1. Introduction

*Research Strategy, Themes, and Scope*

The history of caring for young children in Alberta is one of unexpected and often paradoxical turns of policy, of vigorous arguments and counterarguments about issues such as the appropriateness of mothers’ employment and the desirability of commercial rather than not-for-profit day care, and of competing sentiments of indifference toward and passionate concern about the quality of children’s care. It is also a story of countless hours of hard work by undervalued and often unacknowledged caregivers, the vast majority of whom have been women. Therefore, investigating day care in Alberta requires an exploration of the “gendered social worlds” in which caring work has been accomplished (Ribbens 1994, 14) as well as the world of policy struggles involving governments and bureaucrats, movements and countermovements, experts and parents.

Alberta’s approach to child care has long been recognized as anomalous relative to that of other Canadian provinces. For instance, in 1992 substantially more licensed centre-based spaces in Alberta were found in commercial than in not-for-profit facilities (65 percent to 35 percent); in the rest of Canada, commercial spaces constituted only 25 percent of the total (CRRU 1994, 87). In Calgary, where I had moved in 1989, commercial day cares were typically located on commuter routes. They sought new customers by distributing discount coupons in nearby neighbourhoods, promoting their brand names, and (in some cases) maintaining an attractive playground to create curb appeal for potential new customers. This decidedly commercialized approach to day care had more in common with developments in states like Texas and Florida than with what was happening elsewhere in Canada.

Alberta was indeed an anomalous case at that time, but not in any simplistic or easily categorized way. For instance, in the early 1990s, the Government of
Alberta modestly subsidized the care of every child in a licensed day care centre. This universal funding program allowed Alberta day cares to keep parental fees relatively low and meant that licensed day care was more accessible to full-fee-paying parents in Alberta than anywhere else in Canada. Another feature of the day care landscape in Alberta was the extraordinary variation in day cares among communities—a vestige of the 1970s, when municipal governments were delegated the authority to initiate subsidized day care services (although through cost sharing with the other levels of government, municipalities only had to pay twenty cents on the dollar for new services). From the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, Medicine Hat was the most active of Alberta’s municipal governments in planning and delivering day care services. So significant were its efforts that the national advisor on child care for Health and Welfare Canada, Howard Clifford, stated in 1993 that Medicine Hat was not only “the most progressive community in Alberta in terms of child care” but “the equal of any community in Canada” (221).

This particular history of child care in Alberta begins in chapter 2 with the establishment of Alberta’s first day nursery in Edmonton in 1908. Subsequent developments, especially during World War II, are given considerable attention in chapter 2. Alberta, like Ontario and Quebec, signed an agreement with the federal government to participate in the Dominion-Provincial Wartime Day Nursery Program but, unlike the other two provinces, never established any day nurseries at that time. The core of the book, however, consists of chapters 3 to 8, which focus on developments in day care between the mid-1960s and the late 1990s. Remarkable twists and turns in provincial policies and programs occurred during this relatively short time period. Indeed, the controversies over day care reveal a great deal about the patterns of power and inequalities in Alberta society in the last third of the twentieth century. Chapter 9 concludes the book with an examination of how day care in Alberta changed through the first decade of the new millennium and links historical developments to contemporary policy questions.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to outline the research strategy, themes, and scope of the book. My analytical focus is on group care of young children while the adults who are normally responsible for them (usually one or two parents) work or go to school. Although this sort of group care existed in Alberta over the entire period in question, the name used to designate it shifted over time. In the early decades, “day nursery” was a favourite term. Between the 1960s and 1980s, “day care” replaced “day nursery” to the extent that the latter now evokes images of a bygone era. In the 1980s, many people working in
the field started to use “child care” instead of “day care.” More recently, “early learning and child care” or “early childhood education and care” have been the favourite terms of experts and policy makers. Despite these shifts in terminology, I have used “day care” in the title of this book and throughout the remaining pages. I do so for two reasons.

First, even though the term “day care” is widely understood, it often evokes strong and divergent opinions among Albertans. An important goal of this history is to explain what lies behind the strong reactions of so many people to the seemingly innocuous descriptive term “day care.” Second, much of this book is concerned with struggles over the character of government regulation and the funding of what the provincial government has officially called “day care centres” or “day care programs.” The title of this book is therefore consistent with Alberta’s regulatory language.¹

RESEARCH STRATEGY

As a sociologist engaged in historical scholarship, I have drawn upon themes and concepts grounded in particular theoretical perspectives and debates. To my mind, the advantages of this approach are twofold. First, the historical narrative may attract the interest of a broader group of people, including those who are only marginally concerned with the development of day care in Alberta but who are keenly interested in the conflict between social conservatives and free market conservatives (neo-liberals) over the agenda of the conservative political movement. Second, the researcher is given the opportunity to consider the broader theoretical relevance of a historical narrative and to engage in what Michael Burawoy calls the “reconstruction of theory” (1998, 20–22) in order to advance our knowledge of social processes that operate in many social fields and settings in addition to the care of young children in Alberta. This book’s theoretical contribution, found in the concluding chapter, involves a discussion of the social mechanisms that have created recurring patterns of events and discourse.

This history also includes a comparative focus. It is impossible to appreciate the broader significance of developments in Alberta without reference to day care in other jurisdictions. Among the many useful categories of comparators is other Canadian provinces and territories, particularly those with relatively strong economies and large urban populations. These comparators are part of the same set of federal-provincial relations as Alberta and are consequently
useful for highlighting how day care in Alberta has developed in distinctive ways despite pressures to follow the policy guidelines of the federal government or the policy initiatives of other provinces. Another category is American states where, like Alberta, a marked expansion of commercial day care chains took place in the 1980s, notably Texas, California, Florida, and North Carolina (Neugebauer 1989, 16). These comparators are valuable in that they enable me to identify the extent to which day care in Alberta has developed in ways parallel to the most commercialized of the American states.

Alberta is an oil-and-gas producer, and it is thus useful to compare the development of day care in Alberta with another oil-and-gas-producing jurisdiction in order to gauge the impact of the economic boom-and-bust cycle on child care. Texas is the comparator in this category, and I pay particular attention to child care developments in Houston and Calgary when oil prices collapsed in the mid-1980s. Finally, certain select countries and regions have developed exemplary systems of early childhood education and care. Unlike the other three categories of comparators, these exemplars are not similar to Alberta on either the dependent variable (nature of the day care system) or key independent variables (political system and character of the economy) and thus cannot be used to explain developments in Alberta. I discuss one of these exemplars, Sweden, in order to highlight the unique features of Alberta’s approach to day care at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s. The consideration of Sweden also serves as a concrete reminder that the care of young children in Alberta could have been organized on a much different basis than it eventually was.

This is a case study rather than a work of systematic comparison. In the latter, equivalent data for two or more cases are presented and analyzed, usually in order to test hypotheses based upon theory or previous research findings. An example of such a comparative research design is a study by Linda A. White, who systematically compared child care policy development in Alberta and Ontario from 1980 to 1996. Her goal was to assess the hypothesis that in times of fiscal crisis, right-wing governments will attempt to change the nature and limit the scope of social programs at the same time as they cut spending, while left-wing governments will simply cut spending (1997, 8).

I decided against a systematic-comparison research design for two reasons. First, I felt it important to undertake detailed, labour-intensive research on day care in Alberta so as to avoid arriving at superficial or incomplete conclusions and to ensure that I did not ignore important sources and perspectives. Given this commitment to primary research, it was impossible to contemplate
equivalent research for other jurisdictions (and hope to complete the project sometime in this lifetime). Second, I am unconvinced that testing hypotheses using data from comparable cases is the most effective way to develop understandings of historical processes. Hypotheses are usually stated in terms of a small set of variables and proceed by abstracting those variables from the complex, historically specific relations they have with other variables. A great deal is lost in this abstraction process, as has been noted in prominent critiques of variable-type analysis over the years (e.g., Abbott 1992; Blumer 1956). This loss can be justified in studies of structural patterns over a large number of cases. However, when the goal is to understand process rather than structural pattern, and when few rather than many cases are being studied, variable-type, case-comparison analysis limits rather than furthers knowledge.

Nevertheless, variable-type analysis can be useful in case-study research when it is applied to units that are embedded within the primary case. For the Alberta day care system, the embedded units include municipalities (where there are a few dozen cases) and licensed day cares (where there are hundreds of cases). I comparatively analyze these embedded units not as an end in itself but rather to build up a richer understanding of the historical development of day care in Alberta. In Robert Yin’s terms, my study has an embedded, single-case research design (2009, 47–53).

KEY CONCEPTS AND THEMES

The history of day care in Alberta involves a complex conjunction of economic, social, and political processes. At any single point in the story, I am interested in explaining why a particular policy decision on day care was made and not another. Economic, social, and political factors must all be considered when trying to explain such decisions. Furthermore, I am concerned with understanding the consequences of crucial policy decisions for subsequent developments in day care.

In studying the influence of economic factors on the history of day care, I have drawn upon insights from the field of political economy. In line with my training as a sociologist, my conception of the “social” begins by identifying major social inequalities in Alberta society. In this history, I consider how patterns of social inequalities have influenced developments in day care. As a political sociologist, my understanding of politics encompasses both societal groups
and state groups. I examine how social movement organizations and interest groups have mobilized resources to shape the direction of day care in Alberta. I also pay attention to how divisions within and between states have figured in the development of day care in Alberta. The purpose of the rest of this section is to outline briefly the key concepts and themes that I have drawn from each of these areas of scholarship.

Political Economy of Day Care

Conventional economic analysis of day care is concerned with issues such as the effect of day care costs on women’s decision making about employment, the efficiency of the day care market, and the economic rationale for government subsidies of day care (see, for example, Blau 1991; Cleveland and Krashinsky 1998). In contrast, political economy has a broader focus: how day care fits into the overall operation of the economy on local, regional, national, and international scales. In addition, political economy differs from conventional economic analysis because it analyzes and critiques, rather than takes for granted, the different types of power relations that structure day care’s place in the economy.

Because of the importance of commercial day care in Alberta, the political-economic concepts of commodification and de-commodification are of particular relevance. A service like child care can be supplied through markets or, alternatively, by family members, friends, community groups, or state organizations. Child care has been organized in Alberta such that monetized exchange pervades all forms of provision and a market logic must be implemented to some extent by all providers because of the strength of the market-based commercial sector. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to conclude that, as a consequence, child care in Alberta is wholly commodified. As has been recently noted by Colin Williams (2009, 68), a service is commodified only when it is delivered to make a profit. As a consequence, monetized exchange is not synonymous with commodification, and services organized under the auspices of state agencies or community groups are definitely not commodified. Williams even argues that, in some circumstances, private businesses are driven by a rationale other than profit (72). This is relevant to the field of child care in Alberta since some commercial owners appear to have a track record of putting children’s interests ahead of return on investment. Therefore, from a political-economic perspective, Alberta is an interesting case for study because of the relative parity of the commercial
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and non-commercial day care sectors and the consequent tension between the processes of commodification and de-commodification. Further complicating the politics of day care in Alberta is a strong pro-family movement that supports child care within family units along with the “pre-commodified” dependency of women that such an approach entails (Esping-Andersen 1999, 45).

This case study can also be used to raise broader questions about the character of Alberta’s form of the welfare state. More than two decades ago, Gøsta Esping-Andersen proposed three ideal types to aid in analyzing the empirical character of welfare state regimes: liberal, corporativist (later renamed “conservative”), and social democratic. Canada was identified as one of the “archetypical examples” of the liberal regime type as characterized by means-tested rather than universal benefits, strict entitlement rules, and promotion of welfare through private rather than public plans (1989, 25–27).

Esping-Andersen’s specification is a useful first approximation of Canada’s approach to social welfare. However, Gerard Boychuk (1998) has demonstrated how his designation ignores important provincial variations in social assistance provision and changes in provincial social assistance regimes over time. Furthermore, Rianne Mahon (2008) has convincingly argued that three varieties of liberalism are currently contending to become “the dominant organizing principle” of the Canadian welfare regime: (1) a social liberalism that has an orientation toward program design that is very similar to social democracy, (2) a neo-liberalism with strong roots in classical liberalism, and (3) an inclusive liberalism that combines many broader neo-liberal perspectives with a stress on the empowering of individuals through education and training (343–45). These three varieties of liberalism are particularly apparent in the field of child care in Canada, where social liberal proposals for universal early learning programs contend with neo-liberal emphases on privatization (for example, the federal government’s $100 monthly payment for each child under six years of age) and with inclusive liberal programs such as early learning opportunities for young children “at risk” (358). Mahon’s schema is a useful tool for specifying the shifting and contested character of Alberta’s approach to child care over the past fifty years.

Social Inequalities

This book identifies inequalities of gender, class, immigrant status, and generation as being central to an understanding of the history of day care in Alberta.

Introduction
Day Care and the Gender Order

A gender order is the “historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women” in an entire society, along with the historically extant notions of masculinity and femininity (Connell 1987, 98–99). It is a concept that describes an overall pattern of gender relations, not necessarily the situation in every group or institution, and certainly not the experience of every individual. In Alberta throughout the period in question, the gender order was one of institutionalized male domination, which means that this domination could be observed in face-to-face settings like workplaces and homes, and in the normal operation of societal institutions like the mass media and religion (Connell 1990, 514). Nevertheless, between 1908 and 2009, important changes occurred in the gender order such that the overall level of societal male domination decreased and the particular character of male domination changed in all institutional sites. How day care fits into that changing gender order over time is one of the central thematic questions of this book.

Many feminists have argued, in the words of Sonya Michel, that “the key to women’s disadvantaged position in liberal polities and market economies lies in their cultural and social assignment to the family, specifically to the role of mother” (1999, 2). In this type of analysis, governmental support for child care by someone other than a mother is seen as an important extension of social citizenship rights: it allows women to escape the reality and expectation of compulsory motherhood and, as a result, gain greater opportunities for success and advancement in other fields of life (Orloff 1993, 318–19).

But not all types of publicly supported child care are equal in their capacities to transform the gender order. Child care by nannies may enhance the opportunities of higher-income women, but it does so by exploiting the limited opportunities of the women who work as nannies (Wrigley 1999). Exactly the same point applies when middle- and upper-income women place their children in low-wage family day homes (FDHS), day care centres, and out-of-school care (OOSC) centres; such low-wage workplaces predominated in Alberta prior to the establishment of an effective provincial wage enhancement program between 2005 and 2009. Furthermore, when government support for day care is organized as a low-cost alternative to welfare payments, the mother who is using day care does not necessarily benefit since she may be stuck working in a low-wage female job ghetto.

This critique also applies at the level of what children learn about gender while partaking in day care. The gender order, as defined above, includes cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity. When day care takes place in
social worlds where care is overwhelmingly an activity of women and men are largely absent, and when societal support for day care (in places such as church basements and crowded private homes) is clearly marginal compared to societal support for almost everything else, highly differentiated and hierarchically ordered notions of masculinity and femininity are learned.

Class Struggles in Day Care
A class is a category of people who bring distinctive sets of resources to the production of goods and services. Class is a salient element of human experience and identity since people who occupy a similar structural location over time may participate in class subcultures and, as a consequence, develop broad similarities in outlook and political commitment (Langford 2002). Classes struggle with one another over the distribution of resources in day care and over competing visions of the future of the day care system.

All of the major classes in contemporary capitalist societies are important players in child care in Alberta. First, there is the working class, defined as people who are paid to look after young children but who have no ownership or managerial role in a day care operation. It includes employees in day care centres, OOSC programs, and satellite FDHS; frontline government employees such as licensing inspectors; and nannies. The second and third classes constitute two distinct types of commercial owners. The first is owner-operators of commercial services who, although they may employ some workers, primarily depend upon their own labour and the labour of family members to keep their business going. This class includes the owners of small day care centres and of independent FDHS. For brevity, this group of small business owners can be termed the old middle class in day care. The second class of owners comprises the investors in large commercial centres or chains of centres, some of whom are involved in the management of day care operations while others are not. These capitalists employ day care workers in order to generate a return on their investment.

A fourth class involved in day care is the new middle class. It is made up of a somewhat diverse group of employees who, like workers, have no ownership stake in day care but who have some say over the direction of either a particular day care program or a day care policy. This new middle class includes the directors of day care centres and agencies, civil servants involved in managing the participation of governments in day care, the administrators of early childhood education programs, and the outside consultants and academics who periodically evaluate the day care system.
Immigrant Status and the Ownership of Commercial Day Cares

There has been a boom in immigrant ownership of small businesses in Western Canadian cities since the early 1970s. New immigrants are typically drawn to investing in businesses “that require relatively small capital outlays, no specific educational qualifications and where technical barriers are low” (Kloosterman 2000, 94). Prior to 30 November 1990, Alberta did not require directors of day care centres to have any educational qualifications. Furthermore, small day cares can be purchased fairly cheaply and are often attached to a residence where a proprietor’s family can live; day care is also a decidedly “low-tech” activity. As a consequence, in response to the strong demand for day care in the late 1970s and 1980s, many new immigrants invested in commercial day cares in Alberta. This changed the racial/ethnic face of the ownership of commercial day care in Alberta since, starting in the late 1970s, immigration from Asia surpassed immigration from Europe (Kalbach 2000, 26–27).

Gender and class inequalities have been integral to the history of day care in Alberta from the very beginning. Inequalities involving racialized and ethnicized groups, in comparison, were of secondary importance in shaping policy developments in the early years. Changes in the ownership patterns of commercial day cares in the 1980s, however, increased the importance of racialization and ethnicity as factors affecting developments in day care. This importance was further extended by government emphasis on early intervention programs for “at-risk” children beginning in the 1990s; as documented in chapter 9, this led to an increase in the number of day cares in Aboriginal communities at the same time as the overall number of day cares in Alberta declined.

Forgotten Generational Inequalities

The final type of inequality to be singled out for special attention in this study involves generations. In conceptualizing “generation,” I follow McDaniel (2001, 197), who detaches the notion from birth cohort and argues that people are part of a generation by virtue of their social roles (e.g., mother, grandfather). In general terms, intergenerational relations involving young children are dependent upon both cohort processes and historical change. In studying the history of day care in Alberta, I have paid attention to how successive cohorts of young children have experienced day care in light of the changing patterns of intergenerational relations. Fundamental to understanding these social relations are intergenerational inequalities, particularly in regard to human rights and social citizenship benefits.
Society and State in the Making of Day Care in Alberta

This study assumes that contemporary states are shaped by the balance of forces in society (Jessop 1982, 221–24) but also have the legal, institutional, and political power to develop original policy responses in any particular conjuncture. It further assumes that divisions within and between states are consequential for the development of social policy. Given this perspective, the key issues in analyzing state actions are (1) to identify the possible policy courses given the existing balance of forces, (2) to ascertain both the societal groups and state actors that favour each possible policy course, and (3) to explain why one policy prevailed over others.

Societal Groups Compete to Influence Social Policy
The balance of forces in society is dynamic. Although it certainly depends upon the patterns of inequalities in a society, it is also affected by the relative success of societal groups in marshalling available resources to influence civil servants, political parties, government leaders, and the public. One of the defining features of day care as a policy issue in Alberta is that it has often engendered strong positions and hard lobbying/mobilizing efforts from a surprisingly wide variety of social groups.

My analyses of the actions and effects of societal groups draw upon concepts taken from the sociological literature on social movements (e.g., McAdam 1996) and the political science literature on interest groups (e.g., Maloney, Jordan, and McLaughlin 1994). Social movement organizations and interest groups both engage in conventional types of advocacy like lobbying and public education, and also undertake organizational activities like membership drives. What distinguishes social movement organizations from interest groups, however, is that they enjoy support from a significant number of ordinary citizens who are willing to engage in contentious as well as conventional political action and whose commitment to the movement’s cause spans an extended period of time (Tarrow 1998, 4). The movement for quality day care has waxed and waned over the years in Alberta; as a consequence, at particular points in the history (e.g., the 1970s), an organization like the Alberta Association for Young Children fits the definition of a social movement organization while at other times (e.g., the 1990s), it could be defined as an interest group. It is probably futile to try to classify an advocacy organization as either one or the other (Andrews and Edwards 2004, 483); nevertheless, it is still useful to recognize...
that when an organization enjoys widespread public support and is part of an organizational field that includes many like-minded groups, its capacity to influence policy is much different than when it is narrowly based and relatively isolated.

This book describes many instances where societal groups engaged in conventional lobbying efforts with municipal or provincial politicians. There are also a number of examples of groups mobilizing to counter the efforts of other groups. For instance, commercial operators in Calgary tried to disrupt the formation of the Bowness-Montgomery Day Care Association in 1968 (see chapter 3), and the pro-family movement that took shape in the 1980s can be seen as an attempt to counter significant changes in the gender order, including growing public investments in day care (see chapter 7). Indeed, just as some groups can be depicted as movement organizations, others can be described as counter-movement organizations.

**Divisions Within and Between States**

“The State” is a complex of institutions concerned with governing a territory. Furthermore, there are overlapping states with different scales of operation, namely, federal, provincial, and municipal. Divisions within and between states are crucial elements of the history of day care in Alberta. The main years of this study coincide with a period when state institutions became much more complex and when the provincial state expanded its jurisdiction vis-à-vis both municipal states and the federal state. Therefore, this book is an examination of the changing nature of governance in Alberta seen from the vantage point of day care policy.

This study records a surprising number of cases where civil servants and elected officials strongly disagreed over day care policy or administration, demonstrating just how controversial day care has been in Alberta. The tension over the years also reflects the fact that many civil servants remained attached to the social liberal model of high-quality, not-for-profit day care that was supported by the provincial government in the 1970s but abandoned thereafter.

A second type of division involves different departments of the provincial state. For instance, in the early 1980s, the Department of Education supported higher standards of training for day care workers than did the Department of Social Services and Community Health. This aligns with the research finding that social movements may win support from one state agency but be opposed by others (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1988).
Given the decentralized nature of the Canadian federation, it is not surprising that federal-provincial conflict is a recurring element of this history. Nevertheless, I also record important examples of federal-provincial collaboration, most notably in the mid-1960s when the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) was developed. “CAP was a product of multilateral executive federalism,” notes Michael Prince, “and the pattern of intimate intergovernmental consultation and interaction continued well into the 1970s” (2001, 797). Prince has identified “interprovincial/territorial collaboration” as a second model of federalism that has arisen in Canada in conjunction with the growing demands of provincial governments like Alberta for autonomy in social policy (805–9). This history pays close attention to the mode of federalism in play at different junctures. It is noteworthy that important policy and funding initiatives in day care in Alberta have sometimes been initiated by the federal government (in periods of executive federalism) but have at other times been the product of autonomous action by the Alberta government.

Finally, from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, conflict between municipalities and the province dominated the politics of day care in Alberta, with municipalities supporting demands for strong standards and generous funding. The province terminated this conflict in 1980 when it arbitrarily ended municipal participation in the provincial day care system. These events fit a pattern noted by a group of British sociologists in the late 1980s:

The exigencies of local situations will lead to local state managers developing policies in particular ways, possibly ways inappropriate from the viewpoint of those groups dominant at the centre. Furthermore, social relations are also unevenly developed and particular social groups which are not well represented in the power bloc dominating the national [or provincial] state may be locally important. The necessary degree of local state autonomy gives such groups leverage; they can begin to use state power to further their own interests and develop their own local interpretations of policy. (Goodwin, Duncan, and Halford 1988, 124)

This generic process helps to explain why the day care systems developed in various Alberta municipalities in the 1970s were so different from one another. It also aligns with Peter Saunders’ observation that central governments tend “to remove ‘contentious’, ‘strategic’ or ‘expensive’ aspects of public policy from the local level” (1986, 302). When this is done, as was the case with day care in Alberta in 1980, democratic channels of control over public policy are reduced.
SCOPE IN RELATION TO OTHER STUDIES OF DAY CARE IN ALBERTA

While this is the first book-length history of day care in Alberta, a number of reports and articles have already appeared on the subject. There is a fairly large body of evaluations of the state of day care in Alberta at particular points in time, and I use these critiques as source material throughout the book. In order to fill gaps in my own research, I have used a historical paper by Sheila Campbell (2001) on day care in Edmonton up until 1970. Finally, between the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, a number of valuable academic studies appeared: Bagley (1986), Friesen (1995), Hayden (1997), Read et al. (1992), and White (1997). I have used these to orient my own research and as secondary sources of information.