights-based approach to education: that is, "all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term" and that education "is the key to sustainable development and peace and stability within and among countries, and thus an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century, which are affected by rapid globalization" (UNESCO, World Education Forum, 2000, p. 8). In addition, Article 5.3 of the Programme of Action that emerged out of the UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 states that "Governments, in cooperation with employers, should provide and promote means to facilitate compatibility between labour force participation and parental responsibilities...Such means could include...day-care centers... kindergartens... paid parental leave."

Currently, three international conventions recognize child care as a human right (Davis, 2005). Article 11 of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 deals with employment rights for women. It commits state governments to eliminate discrimination against women in employment and to ensure equal employment opportunities with men. Article 11 (2) specifically commits country

governments to provide maternity leave protection and paid maternity leave and Article 11 (2) (c) commits those governments “To encourage the provision of the necessary supporting social services to enable parents to combine family obligations with work responsibilities and participation in public life, in particular through promoting the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities.”

Article 18 (2) of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1989 commits country governments to “render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and shall ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.” Article 18 (3) in addition states that “States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children of working parents have the right to benefit from child-care services and facilities for which they are eligible.”

Finally, Davis (2005, p. 147) notes that the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which recognizes that “everyone has a right to work and to have an equal opportunity to be promoted in employment” has also been interpreted to include child care.

Outside the UN, some other IOs have picked up the discourse of rights. For example, while the Ministers of Education in the member countries of the OAS (2007) committed to developing comprehensive early childhood education programs on the basis of human capital investment concerns, they also state that “equitable and timely access to quality and integral education adapted to global and local contexts and global realities is a human right, a public good, and a political priority...”

Unlike the human capital development paradigm, rights arguments do not impose attendant duties and responsibilities on part of children to learn or be economically successful. Rather these rights declarations simply impose obligations on states to provide these services. But without appeal to cost-benefit rationales, and without acceptance from governments of the moral imperative to act, it has been difficult to persuade country governments to comply. The USA in fact has not ratified any of the three major UN conventions with the view that “it has little to learn from human rights practices of other nations” (Davis, 2005, p. 148). Australia, which has ratified CEDAW, has entered a reservation to the article that commits countries to implement paid maternity leave (Brennan, 2007, p. 41). Countries which have ratified are supposed to submit reports to the UN Committees monitoring compliance (Davis, 2005). Under Canadian law, though, these international treaties have no legal effect domestically until they have been adopted as part of Canadian law. Thus, there is no mechanism, other than shaming, to ensure compliance with these conventions.⁹

ECEC as Part of Gender Equality

One could say that all of the IOs considered in this paper have endorsed to some extent the notion that “the relative lack of investment in childcare and parental leave policies tends to undermine the position of women in the labour market” as well as affect the overall economy by way of higher unemployment (with parents dropping out of the labour market) and a lower income tax base (Bennett, 2003, p. 33, 36). The sacrifices in labour market participation that

⁹ Nevertheless in Canada, some academics (e.g. Howe and Covell, 2005), advocacy groups such as the Canadian Child Care Federation (CCCCF) and Parliamentarians, most visibly Senator Landon Pearson, have worked to persuade Canadian governments to recognize these children’s rights in law. In the USA, in contrast, Davis (2005, p. 149) points out that, given the illegitimacy of the international human rights frame in the USA, domestic women’s groups have focused their attention exclusively on “domestic standards and paradigms.”

primarily women make in order to care for children are extremely costly for those workers and their families: they result in considerably lower earnings accumulated over a lifetime, as well as lower pension earnings, health and other benefits coverage (e.g. Gornick and Meyers, 2003). They are also costly to governments increasingly faced with labour shortages. There are thus points of overlap with human capital development arguments. As Esping-Andersen et al. (2002, pp. 10-11) argue, “Gender equality policies should not be regarded as simply a concession to women’s claims. If society is not capable of harmonizing motherhood with employment, we shall forego the single most effective bulwark against child poverty – which is that mothers work. We shall, additionally, face very severe labour force shortages or, alternatively, a shortage of births. And, as women now tend to be more educated than men, we shall be wasting human capital.”

The extent to which IOs make gender equality a central part of their policy research and recommendations varies greatly, however.¹⁰ The EU has gone furthest in pushing for ECEC programs to promote the reconciliation of work and family life (e.g. European Commission, 2006). The EU focused until 2000 on maternity and parental leave rights and benefits.¹¹ Since 2000, though, Lewis and Campbell (2007, p. 7) argue that the EU’s focus “has switched from parental leave to promoting childcare provision,” although “childcare services have been the subject of a ‘target’ ...rather than a Directive as was the case for parental leave...” In the March 2002 meeting of the Council of Ministers in Barcelona, the Council established an EU-wide objective for member countries “to remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age” (European Council, 2002, p. 12). By 2006, the OECD (2006, p. 78) estimated that about five countries – Belgium (Flanders region), Denmark, France, Norway, and Sweden – had definitely achieved the target set by the Barcelona meeting, and Finland had if one excludes children under the age of one (as almost all parents take parental leave).¹²

The ILO has also been a major promoter of paid maternity leave as important programs in promoting gender equality at work. The member countries of the ILO first adopted its first convention on maternity protection in 1919 (Convention No. 3). The convention endorsed a program of 12 weeks of maternity protection with benefits “sufficient for the full and healthy maintenance of herself and her child.” The convention covered all women working in industry and commerce. In 1952, the ILO member countries ratified a revised convention (No. 103) which extended the 12 week program to all women workers. The member countries also passed Recommendation 95 which endorsed that the leave period be extended to 14 weeks (six week prior to birth and eight weeks afterward) at 100 per cent of prior wages. The 2000 ILO

¹⁰ For a critical view of the gender unequal implications of the human capital development and social pedagogical perspectives see for e.g. Mahon (2006). For a critical view of the gender unequal implications of the children’s rights perspective see Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004).

¹¹ See Ross (2001) and Henderson and White (2004) for details on the two EU Directives related to maternity and parental leave.

¹² Earlier, the European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile the Employment and Family Responsibilities of Men and Women (Childcare Network) had recommended that European countries invest at least 1% of GDP in ECEC services (European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996). The OECD (2006, p. 105) estimates that only five countries in Europe have achieved that level of investment: Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, and Sweden, and that the Flanders region of Belgium and Hungary are likely close to that benchmark.

convention (No. 183) endorsed the extended leave period of 14 weeks with benefit levels of not less than two-thirds of previous earnings. The 2000 ILO Recommendation (No. 191) endorsed a leave period of 18 weeks with 100 per cent wage replacement.

With regard to child care, in 1981, the participating countries in the ILO passed Convention 156 concerning workers with family responsibilities. Article 5 (b) of C156 declared that “All measures compatible with national conditions and possibilities shall further be taken...to develop or promote community services, public or private, such as child-care and family services and facilities.” Part 5 of the accompanying Recommendation 165, Workers with Family Responsibilities, details a number of recommendations regarding child care to “encourage and facility the establishment, particularly in local communities, of plans for the systematic development of child-care and family services and facilities...” (ILO Bureau for Gender Equality, 2006). Of the liberal welfare states, only Australia has since ratified the convention.

The OECD has also tackled ECEC as part of its research agenda on policies to promote the reconciliation of work and family life, mainly through its *Babies and Bosses* project (e.g. OECD, 2007; see also Mahon, 2006). In fact, Bennett (2003, p. 40) argues that “In most countries, policy for under-threes still emphasizes expansion of services as a necessary support for maternal employment in a strong economy, rather than as a public service that can benefit both children and parents.” The UN (e.g. UNESCO, 2007), in contrast, tackles the issue as one of equal education for all, that is, girls and boys, women and men.

Ideational Hegemony or Fragmentation at the International Level?

To Jenson (2004; 2006) and others (e.g. Jenson and Saint-Martin, 2003), the ideas documented above are evidence of a new paradigm emerging regarding the role of the state vis-à-vis the market and the family. Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003, p. 93) argue that “All countries are currently engaged in redesigning their welfare architecture and citizenship regimes”¹³ to reflect a social investment model of welfare state program delivery. This social investment model entails investing in human capital development policies that will ensure that all adults are productive participants in the globalized economy. A social investment strategy focuses on developing active labour market policies, modernizing social protection policies, and combating social exclusion (Jenson and Saint-Martin, 2003, p. 78).

Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004; see also Jenson, 2004) argue that children, rather than adult wage-earners, have become the legitimate subjects of social investment strategy, as opposed to adults who were the subjects of the previous Keynesian social security strategy designed, however imperfectly, to protect people from the vagaries of the market. Children are the core of this social investment strategy from both a population health perspective and human capital development. By investing in ECEC services, governments provide the means to allow parents to participate in the labour market, as well as balance work and family life, stave off poverty and social exclusion, and prepare all children for the future so that they can be productive adults themselves (Jenson, 2006, pp. 36-37). But the needs of women can be “sidelined” and replaced by those of “children” under this new social investment discourse (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, p. 155).

¹³ Jenson and Saint-Martin (2003, p. 93) define a citizenship regime as “the institutional arrangements, rules and understandings that guide and shape concurrent policy decisions and expenditures of states, problem definitions by states and citizens, and claims-making by citizens” and in particular the “responsibility mix” between states, markets, and families regarding social reproduction, and the boundaries of rights inclusion in a political community.

The OECD's Ideational Fragmentation

The assertion that ECEC policy changes reflect a paradigmatic shift solely to a human capital development strategy is subject to debate. To demonstrate that ideas are paradigmatic, one has to demonstrate that they are widespread, have a taken-for-grantedness, and that they filter out other options (that is, they become normative). This paper thus turns to a case study of the OECD's ECEC research project to determine whether it reflects solely human capital development concerns. I focus attention on the OECD because, while a number of IOs have increasingly paid attention to ECEC issues, the OECD has established the largest research program and has been most visible in the industrialized countries in promoting these policies (see e.g. OECD, 2001, 2006, as well as the OECD's country notes and background reports on 20 countries).

The OECD became interested in ECEC issues as part of its attention to human capital development under its mandate to "promote policies designed...to achieve the highest sustainable economic growth and employment and a rising standard of living in Member countries, while maintaining financial stability, and thus to contribute to the development of the world economy" (Article 1 of the OECD Convention, 1960). As Mahon (2006, p. 180) notes, the OECD has always been a "promoter of active labour market policies as a solution to the Phillips curve inflation-unemployment tradeoff." She notes that while researchers such as Armingeon and Beyeler (2004), Deacon, Hulse and Stubbs (1997), and McBride and Williams (2001) claim that the OECD took a neo-liberal turn in the 1970s and 1980s, by the early- to mid-1990s, the OECD (again) began to highlight the importance of promoting employment and employability, especially for the less-skilled and the long-term unemployed (e.g. OECD, 1994a). It focused attention on two strategies: "employment-oriented social policies" including "active labour market policies" and a "life-long learning" strategy so as to ensure that children become productive economic actors as adults, and not marginalized (OECD, 1999, p. 3; see also OECD, 2001, p. 13). ECEC was seen as the key programme: that is, early childhood development was the basis upon which lifelong learning and development occurred and "When sustained by effective fiscal, social and employment measures in support of parents and communities, early childhood programming would help to provide a fair start in life for all children, and contribute to educational equity and social integration" (OECD, 2006, p. 3). Below I trace through the process by which those ideas emerged and the actors who promoted them.

In 1992, the Ministerial Council of the OECD commissioned the Secretariat of the OECD to conduct a major study on the issue of high and persistent unemployment in the member countries. The Secretariat released its concluding report, *The OECD Jobs Study: Facts, Analysis, Strategies*, in 1994 (OECD, 1994b). That report recommended that "increasing the provision of early childhood education programmes, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, is part of a long-term strategy improving labour force skills and competencies" (OECD, 1998; see also recommendation 8 of the 1994b report). One year after the release of that study, the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) released a report, *Our Children at Risk*, which recommended that countries adopt proactive measures for children in their early years so as to prevent school failure (OECD, CERI, 1995). Then, in 1996, the Ministerial meeting of the Educational Committee, *Making Lifelong Learning a Reality for All*, focused on early childhood education as well as a way to provide the foundations for lifelong learning. The Ministers' communiqué articulated the goal of improving access and quality in early childhood education and care (OECD, 1996). The 1997 OECD Secretary-General's note

summarizing the policy conference *Beyond 2000: The New Social Policy Agenda*, also highlighted the view that preventative policies, especially in the early years, should be given greater emphasis in countries' social protection systems (OECD, 1997, p. 11).

Thus, the Education Committee of the OECD included early childhood education and care in its 1997-1998 program of work (OECD, 1998). It held an informal meeting of early childhood education and care policy experts in January, 1998. Subsequently, it announced its proposal for a thematic review of early learning and care practices of those member countries that had agreed to participate in the review (Australia, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States).

The goal of the thematic review of ECEC policies and programs was to “provide cross-national information to improve policy-making and planning in early childhood education and care in all OECD countries” by reporting on countries' programs and policies, including regulations and governance, staffing issues, programme content, and financing (Bennett, 2003, p. 22). It released its major report, *Starting Strong*, in 2001 on the basis of comparative analysis of those country studies (OECD, 2001). The Education Committee then conducted a second round of reviews (of Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Korea, and Mexico). It released its second major report *Starting Strong II* in 2006 which reviews the progress the original countries made in achieving the goals set out in the first *Starting Strong* report and incorporated the new data from the second round of country reviews (OECD, 2006).

It is important to remember that the diffusion of ECEC policy ideas occurred not just from the OECD to country governments but also from domestic policy experts and advocates to the OECD who represented a broad range of perspectives. For example, the list of participants at the experts meeting in January 1998 in Paris included a representative from the Toronto Board of Education in Canada, representatives from the US Department of Education and the French Ministry of National Education as well as the French national social services network the Caisse Nationale des Allocations Familiales (CNAF), academics such as Dr. Peter Moss from the Institute of Education, University of London and Sharon Lynn Kagan from Yale University's Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy, and a UNESCO researcher (personal correspondence with OECD official, 11 April 2008). The inclusion of a broad range of policy experts was typical of the *Starting Strong* project.

Scientific understanding of the importance of the early years also influenced the OECD. Not coincidentally, at about the same time as the *Starting Strong* project began, the OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation began its Learning Sciences and Brain Research project in order to “discover what insights cognitive neuroscience might offer to education and educational policy and vice-versa” (OECD, 2002, p. 9). One of its research tasks was to investigate the importance of the early years of a child's life to successful lifelong learning (OECD, 2002, p. 12). The OECD sponsored three academic conferences, the first on early learning in 2000 involving a number of academic experts. The second phase of the project (OECD, CERI, 2007) involved a number of country governments' ministries of education as well as the US National Science Foundation. The corpus of research the 1998 OECD document cites gives an indication of the mainly US research that informed the first *Starting Strong* review. The second *Starting Strong* report (OECD, 2006, ch. 9 and annex d) also presents evidence supporting the importance of the early years to children's success in life.

One of the principal actors behind convincing the OECD to do the *Starting Strong* project was Abrar Hasan. He headed the Education and Training Division of the Directorate for

Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs. Two other principal actors were the co-authors of the 2001 *Starting Strong*, report, Michelle Neuman, who at the time was an administrator in the OECD's Education and Training Division and who is now the special advisor on early childhood care and education for UNESCO (Neuman, 2007) and was on the 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report team (UNESCO, World Education Forum, 2006); and John Bennett, a consultant in the OECD's Education and Training Division (OECD, 2001, p. 4), who also co-wrote *Starting Strong II* with Collette Taylor from the Queensland University of Technology, Australia (OECD, 2006, p. 5), and who had been the director of the Early Childhood and Family Unit at UNESCO from 1989-1997, and who is now working as a consultant for the Starting Strong Network that emerged after the Starting Strong project ended. This network is made up of country government representatives (currently organized and managed by the Flemish governmental agency, Kind en Gezin) with the mandate to: develop, share, and disseminate information "on experiences, research and good practice of countries in the field"; serve "as a clearing house of new policy research in the field and identify[...] new areas for fruitful policy research and analysis"; identify "data development needs and contribut[e] to the development of methodology for developing such data"; organize workshops on certain policy themes; and facilitate "contacts among researchers, policy makers and practitioners, and with international networks in related fields" (Starting Strong Network, 2008). IOs thus provide a base for international epistemic communities from which to yield influence.

While the origins of the Starting Strong project were grounded in human capital development thinking, the principal actors involved in the project promoted those ideas in conjunction with broader social development goals, as evidenced in the documents they produced. The 2001 *Starting Strong* report (p.3) claims that the OECD study took "a broad and holistic approach to studying children's early development and learning." From its survey of the initial group of participating countries' policies, it identified eight key elements of a "successful" ECEC policy: 1) "a systemic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation"; 2) "a strong and equal partnership with the education system"; 3) "a universal approach to access, with particular attention to children in need of special support"; 4) "substantial public investment in services and the infrastructure"; 5) "a participatory approach to quality improvement and assurance"; 6) "appropriate training and working conditions for staff in all forms of provision"; 7) "systematic attention to monitoring and collecting data collection"; and "a stable framework and long-term agenda for research and evaluation" (OECD, 2001, p. 11).

In addition to fulfilling an educational purpose, that is, to determine what countries do best, the OECD reports also offer policy recommendations. The 2006 *Starting Strong* report (p. 4) recommends that governments, in building their own ECEC systems: 1) "attend to the social context of early child development"; 2) "place well-being, early development and learning at the core of ECEC work, while respecting the child's agency and natural learning strategies"; 3) "to create the governance structures necessary for system accountability and quality assurance"; 4) "develop with the stakeholders broad guidelines and curricular standards for all ECEC services"; 5) "base public funding estimates for ECEC on achieving quality pedagogical goals"; 6) "reduce child poverty and exclusion through upstream fiscal, social and labour policies and to increase resources within universal programmes for children with diverse learning rights"; 7) "encourage family and community involvement in early childhood services"; 8) "improve the working conditions and professional education of ECEC staff"; 9) "provide freedom, funding and support to early childhood services"; 10) "aspire to ECEC systems that support broad learning,

participation and democracy.” These recommendations fall more into the social pedagogical framework Bennett (2005) identifies, rather than just human capital development.

The Normative Potential of the OECD’s Work

While the vision of a successful ECEC strategy offered in the OECD’s 2001 report, and the specific recommendations outlined in the 2006 report were not radical to some OECD countries, to many others, including Canada, that vision and those recommendations offered were radical, to say the least. Most liberal welfare states, for example, are far away from having established “a universal approach to access” as well as “substantial public investment in services and infrastructure.” Liberal market approaches tend to predominate, even in countries such as the UK which has increased public ECEC spending over the past ten years (for details see White, 2008b). Indeed, a market-based and particularly a large corporate-based system can be a hindrance to even the most benign of the OECD’s recommendations such as accumulation of data on quality, staffing, and so on. Some companies may claim that such information is private and “proprietary” company information (Brennan, 2008).

To illustrate how contrary the Starting Strong project was to traditional policy approaches in liberal welfare states in particular, we can examine why Canada was initially excluded from the initial round of country reviews.¹⁴ When the OECD embarked on its country reviews in the late 1990s, it deliberately adopted the language of “early childhood education and care” as opposed to the language of “child care” which OECD reports and other studies had until then used (e.g. OECD, 1990; European Commission Childcare Network, 1990; European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996). “Child care”, however, did not accurately capture the range of formal services that existed in many OECD countries for children under the age of compulsory school, nor did it fully capture the educational thrust behind its research agenda. When the Education Directorate of the OECD contacted country governments to ask them to be part of the review, Canadian federal government officials from Human Resources and Development Canada declined as it pointed out that education was a provincial responsibility [check to make sure I have that right]. Then, when members of the Canadian delegation to the OECD’s 2001 Early Childhood Education and Care: International Policy Issues Conference in Stockholm successfully persuaded the federal government to participate in the second round of reviews, HRDC Canada had a difficult time persuading provincial governments to allow a federal government study in an area of provincial jurisdiction. In the end, only four provinces hosted site visits by the OECD review team: British Columbia, Manitoba, Prince Edward Island, and Saskatchewan (OECD, 2004).

Thus, one of the most significant impacts of the OECD project may have had in Canada has been helping to make the link between early childhood education and child care in the minds of Canadian federal and provincial policy officials and to draw attention to the need to link child care and education services administratively (although federalism concerns prevent those linkages from being made across levels of government). The power of the OECD thus lies in its peer review function. As Pagani (2002, p. 5) notes, “peer review is characterized by dialogue and interactive investigation” with country officials, which can influence those officials’ thinking during the process. And as Porter and Webb (2007) argue, through its knowledge production function, the OECD is also engaged in norm creation.

¹⁴ The following information is based on a presentation given on 15 August 2001 by one of the Canadian delegates to the OECD’s Early Childhood Education and Care: International Policy Issues Conference held in Stockholm, Sweden, 13-15 June 2001.

The other useful part of the OECD exercise was highlighting cross-national policy trends, with the implication being that there are leaders and laggards. As Pagani (2002, p. 5) notes, peer review can lead to “peer pressure” where the level of public scrutiny exercised during the process and after completion, along with “comparisons and, in some cases, even ranking among countries,” and domestic media attention and public opinion shifts can pressure change. The OECD study was the first to highlight discrepancies in ECEC provision between liberal welfare states and those of continental Europe. The only other large cross-national research project – by the European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile Employment and Family Responsibilities – surveyed only those countries belonging to the European Community at the time (e.g. European Commission Childcare Network, 1990; European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996). As Pagani (2002, p. 6) argues, “Peer pressure does not take the form of legally binding acts, as sanctions and other enforcement mechanisms. Instead, it is a means of soft persuasion which can become an important driving force to stimulate the State to change, achieve goals and meet standards.”

The OECD 2001 Starting Strong report (p. 8) identified seven trends: “1) expanding provision toward universal access; 2) raising the quality of provision; 3) promoting coherence and co-ordination of policy and services; 4) exploring strategies to ensure adequate investment in the system; 5) improving staff training and work conditions; 6) developing appropriate pedagogical frameworks for young children; and 7) engaging parents, families and communities.” The extensive data reported in the two OECD studies and in the country background reports and country notes allowed policy researchers and advocacy organizations to highlight Canada’s comparatively poor performance (e.g. Friendly, Beach, Ferns, and Turiano, 2007). In countries where governments tend to be much more willing to borrow policy ideas from other jurisdictions, including IOs, that shaming can resonate amongst domestic policy officials, and be picked up by advocacy groups and the media. Indeed, while Canada and the USA were both chastised as laggards in the OECD (2001) report, the media gave that much greater play in Canada, whereas I have not discovered similar attention in the USA, reflecting cross-national differences in the extent to which countries see themselves as part of international society.¹⁵ In fact, one House of Representatives staff person, when asked whether the House’s focus in the mid-2000s on the quality and effectiveness of federal programs such as Head Start was influenced by reports such as that by the OECD, stated that House discussions and decisions are being driven solely by internal politics and partisan debate between Republicans and Democrats about what role, if any, the government should be playing in the delivery of early childhood development programs and services (personal interview, 19 February 2004, Washington, D.C.).

However, as Pagani (2002, pp. 12-13) argues, for peer review and peer pressure to be effective, there must be “convergence among the participating countries on the standards or criteria against which to evaluate performance” and there must be mutual trust and credibility in the examiners chosen to conduct the review. In the case of Canada, some public commentators (e.g. Wentz, 2004, p. A19) questioned the credentials of the people who conducted Canada’s review. Wentz claimed that the country note was written by “two of Canada’s leading daycare lobbyists” which was incorrect but served to undermine the credibility of the international team

¹⁵For documentaton of the media reports and advocacy organization responses to the OECD (2004) country report, see CRRU’s issue file. Online: <http://www.childcarecanada.org/res/issues/oecdthematicreviewcanadareports.html>. See, for e.g. Strang and Chang (1993, p. 250) on the US’s nonparticipation in international standard setting on social welfare through the ILO, and its refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol.

of examiners.¹⁶ One interviewee also reported that the final version of the OECD country note required some negotiation and massage. This interviewee said that the first version of the Country Note was much harsher, especially with regard to ECEC services for aboriginal peoples in Canada, but that the report was reworked given that federal and provincial governments were in the midst of negotiating policy changes [confirm].¹⁷ All of these factors may have contributed to less peer pressure as a result.

Domestic Policy Change and Domestic-International Norm Congruence

The evidence presented above suggests no one vision of ECEC policies and programs has become dominant at the international level; the meaning and value of “early learning” and “care” programs remains contested. What about at the domestic level?

One other way the OECD may be contributing to domestic policy change is through what has been labeled “the PISA effect” (e.g. Jensen, 2008): that is how countries are performing on cross-national comparable educational assessments such as the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) or the US Department of Education’s Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). The USA has been collecting comparative data since 1995 and every four years hence. The OECD first reported its results in 2000 and every three years hence. The results of those assessments for liberal welfare states in particular reveal that Canada and Australia perform consistently above average, indeed, near the top of the international rankings, whereas the USA performs consistently at or below average on both PISA and TIMSS. The results for New Zealand and the UK vary. In the 1999 TIMSS results, New Zealand and England performed similarly to the USA on mathematics achievement of eighth-graders, but while New Zealand and the USA performed similarly on science achievement, England performed better - similarly to Australia and Canada (IES, 2008). On OECD PISA (e.g. 2001, 2007) assessments, however, New Zealand performs consistently well above average, similarly to Australia and Canada whereas the UK performs poorly (although not as poorly as the USA which ranks at or below average among the participating countries (White, 2008b, 2008c).

One could hypothesize is that countries that perform relatively poorly on these international rankings would be more likely to be willing to invest public funding in cognitively-focused early childhood education as a means to improve student test scores. And in fact, amongst liberal welfare states, the UK and USA have paid the most attention (along with New Zealand) to developing their early childhood education programs as opposed to child care programs, whereas Australia has focused more attention on child care program expansion than “early learning.” New Zealand’s attention to ECE investment and ECEC integration seems to disprove that hypothesis. However, as White (2008b) demonstrates, New Zealand was an early leader in ECEC integration and ECE investment. By its own acknowledgement (Statistics New Zealand, 1998, pp. 30-31), New Zealand performed extremely poorly on the 1995 TIMSS

¹⁶ The OECD’s international team consisted of John Bennett from the OECD, Bea Buysse from Belgium, Païve Lindberg from Finland and Helen Penn from the UK (OECD, 2006, p. 438). The background report, in contrast, as in all countries, was written by three in-country experts (Doherty, Friendly, and Beach, 2003) and was commissioned by the Government of Canada.

¹⁷ Pagani (2002, p. 13) states “The involvement of the reviewed State in the process and its ownership of the outcome of the peer review is the best guarantee that it will ultimately endorse the final report and implement its recommendations. However, the State’s involvement should not go so far as to endanger the fairness and the objectivity of the review. For example, the State under review should not be permitted to veto the adoption of all or part of the final report.”

assessment which may have prompted the New Zealand government to invest in ECE, among other reforms. Further research would need to be conducted to establish this causal link. But certainly in the case of Australia and Canada, “PISA complacency” as opposed to “PISA shock” could explain why there is less domestic outcry for school readiness programming than in the UK and USA.

Domestic reaction to cross-national performance evaluations suggests the potential emergence of a new norm: that student performance in reading, math, and science is one of the measures of whether a state is modern or not (Meyer et al., 1997), and that countries should be encouraged to adopt ECE programs out of human capital development concerns. It is surprising, then, that poorly performing countries are NOT rushing out to adopt universal high quality school-based pre-k programs.

This paper now turns to briefly document changes at the domestic level in liberal welfare states to determine to what extent these new ideas in evidence at the international level are also reflected in domestic policy developments.

Measuring the Extent of Domestic ECEC Norm Change

Comparative research on ECEC provision often analyzes broad cross-national data such as overall patterns of child care and ECE provision (e.g. Daly and Rake, 2003) in order to determine the extent of cross-national policy change, general shifts in societal norms regarding work and family, and the respective roles of states, markets and families in providing care. Jensen (2008), for example, explores the extent of ECEC norm change using two quantitative measures: percentage change in public expenditure on child care and ECE services over time; and the extent to which a country’s curriculum tradition emphasizes school readiness rather than social pedagogical tradition. But tracking the scope and nature of ECEC policy change is not easily done by looking at broad policy indicators, such as levels of public spending as a percentage of GDP, overall provision rates, or a country’s traditional policy emphasis. For example, a country’s overall spending on ECEC may be low compared to other policy areas but that may mask significant new investment, or mask significant shifts in instrument choice. As well, overall levels of provision (that is, what percentage of children are using services) reveals little about the kinds of services in place, the mandate (educational or otherwise) of those services, and so on. Finally, coding countries’ traditional curriculum emphases may not capture the quite radical shifts in both thinking and resultant policies witnessed recently in a number of countries.

Broad cross-national data surveys, therefore, do not reveal the myriad changes that are going on within liberal welfare regimes and the extent to which fundamental shifts in policy orientation have occurred. Instead, as the policy paradigm literature suggests, it is important to examine the overarching goals that guide policy making in a given policy area as well as the policy instruments used to obtain those goals and the settings of those instruments (Hall, 1993). Thus, in another paper (White, 2008b), I develop a more complex set of measures to discern the scope and nature of ECEC policy change within liberal welfare regimes that analyzes changes in gender norms, child care and ECE system-building norms, and child care and ECE system-integration norms (see Table 1). Those indicators of norm change are based on best practices identified, for example, in OECD (2001, p. 7) and OECD (2006, p. 3) that specify what factors are necessary to achieve a system of early learning and child care that provides “a fair start in life for all children, and contribute[s] to educational equity and social integration” and supports “the social needs of families”, including parental employment.

Gender norm change can be measured by the extent to which a state provides labor market- and family-supportive family policies such as maternity and parental leave rights and paid leave provisions. A country's relative degree of gender equality leadership can also be measured by how effective that parental leave is: that is, to what extent the length of maternity/parental leave, combined with wage replacement rate, usefully allows parents to take a leave from paid employment (Plantenga and Siegel, 2004) but that also encourage them to return to paid employment. Another measure is to what extent the state provides ECEC programs that are structured around the parental work day and for younger as well as older children. Societal norm shifts can be discerned in the extent to which mothers with young children return to work after having a baby, or return to work full-time as opposed to part-time.

Commitment to human capital development versus social pedagogy norms is a little more difficult to tease out in domestic policies. Countries interested in human capital development would likely commit to full-day child care funding in order to support women's labour market participation; they would also likely commit to funding early childhood education programs, especially if they embrace the scientific arguments that high quality early years investments pay off economically in later years. In other words, countries with an interest in human capital development would likely commit resources to ECEC system building beyond simply state funding of ECEC services. It is thus also important to measure the extent to which governments fund formal as opposed to informal forms of care; impose national or centralized regulations and staff standards; and set a national or centralized curriculum. The extent to which government investment provides an effective system of ECEC delivery for parents can also be measured by the percentage of program costs parents assume.

While human capital development programs would likely be targeted to particular populations, a more social pedagogical approach to delivery would likely include more universal provision, emphasis on quality indicators that encompass the whole child. Both human capital and social pedagogical approaches would likely emphasize quality service provision and ECEC system integration. Measurements of system integration norms include to what extent administrative authority is vested in a single administrative unit within a level of government; the degree to which service delivery is coordinated between levels of government; and the degree to which services are delivered by one level of government in federal systems.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Fragmentation in Domestic ECEC Norms

As Table 1 demonstrates, there is a great deal of fragmentation in liberal welfare states' ECEC policies and programs. It is thus very difficult to claim that domestic policy changes observed in these countries reflect a single paradigm, gender or otherwise. While all liberal welfare states have increased public funding on ECEC programs, and while there has been an increase in overall provision of child care and ECE services from that which existed in the late 1980s, very different policy choices are being made as to the kinds of programs that are being supported and the ways the money is being spent.

First, in some countries, traditional gender norms (O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver, 1999) persist, as reflected in the non-provision of national paid maternity or parental leave (Australia, USA), the high percentage of mothers' part-time employment (Australia, UK) and lower percentages of mothers with young children or multiple children who participate in the labor market (Australia, UK). Some countries such as New Zealand and the UK are doing more to

support mothers' labor market participation by introducing paid maternity and parental leave, as Canada has traditionally done. But the amount of effective parental leave as Plantenga and Siegel (2004) define it remains below the OECD median in all countries save for the province of Quebec, which introduced its own provincial parental leave scheme in 2006 (for details see Friendly et al, 2007, p. 62).

There is also evidence of continued emphasis on parental responsibility and parental choice in locating child care services (Australia, Canada, UK, USA), with only New Zealand providing extensive funding to support ECEC infrastructure. However, there clearly has been a paradigm shift in some countries regarding the responsibility for funding for those services. In Australia and the province of Quebec, governments have committed to developing full-day child care for parents through parental subsidies, although of mixed quality (Japel, Tremblay, and Côté, 2005) and, in the case of Australia, high cost (Brennan, 2004). The result is positive labor market effects in the case of Quebec (Baker, Gruber, and Milligan, 2005) but not so in Australia (see Table 1). And in New Zealand, while the government funds all forms of ECEC services, full-day programs have proven to be more popular than part-day government-subsidized ECE services, the former which are labor market supportive but require parents to pay fees (White, 2008b).

In the UK and USA, a paradigm shift has occurred as well with regard to the importance of supporting at least low-income mothers' paid labor market participation. Lewis (2003, p. 221) argues that the UK government's 1998 National Childcare Strategy represented "radical" change in the UK because, by providing public funding for child care services, it was acknowledging for the first time "the desirability of collectively provided childcare" and a model of the family where all adults are wage-earners. A concern to transform low-income single mothers in the USA into wage earners drove the US government to include child care funding as part of welfare reforms in 1996 (Orloff, 2005). In both the UK and USA, there seems to be a growing consensus that low-income and single parents especially need child care in order to participate in the paid labor market, but that has not translated into an acknowledgement of the need for these services for *all* families. The extent to which one can claim that the UK and US governments have moved away from male breadwinner/female caregiver norms to the adult wage earner norm for *all* women is limited by the fact that parental subsidies for child care remain targeted in both countries, and the US government has not instituted a labor-market-supportive paid parental leave program. In the UK as well, despite the government's strong stated commitment to support parents' and particularly poor women's paid labour market participation,¹⁸ it has invested a great deal of public resources in part-day pre-school programs which are not necessarily conducive to parents' labour market participation. In Australia, in contrast, funding is increasingly directed to full-time child care programs, as it is in the province of Quebec.

There is thus a great deal of variation in liberal welfare states in their embrace of either gender equality norms or human capital development norms regarding parental (i.e. maternal) workforce participation. Similar variation and ambivalence can be observed regarding the embrace of ECE norms. In New Zealand, the UK, and USA, there seems to have been a normative shift toward valuing early learning experiences for young children. In each of these

¹⁸ In the UK, researchers (e.g. Gray, 2001; Lewis, 2001; Rake, 2001) point to a number of policy documents that signaled the Blair government's desire to encourage all adults – even lone parents who before then had received state support to care for children – to become wage-earners, including the 1998 policy document *New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare*. One can also point to the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit and the various New Deal programs, including New Deal for Lone Parents.

countries, while the nursery school movement has been strong in the past, and in New Zealand and the UK especially, there have been strong calls for universal pre-school programs for decades (Melhuish and Moss, 1992; Beatty, 1995; May, 1997), governments are finally committing to developing universal pre-k programs. The New Zealand government (Ministry of Education, NZ, 2007), and UK government (DfEE, 1998; HM Treasury, 2004) have both committed to funding part-time “free ECE” programs. In the USA as well, concerns about students’ educational performance (i.e. school readiness) and the effects of child poverty and social exclusion on children’s schooling and development have led state governments to commit more resources to developing universal pre-school education services (as opposed to child care services) (e.g. Kirp, 2007). Even the Australian Labor government has now committed to “ensure every four year old child has access to fifteen hours a week and 40 weeks a year of high quality preschool delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher” (Australian Labor Party, 2007, p. 1). In Canada, however, only two provincial governments – Ontario and British Columbia – have entertained the possibility of expanding current part-day programs for children aged four and five in Ontario and aged five in B.C., while the Quebec government chose not to pursue such a plan (Friendly et al., 2007). In fact, the Quebec Government’s decision to fund full-day kindergarten for children age five only, and subsidize full-day child care programs for children aged four and under, is contrary to trends in most other welfare states where governments have put more resources into pre-school rather than child care programs, although it mimics funding patterns in social democratic welfare states (White, 2008b). While the Quebec government labels its programs “educational child care”, (Ministère de l’Emploi, de la Solidarité Sociale et de la Famille, 1997; Ministère de la Famille et des Aînes, 2007), the programs are delivered through a range of providers, including commercial child care centres and family day care providers, and by staff with varied (and often limited) training, and not within schools by trained teachers, a point returned to below.

There also seems to be some fragmentation within liberal welfare regimes regarding the norms surrounding the purposes of these early years programs. That fragmentation is evident first in the administrative apparatus established to deliver these programs. While New Zealand and the UK (both unitary states) have integrated early learning and care services under a single administrative apparatus (within departments of education), in Australia, Canada, and the USA, child care and early childhood education are administered via separate departments, and, perhaps reflecting the vagaries of federalism, separate jurisdictions. Only some states and provinces in Canada and the United States have attempted to integrate service delivery. The Australian government in 2004 introduced measures to try to coordinate services across states and territories, although it remains to be seen what those mechanisms of coordination would be (White, 2008b).

Second, while most governments claim to be increasingly concerned with the cognitive or developmental “deliverables” of these ECEC programs, most remain wholly agnostic as to who delivers the programs. In all countries except Canada, governments have encouraged ECE delivery in a variety of settings including schools, as well as public and private (and increasingly for-profit) child care centres, family day care homes, and so on, and by staff with varying levels of educational training. Commitment to either human capital development or social pedagogy seems weak at best when governments remain agnostic to delivering these programs in schools with trained staff.

The New Zealand government has gone much farther than other countries in trying to manage the ECEC system, including instituting national regulations, staff standards, and a

national curriculum, but has not moved away from contracting service delivery, instead providing monetary incentives to services that hire more qualified staff and meet lower child/staff ratios. The 2007 Free ECE program also does require parents to enroll children in teacher-led programs offered in a variety of settings (Ministry of Education, NZ, 2007). In the UK, in contrast, the government provides ECE grants to programs which simply have to agree to try to implement the government's curriculum, although there are no national requirements regarding teacher training. The UK does have the lowest average child-staff ratios for children under age four, followed by the USA, then New Zealand, Canada, and Australia, which research demonstrates is an important factor in service quality (OECD, 2008, PF14). In addition, the UK's Childcare Bill of 2005 imposes a common inspection process for all regulated ECEC services, including schools, serving children under the age of eight (OECD, 2006, p. 48).

The policy instruments used to deliver programs, and the governance and management of those programs are thus crucial factors to analyze in order to determine whether liberal welfare states have moved away from traditional liberal market norms in ECEC provision. Normative adherence to liberal market norms undermines governments' ability to achieve other goals such as encouraging women's workforce participation and high quality educational programs. Systems based on for-profit service delivery, for example, tend to translate into higher costs for parents, making it more difficult for parents to afford to work, even if the state is providing a lot of funding. This can be seen when one compares data regarding the share of costs assumed by parents compared to governments for ECEC with net child care costs, that is, what it actually costs parents in terms of their out-of-pocket expenses, taking into account fees charged by centres and any government-provided benefits and tax concessions. The OECD (2007b) reports that the cost of care in terms of a family's net income for two income earners with full-time earnings with 100 per cent of average earnings in 2004 was in fact highest in the UK, followed by New Zealand, then Canada, the USA, and Australia; and for a lone parent was highest in New Zealand, followed by the USA, Canada, the UK, and Australia. The relatively low net cost of child care in Australia could be due to the fact that the Australian government provides generous tax rebates to parents to offset the high costs of care, which creates the ironic situation where the government both fuels the provision of expensive commercial care through its subsidy system and then has to offset those prices with parental tax rebates. In addition, there are no financial incentives for for-profit centres to improve quality (Sumsion, 2006), unless a government provides those incentives or mandates. The lesson seems to be that it not only matters how much a government spends but also how it spends and how much it is willing to exercise governance and management functions as to whether programs can deliver human capital development or social pedagogical goals.

Despite the relatively low levels of ECEC funding and provision in Canada, it stands out as a (positive) outlier among liberal welfare states for two reasons: one, most (but not all) provincial governments have accepted that if child care services are to be delivered by the private sector, the governance structure should be predominantly not-for-profit, rather than for-profit (see Friendly et al., 2007 for statistics); two, most provincial governments (so far) have accepted that if they are going to deliver early childhood education services, they should be provided through public schools. Thus, while Canada ranks lowest in the percentage of four-year-olds with access to publicly funded ECE services, it stands out as the only country¹⁹ where those ECE services are predominantly delivered through public schools by trained teachers.

¹⁹ The state of Oklahoma similarly delivers its universal ECE program through public schools (Barnett et al., 2006).

Conclusion

This paper goes beyond many conventional accounts of policy change that simply consider the role of domestic policy actors (governments and outside actors such as interest groups) to examine the role of International Organizations in the development of social policy norms. The paper demonstrates that ECEC policy has been internationalized; that IOs, in addition to domestic governments, are reconsidering childhood, the nature of learning, and the kinds of programs necessary for successful childhood and adult lives. That shift in thinking to new norms may work to overcome domestic governments' normative resistance to state-funded child care and ECE programs.

This paper also demonstrates that while there have been clear policy shifts in liberal welfare states regarding ECEC funding, there is also demonstrable fragmentation in the norms underpinning these policies. There is some evidence of support for parental labour market participation and workplace gender equality; some evidence of social program provision to overcome social exclusion and economic disadvantage for both parents and children; but only spotty attention to quality programming to ensure children thrive in terms of their social, intellectual and emotional development. No country in this study²⁰ appears to accept children's rights arguments, which would be reflected in universal programming as a right of citizenship, as exists in some countries in Europe. And none appear to accept the social pedagogical approach to early childhood development and care that the OECD prescribes. Thus, in response to the question of whether liberal welfare states demonstrate adherence to any of the norms articulated within international organizations, the answer is, "if we could only be so lucky."

²⁰ Although outside of the scope of this paper, I hypothesize that similar results can be found in "liberal mimicking" welfare states such as Ireland and the Netherlands.

Table 1
Dimensions of Change in Liberal ECEC Regimes

Gender norms		Child care and ECE system-building norms		Child care and ECE system integration norms	
Paid maternity/parental leave	Yes: Canada*, NZ, UK No: Aus, USA	Public spending on child care and ECE service operations and not just parent subsidies	Yes: Aus for certain specialized services, NZ, UK No: Can at federal level; minimal at prov'al level Minimal: USA? Fed and state?	All services administered under a single administrative authority within a level of govt	Yes: NZ: Min of Education* UK: Dept of Education and Employment No: Aus, Can, USA
Effective parental leave	Median among OECD: Que < median: UK, Can, NZ, Aus, USA	Universal versus targeted programs	Yes: Aus nascent plans for ECE; UK for ECE; some ECE in USA states; min ECE in Can provs NZ: govt funding for all ECEC services but not for all parents Que: govt funding for all parents who wish for child care	Service delivery coordination between levels of govt (in federal systems)	Yes: some recent attempts in Aus No: Can, USA
% employed mothers with children ages 3-5	> 60%: Can, USA,	Encouragement of not-for-profit services	Yes: some provisions in Can	Involvement outside constitutional	Yes: Aus, USA

	NZ <60%: UK <50%: Aus	and more formal forms of care	No and yes: NZ govt funds for all forms of services but provides grants for not-for-profit services No: Aus, UK, USA	jurisdiction (in federal systems)	No: minimal in Can
% employed mothers with 3 children	> 60%: Can <60%: Aus, NZ <50%: UK USA N/A	National regulations to improve quality	Yes: Aus, NZ, UK No: Can, USA	Decentralization of authority over service provision	[Still to be scored based on Luc Turgeon's research and Lewis, Evers, Riedel (2005); Wincott (2005)]
% mothers with 2+ children who work part-time	>60%: Aus, UK <60%: NZ <30%: Can, USA	National staff training standards	Yes: NZ No: Aus, Can, UK, USA		
Child care availability for younger age groups	> 30%: USA, Que, NZ <30%: Aus, Can, UK	National curriculum	Yes: NZ, UK No: Aus (but broad statement of goals), Can, USA		

ECEC policy emphasis on full-day rather than part-day programs	More: Aus, Que Both: NZ? Less: UK, USA Neither: Can	Public delivery of universally accessible services w/ costs assumed by state	None		
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* indicates early leader;

Source: White (2008b)

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