

9. Day Care into the Future

Trends, Patterns, Recent Developments, and Unresolved Issues

It is going on fifty years since the government of Ernest Manning broke new ground by committing funds to the Community Day Nursery (CDN) in Edmonton. This was the first time that day care was financially supported by the Province of Alberta, and it was far from a routine governmental decision. Prior to the province being asked for money, there was an intense public controversy in Edmonton, sparked by the Edmonton Creche Society's shocking decision to close the creche that it had been operating on a charitable basis since 1930. When the matter of funding for the CDN came to the provincial cabinet, many ministers insisted that public money should not subsidize child care for parents who could otherwise afford the service.

A wide variety of provincial programs now support child care financially, some of which (like staff wage enhancements) universally benefit all children in regulated care; others (like subsidies for children from low-income families) benefit targeted groups. Governmental enhancements, allowances, grants, and subsidies have helped to make day care much more of an institutional fixture in contemporary Alberta than it was when the CDN opened. At the same time, however, just as was the case in the mid-1960s, day care policy questions continue to provoke controversy in the public realm and among Alberta's political elite. Furthermore, contemporary policy debates often rehash arguments that were just as eloquently expressed by Albertans in the 1980s, the 1960s, or even during the wartime day nurseries dispute in 1943-44.¹ Perhaps the emotions associated with today's debates are not quite as raw as they were in the late 1960s, when Howard Clifford could never be sure whether he should extend a hand in greeting or duck when someone addressed him as Edmonton's "Mr. Day Care" (see chapter 3). Nevertheless, many individuals

and groups continue to feel passionate about day care. In 1975 Al Hagen wrote to a former colleague that “the daycare controversy seems to continue endlessly in Calgary.”² All these years later, Alberta’s day care controversy still appears endless.

What accounts for the durability of day care as a controversial issue? In my view, it is because different policy preferences for the care of young children are based upon competing conceptions of what a good society looks like, as well as upon competing sets of foundational beliefs about class privilege, gender inequalities, and the quality of children’s lives in an adult-centric world. Any issue that simultaneously evokes notions of class, gender, and generational justice is bound to be highly salient for a great many people. That salience has been amplified by the determined work of contending advocacy organizations, with a broad-based movement for quality child care taking the initiative and gaining many successes in the 1960s and 1970s, only to be forced onto the defensive, first by day care capitalists and a provincial government sympathetic to free enterprise and second by pro-family organizations and neo-liberal politicians committed to spending cuts, deregulation, and reprivatization. But just when it seemed that neo-liberals and pro-family organizations had gained a decisive upper hand in the advocacy battles, the provincial government, in the first decade of the new century, introduced and rapidly expanded a wage-enhancement program for workers in day cares and approved FDHS and even extended the enhancements to workers in out-of-school care (OOSC) programs. This breakthrough renewed the movement for quality child care, as demonstrated by the founding of the Alberta Child Care Association (ACCA) in 2009.

The goal of this chapter is to update the story of day care in Alberta in a way that puts recent developments and unresolved issues in a broader context. The first section looks at trends. I begin by outlining the significance of the demographic and labour-force changes that have occurred since 1976 in Alberta society, and then consider how the patterns of non-parental child care changed in Alberta between 1994–95 and 2002–3 in comparison to the changes experienced in other large provinces. Finally, I identify changes in the number of day cares and licensed spaces that accompanied the end of operating allowances in 1999, broken down by region and auspice. The second section highlights some of the mechanisms that have patterned the development of day care in Alberta over the past few decades, and the third analyzes recent developments in child care in Alberta up to 2009. I conclude by highlighting the major unresolved issues for quality child care and the four distinctive blueprints that compete to define child

care's place in Alberta society: social liberalism, inclusive liberalism, pro-family conservatism, and free enterprise conservatism.

TRENDS

Demographic and Labour Force Changes, 1976–2006

In chapter 3, I considered the changes in Alberta society after World War II that helped to set the stage for the rapid development of both commercial and Preventive Social Service (PSS) day care in the late 1960s. These changes (1946 to 1971) are recorded in table 3.1. I constructed table 9.1 as an update of that earlier table: it covers changes in the same variables between 1976 and 2006. (It also includes a few data points for 2008.) In combination, tables 3.1 and 9.1 give a picture of key changes in Alberta society during a period of sixty years.

Alberta's population doubled in size in the twenty-five years between 1946 and 1971, and doubled again in the thirty-five years between 1971 and 2006. In the latter period, population growth has followed the fortunes of the fossil fuel industries: the increases were large between 1976 and 1981, much smaller in the period 1981–96, and large again after 1996. The rapid process of urbanization between 1946 and 1971 slowed in the 1970s, but the percent urbanized still continued to grow: in 2006, 82 percent of the population lived in urban areas, the vast majority in Edmonton and Calgary.

The baby boom after World War II created a population pyramid with a large proportion of young children; indeed, in 1961, 14 percent of the total population was four years of age or younger, and 26 percent was nine or younger. This latter percentage fell to 17 percent in 1976, stabilized for fifteen years, and then gradually decreased from 16 percent in 1991 to 12 percent in 2006. In the latter year, only 6 percent of the population was less than five years of age. But even though this was less than half the 1961 peak percentage for children under four, because of overall population growth, there was actually a greater number of preschool children in Alberta in 2006 (203,000) than in 1961 (180,000).

Between 1991 and 2001, the number of preschoolers in Alberta actually declined. However, by 2006 this trend had reversed because the economic opportunities created by Alberta's vibrant economy for most of the first decade of the new century had attracted many migrants in their childbearing years: between 2001 and 2006, the number of preschoolers in Alberta increased by seventeen

TABLE 9.1 Demographic and Labour Force Changes in Alberta, 1976 to 2008

	1976	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006	2008
Population	1,838	2,238	2,366	2,546	2,697	2,975	3,290	3,596 ^a
% urbanized	75%	77%	79%	80%	80%	81%	82%	
Calgary	470	593	636	754	822	951	1,079	
Edmonton	461	542	574	838 ^b	863	938	1,035	
Together, as % of total Alberta population	51%	51%	51%	63%	62%	63%	64%	
Lethbridge	47	55	59	61	63	67	95 ^b	
Medicine Hat	33	41	42	53 ^b	57	62	69	
Red Deer	32	46	54	58	60	68	83	
Grande Prairie	18	24	26	28	31	37	72 ^b	
Together, as % of total Alberta population	7%	7%	8%	8%	8%	8%	10%	
Newborns to 4 year olds	153	188	205	208	194	186	203	
% of total Alberta population	8%	8%	9%	8%	7%	6%	6%	
5 to 9 year olds	163	174	183	207	210	208	204	
% of total Alberta population	9%	8%	8%	8%	8%	7%	6%	
Divorces per 100,000 people	310	376	404	329	282	277	246	(2005)
Lone-parent families, old concept	41	57	73	83	92	117		
Lone-parent families, new concept ^c						130	134	
% of all families, old concept	9%	10%	12%	12%	13%	14%		
% of all families, new concept						15%	14%	
Females in labour force	330	476	554	635	677	769	879	933
Participation rate	50%	58%	63%	66%	66%	67%	67%	68%
% of total labour force	38%	40%	43%	45%	46%	46%	45%	45%
Married women in labour force ^d	211	285	345	404	429	484	539	
% of married women	49%	56%	64%	69%	69%	69%	70%	

SOURCES: Alberta Bureau of Statistics, 1981 (for 1976 only); Statistics Canada Catalogues nos. 92-901, 93-921, 93-111, 93-324, 93F0053XIE, 94F0006XCB (CD), and 95F0377XCB2001003; Statistics Canada profile reports for Alberta using PCensus for MapInfo; Statistics Canada CANSIM tables 051-0001, 053-1997, 053-0002, 101-6501 (divorces), 153-0037 (urbanization), and 111-0009 (family characteristics); Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey table 282-0002; Statistics Canada population figures for Alberta cities, 1996-2006, online table; civic census population results provided by municipal civil servants.

NOTE: All raw numbers are in thousands.

^a Statistics Canada estimate, CANSIM table 051-0001.

^b Changes in the census boundaries for Edmonton and Medicine Hat between 1986 and 1991 and for Lethbridge and Grande Prairie between 2001 and 2006 contributed to large increases in the population figures.

^c A change of concept increased the number of lone parents between 1996 and 2001 by approximately 10 percent (Catalogue 93F0053XIE). The figures for the new concept in CANSIM Table 111-0009 are taken from Labour Force surveys.

^d Figures for 1976 include women who are married but separated; figures for 1981 to 1996 include only women who are married, with spouse present; figures for 2001 include women in legal or common-law marriages; figures for 2006 include only women in legal or common-law marriages with spouse present.

thousand. Nevertheless, the economic recession that brought about a rapid increase in the unemployment rate in Alberta in 2009³ is likely to cause both a downward trend in the number of births and the out-migration of families with young children. Such fluctuations in the number of preschoolers are to be expected in a resource-based economy like Alberta's and suggest that a significant proportion of day cares should be located in facilities that can be easily converted to other uses when demand drops. Schools, recreation centres, and seniors' centres readily come to mind as ideal locations for such convertible spaces.

One important trend shown in table 3.1 that has continued throughout the years covered by table 9.1 is the increase in the number of lone-parent families. The 23,000 lone-parent families in 1961 had increased to 57,000 by 1981, when the Alberta government used operating allowances to dramatically increase the supply of licensed spaces. By 2006 the number had grown to 134,000. Even if lone-parent families in proportion to all families stabilizes at around 15 percent in future years (a possibility suggested by the percentages for 2001 and 2006 in table 9.1), the size of this group alone is large enough to make day care services a crucial, ongoing policy issue. Quality day care has the unique capacity to provide unobtrusive but comprehensive social support to parents engaged in the difficult job of caring for and educating young children without the assistance of a partner.

Between 1951 and 1971, the proportion of women in the labour force more than doubled, led by the rapid increase in the participation of married women. These trends continued until 1991, when the overall female participation rate was 66 percent and that of married women was 69 percent. Between 1991 and 2006, however, the rates increased only marginally, even with an economic boom at the end of the period; this suggests that women's labour force participation had reached at least a temporary plateau. Nevertheless, with the considerable growth in Alberta's population between 1991 and 2006, the absolute number of married women in the labour force grew substantially, even with a stable participation rate: in 2006 there were 539,000 married women in Alberta's labour force, one-third more than in 1991.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the Alberta government instituted tax changes that favoured couples with a single income. This was meant to encourage more women (and occasionally men) to become stay-at-home parents. During the same period, the Quebec government rapidly expanded the number of licensed day care spaces to meet the demand created by its promise that day care would only cost parents \$5 per day (later raised to \$7 per day). Data from Statistics Canada indicate that Alberta's tax policy may have contributed to a very small

decrease in the labour force participation rate of married women with young children, while Quebec's \$7 day care definitely increased the participation rate of this same group. In Alberta the participation rate of married women with young children was stable at around 67 percent between 1995 and 1999; fell slightly in each of the four years after that, hitting a low of approximately 64 percent in 2003; but rose to around 65 percent in 2004 and 2005. In Quebec the participation rate of married women with young children was about 64 percent before the government introduced its program of affordable day care. Between 1996 and 2005, however, the participation rate of this group rose steadily to over 75 percent.⁴

The divergent Alberta and Quebec experiments in family policy suggest that it may be easier for governments to increase than to decrease the participation rate of married women in the labour force. Therefore, whatever the Alberta or federal governments do to try to encourage stay-at-home parenting by couples, it is highly unlikely that the participation rate of married women with young children would fall by more than a few percentage points. Reprivatization policies do not appear to have any hope of making the pressing public issue of quality child care go away.

The Use of Day Care and Other Types of Non-Parental Child Care, 1994-95 to 2002-3

The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth can be used to study the changes in the use of different types of child care in Alberta that occurred during the period when the neo-liberal Klein government was deliberately pursuing policies of funding cuts, privatization, and deregulation in day care. The first wave of the survey was in 1994-95, just when the Klein Revolution was kicking in. At that time, 39 percent of young children (six to seventy-one months) were in some type of non-parental child care. Eight years later, this percentage had risen to 43 (panel 1 of table 9.2). The increase in the percentage of children in non-parental child care over these years was also relatively modest in Ontario (6 percent increase to 50 percent), which, like Alberta, was governed by a neo-liberal political party. The increase was greater in other large provinces, particularly in British Columbia (13 percent) and Quebec (23 percent). As a consequence, in 2002-3 a smaller percentage of Alberta young children were in non-parental child care than in any of the other five largest provinces (even though the gap was 10 percent or less between Alberta and each of the other provinces except Quebec).

TABLE 9.2 Children in Non-parental Child Care, 1994–95 and 2002–3

	Children in any type of non-parental child care		Main provision for non-parental child care							
			Day care (%)				Family day home run by non-relative (%)			
			Day care (%)		Family day home run by non-relative (%)		Relative (%)		Non-relative in child's home (%)	
1994–95	2002–3	1994–95	2002–3	1994–95	2002–3	1994–95	2002–3	1994–95	2002–3	
National	42	54	20	28	43	30	22	29	14	8
Alberta	39	43	24	19	46	39	18	34	12	8
British Columbia	36	49 ^a	13	20	40	26 ^a	26	43	21	11
Manitoba	42	53 ^a	14	27 ^a	51	35	24	31	11	6
Ontario	44	50 ^a	19	22	44	34	24	35	13	9
Quebec	44	67 ^a	25	52 ^a	43	26 ^a	19	16 ^a	13	6

SOURCE: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth as reported in Bushnik 2006, tables 1, 1b, 2, and 4a–4e. The children included in this survey were aged 6 to 71 months at the time of the interview (p. 40). An additional category of non-parental child care was measured: “‘other’ care, which includes nursery school or preschool, before or after school programs, or other unspecified non-parental care” (p. 13). Data for this category are usually not reported by Statistics Canada owing to small sample sizes. The only exception in this table is the 2002–3 national data, in which the percentages total 95% because the remaining 5% are in the “other” care category.

^a The 95% confidence interval for this provincial estimate does not overlap with the 95% confidence interval for the Alberta estimate.

These National Longitudinal Survey statistics suggest that the Klein government’s policies in the 1990s had a stronger impact on Alberta parents’ choices about child care arrangements than on their choices about whether to participate in the labour force or not. Specifically, as public support was withdrawn from day cares and satellite FDHS, Alberta parents with young children were more likely than comparable parents in other large provinces to find ways to look after their children all on their own. It must be emphasized, however, that the Alberta government’s policies slowed but did not reverse the trend of an increasing percentage of young children in non-parental care. This is further evidence that the pro-family movement and its supporters in conservative governments are fighting an uphill battle when it comes to reversing a strong societal trend away from exclusive parental (usually maternal) responsibility for the care of young children. In 2006–7, the new federal Conservative government of Stephen Harper recognized that half measures would not work to promote the stay-at-home family; consequently, as is detailed in the final section of this chapter, it committed almost \$4 billion per year to pro-family programs. It remains an open question, however, whether even this sort of spending can

substantially increase the percentage of children who are cared for by stay-at-home parents.

Between 1994–95 and 2002–3, interesting shifts occurred in the percentages of Alberta children utilizing different types of non-parental care. Given the reduction and then ending of operating allowances for day cares throughout the 1990s, it is not surprising that day care declined in importance as the main child care arrangement for children in non-parental care (from 24 percent to 19 percent); Alberta was the only large province where day care declined in relative importance during these years (table 9.2). Care in a family day home (FDH) and by a non-relative in the child's home (this includes nannies) also declined in importance in Alberta, in line with the national trends. To compensate for these three percentage decreases, care by a relative as the main child care arrangement jumped from 18 to 34 percent. There was an identical increase in child care by relatives in British Columbia, more modest increases in Manitoba and Ontario, and a small decrease in Quebec.

The increased importance of child care by a relative in Alberta in 2002–3 was consistent with the reprivatization thrust of the Klein government. Nevertheless, the economic boom between 2005 and 2008 restricted the capacity of this sort of non-parental care. For one thing, fewer relatives were available for child care because of the abundance of jobs in the labour market. In addition, many of the migrants drawn to Alberta by economic opportunities did not have any relatives nearby. As a consequence, the boom caused a sharp increase in the demand for regulated day care and FDH spaces. There were many signs of this heightened demand. For example, Kids & Company, a Toronto-based day care chain that caters to corporate clients, opened two Calgary centres in 2005 and later expanded to five. A number of news stories documented a shortage of spaces and long waiting lists in 2006 and 2007. In February 2007, Ralph Klein's replacement as premier, Ed Stelmach, announced a special \$1 million investment to increase the number of child care spaces in Fort McMurray. Later in 2007, 123 Busy Beavers, a corporation with links to the Australian-based ABC Learning Centres, moved into Alberta by purchasing a number of existing centres, including six former Panda chain centres in Calgary and two former Peter Pan chain centres in the Edmonton region.⁵

Between 2006 and 2009, therefore, the day care system entered a modest expansionary phase after fifteen years of decline (table A.3). By happy coincidence, the new public investments in day care in Alberta in 2005 resulting from the federal Liberal government's short-lived Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) program coincided with the economic boom, day care's re-emergence as a hot political

issue, and a change in Alberta's premiership. As a result, the provincial government formally maintained and even expanded these new program initiatives after the federal Conservative government elected in 2006 cancelled the ELCC program.

Changes in Day Cares, 1995-2002

Between 1991 (the high point in day care capacity) and 2005, the number of day cares in Alberta decreased by 26 percent and the number of licensed spaces decreased by 27 percent (yearly changes are recorded in table A.3). This huge loss in the capacity of the day care system was inconsistent with the overall change in the number of newborns to four year olds in the province: although the number of young children decreased by 22,000, or 11 percent, between 1991 and 2001, it increased by 17,000, or 9 percent, between 2001 and 2006, in step with the rapid growth of Alberta's economy.

My goal here is to better understand the nature of the decline in the day care system in the 1990s and early 2000s. Table 9.4 presents a detailed accounting of the changes in the day care system during the period defined by the provincial government's reduction and then elimination of operating allowance payment for day cares. It is based on an analysis of the changes in the distribution of licensed day cares and spaces between 1995 (table 6.2) and 2002 (table 9.3).

In the seven years covered in table 9.4, the provincial day care infrastructure shrank by about 15 percent. I have bolded figures in the table where the shrinkage was considerably greater than 15 percent. First, larger chains declined by about 30 percent with all of the decline taking place in Calgary, where most of the larger chains were located in 1995. Second, the smaller chains sector was the hardest hit: it declined by almost 40 percent, with the percentage decrease being somewhat larger in Edmonton than in Calgary. Overall, chain day care in Alberta decreased by about one-third between 1995 and 2002. Operating a commercial day care in Alberta was certainly no longer the "license to print money" that it had been in the 1980s. Third, while the overall decline in the independent commercial sector was 15 percent, the decline in this sector outside of the two major cities was about 35 percent. One reason why the independent commercial sector did not decline as much in Calgary and Edmonton as in the rest of the province is that in the cities, independent owners took over a number of the locations that had previously been operated by chains. Fourth, while the overall decrease in the commercial sector (including commercial chains and independent commercial

TABLE 9.3 Licensed Day Care in Alberta, 2002, by Region and Auspice

Auspice	Edmonton			Calgary			Rest of Alberta		
	Number	Licensed capacity	Average size	Number	Licensed capacity	Average size	Number	Licensed capacity	Average size
Larger chains ^a	10 (5%)	577 (6%)	58	32 (21%)	2,163 (24%)	68	2 (1%)	140 (2%)	70
Smaller chains ^a	19 (9%)	1,047 (11%)	55	23 (15%)	1,501 (17%)	65	8 (5%)	430 (6%)	54
All chains	29 (14%)	1,624 (17%)	56	55 (36%)	3,664 (40%)	67	10 (6%)	570 (7%)	57
Independent commercial	132 (62%)	5,709 (61%)	43	60 (39%)	3,116 (34%)	52	62 (40%)	2,957 (39%)	48
Total commercial	161 (75%)	7,333 (78%)	46	115 (75%)	6,780 (75%)	59	72 (46%)	3,527 (46%)	49
Total not-for-profit	53 (25%)	2,092 (22%)	39	39 (25%)	2,288 (25%)	59	84 (54%)	4,138 (54%)	49
All centres	214	9,425	44	154	9,068	59	156	7,665	49
Region as % of total for Alberta	41%	36%	n.a.	29%	35%	n.a.	30%	29%	n.a.

SOURCE: Spreadsheet provided by Alberta Children's Services, Child Care Information System.

^a For definitions, see tables 6.1 and 6.2.

day cares) was about 22 percent, the decrease in the commercial sector outside of the two major cities was much larger at approximately 35 percent. The economics of operating a day care without operating allowance payments were clearly not as favourable in smaller cities, towns, and villages as they were in Edmonton and Calgary.

After the introduction of operating allowances in the early 1980s, the primary business task confronting commercial investors had been to establish new day cares and expand existing day cares as quickly as possible. In the difficult economic conditions of the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, the primary business task confronting these same investors was to downsize or even exit the day care business without losing too much money. The gradual and steady downsizing of

TABLE 9.4 Changes in Day Cares, 1995 to 2002, by Auspice and Region

	Number of day cares	Licensed spaces
Province-wide	-93 day cares (-15%)	-4,894 spaces (-16%)
Larger chains	-17 (-28%)	-1,237 (-30%)
Edmonton	+1	-3
Calgary	-18 (-36%)	-1,278 (-37%)
Rest of Alberta	0	+44
Smaller chains	-32 (-39%)	-1,732 (-37%)
Edmonton	-15 (-44%)	-876 (-46%)
Calgary	-13 (-36%)	-601 (-29%)
Rest of Alberta	-4	-255
Total chains	-49 (-34%)	-2,969 (-34%)
Edmonton	-14 (-33%)	-879 (-35%)
Calgary	-31 (36%)	-1,879 (-34%)
Rest of Alberta	-4	-211
Independent commercial	-44 (-15%)	-2,237 (-16%)
Edmonton	-16	-853
Calgary	+9	+227
Rest of Alberta	-37 (-37%)	-1,611 (-35%)
All commercial	-93 (-21%)	-5,206 (-23%)
Edmonton	-30	-1,732
Calgary	-22	-1,652
Rest of Alberta	-41 (-36%)	-1,822 (-34%)
Not-for-profit	Unchanged	+312 (+3%)
Edmonton	-3	-60
Calgary	+1	+107
Rest of Alberta	+2	+265

SOURCE: Calculated from Tables 6.2 and 9.3.

the Kidsland chain in Calgary illustrates this point. Kidsland had grown to thirteen centres after it bought six of the old Kindercare centres from the receiver in 1994 and another centre in 1995. Between 1995 and 2002, the chain converted one of its day cares into a seniors' residence and sold five centres to other operators. This would have left the chain with seven day cares except for the fact that the company had built a new day care in 2000–2001 in a rapidly growing area of north Calgary. Between the end of 2002 and the end of 2005, the downsizing of the Kidsland chain continued, decreasing from eight to five day cares. One of the three

closed centres was sold to an independent commercial operator while the other two (including the original Kidsland centre opened in 1983) were closed. Then, in the summer of 2006, Kidsland closed its centre in the community of Montgomery that operated from an old church; the property was sold to a real estate developer. From its peak of thirteen centres in 1995, Kidsland had strategically downsized to four centres by the middle of the next decade. Significantly, a number of the properties sold by the Kidsland chain were no longer operated as day cares in 2007.⁶

Perhaps the most interesting finding shown in table 9.4 is that there was no net loss of not-for-profit day cares between 1995 and 2002 even though the commercial sector declined by more than 20 percent during that period. This summary statistic camouflages important changes within the not-for-profit sector, however. I define “traditional” not-for-profit operators as dedicated associations or societies (e.g., Bowness-Montgomery Day Care Association) and local governments. Between 1995 and 2002, the number of day cares run by these traditional operators fell from 114 to 96, a decrease of 16 percent. This reflects the decision of many local governments to abandon their financial support for lighthouse programs and the difficulties that a number of dedicated day care societies had in trying to independently operate a quality program during these years. Among the notable closures of old PSS centres that were being run by day care societies were the Awasis Day Care in Grande Prairie, the High Level Children’s Centre, and the Little People’s Community Day Care in Calgary.

As was described in the last chapter, day cares formerly run by the City of Medicine Hat were taken over in the mid-1990s by Medicine Hat College, the Public School District, and the YMCA. Across the entire province between 1995 and 2002, the number of day cares run by public educational institutions increased from eight to twelve and the number of day cares run by the YMCA/YWCA increased from eleven to seventeen. Public educational institutions and the YMCA/YWCA had the capacity to partially subsidize the operations of quality day cares and thus keep them viable in difficult times.

The largest increase in the not-for-profit sector was in day cares run by First Nations: from fourteen in 1995 to twenty-two in 2002. This occurred because of special funding for day cares on reserves in Alberta provided by a number of federal government departments. For instance, in 2002–3 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada ran a program in Alberta that supported 812 licensed preschool and OOSC spaces in seventeen day cares. The financial subsidy was \$2.665 million, which worked out to a very modest \$274 per month for a space. Funding for First Nations day cares in Alberta was also available from the Aboriginal Human Resources Development

Strategy of Human Resources Development Canada and the Early Childhood Development Initiative. The five Treaty Seven nations in southern Alberta used money from all three programs to support seven day cares with 369 licensed spaces in 2002. Three years later, they operated ten day cares with 422 spaces.⁷

Therefore, the growth in the number of First Nations day cares in Alberta between 1995 and 2002 was due to special funding initiatives of different branches of the federal government and did not reflect the general conditions for not-for-profit day cares in the province during these years. Aboriginal day cares were first established in Alberta in the early 1970s in the spirit of the PSS program and continue to hold great potential along this line. In 2005 the child care coordinator for the Treaty Seven nations in southern Alberta, Violet Meguinis, noted that quality day care supports the well-being of families on reserves and allows children with special needs to be identified and receive special programs. She also noted that day care is the ideal forum in which to introduce young Aboriginal children to traditional languages and culture. However, there is a need for substantial extra resources, including capital and operational funding, if Aboriginal day cares are to reach their potential as preventive and educational organizations.⁸

PATTERNING MECHANISMS

At different points when working on this book, I was struck by how particular sequences of events echoed earlier sequences and by how both the supporters and opponents of public investment in day care constructed arguments that had already appeared in the historical record. Events and discourse, then, sometimes fit patterns that have recurred over time in the history of day care in Alberta. In this section, I discuss seven of these recurring patterns. My goal is to consider not only the nature of the patterns but also their causes, or generating mechanisms. Understanding these seven patterns and their generating mechanisms should help us to anticipate elements of day care's future in Alberta.

Advocates Argue That Day Care Costs Less Than Welfare

At many points in this history, advocates for day care have been faced with a conservative provincial political elite that is ideologically uncomfortable with government support for day care. In this circumstance, the one argument that

sometimes gets through to such an elite is that public investment in day care actually saves the government money because day care subsidies are far less expensive than welfare payments. It was this argument that secured the support of Public Welfare Minister L.C. Halmrast for day care funding in the mid-1960s, and the argument regularly reappears in the historical record. For example, a KPMG consultant's report in 2002 quantified the annual savings in welfare costs because of subsidized child care at more than \$15 million, almost one-quarter of the total spending on subsidies at that time (Cleland 2002, 10–11); this report was instrumental in convincing the provincial government to introduce a program of wage enhancements for day care workers in 2002. Furthermore, an ingenious piece of research by provincial civil servants in 1981 showed that the savings in welfare costs because of day care subsidization are actually greater than are estimated using conventional assumptions. They discovered that 17 percent of the subsidy caseload in May 1981 (a total of 950 families) had income levels low enough to qualify for social allowance payments, in addition to a child care subsidy, but had not applied. A senior civil servant argued that the child care subsidy gives such families enough to survive and that they would rather not have to apply for stigmatized welfare payments.⁹ Therefore, child care subsidies result in hidden savings in the welfare budget in addition to the easily measured savings that happen when families fully or partially move off of welfare because of the availability of child care subsidies to support employment.

This history has shown that many arguments in favour of the public subsidization of day care seem to have little persuasive power with conservative political elites, particularly those who favour stay-at-home parenting. When faced with such unsympathetic decision makers, civil servants and advocates in Alberta have learned that day care only looks good to those elites when it is compared to an even more despised program (welfare) and that estimates of substantial immediate cost savings tend to get the attention of fiscal conservatives and even pragmatic social conservatives.

Government Advances Policy to Quell Opposition to Other Initiatives

Between 1935 and the time of this writing (2010), Alberta experienced only one change in its governing political party, and every provincial election yielded a majority government. As a consequence, advocates for quality child care have not been able to use stiff party competition and regular changes of government to

leverage policy advances. Furthermore, except for the Progressive Conservatives' first term in office (1971–75), when the party closely identified with urban reform movements, and the beginning of Ed Stelmach's premiership (2007–8), when it looked like the Liberal Party would challenge the Progressive Conservatives' urban support base, provincial political elites have been decidedly reluctant supporters of day care at best. It is hard to imagine a provincial political environment that could be less conducive to advocacy for quality child care.

Nevertheless, there have been significant advances in programs and policies over the years, in part because progressive initiatives have sometimes been introduced by the provincial government not out of deep-seated conviction but in an attempt to quell opposition to some other initiative central to the government's agenda.

An early example is the Preventive Social Service (PSS) program. It was begun at the same time that the provincial government took over child welfare services from municipalities and can be seen as a move by civil servants to blunt opposition to a more centralized model for the delivery of welfare services from both senior Social Credit cabinet ministers and municipal social services bureaucrats. A second example is the introduction of training requirements for day care directors and workers; this finally happened in 1990 in conjunction with the provincial government's plan to systematically reduce operating allowances for day care to \$50 per space. Later that decade, in conjunction with a new plan to entirely eliminate operating allowances, the government twice made improvements in the day care subsidy program. After the opposition to the end of operating allowances had dissipated, however, no further improvements were made to the subsidy program for six years (1999–2005) even though federal money provided through the National Child Benefit could have been used to increase and/or extend the eligibility for day care subsidies.

At many times in Alberta's history, advocacy for quality child care has seemed like a futile gesture. When this compensatory mechanism operates, however, a policy advance may occur in conjunction with a policy reversal. Unfortunately, this mechanism does not lead to programmatic, progressive reform but rather to sporadic, piecemeal policy advances.

Advocates Make Alberta Look Bad Compared to Other Provinces

At a rally at Calgary City Hall in 1978, a protester carried a placard with the question, "Must Alberta Always Have Lowest Day-Care Standards?" Such advocacy

through embarrassment tries to evoke the pride (and perhaps even the conceit) that Albertans have about the importance of their province in the Canadian federation. The logic of this approach is that neither political elites nor the general public will be happy with Alberta trailing other provinces because it contradicts their provincial identity of Alberta as a national leader.

An early example of this approach was an investigative report that Karen Harding published in the *Edmonton Journal* in 1966. Titled “Day Nurseries Contrast: Higher Standards Observed in Toronto’s Subsidized Centres,” the story was based upon Harding’s first-hand observations of Toronto’s subsidized day nurseries compared to the day nurseries that were then operating in Edmonton. In 1979 the *Edmonton Journal* again investigated how the standards of day care in Alberta compared to the standards in other provinces and reported “that Alberta ranks last in one crucial area, the ratio of staff to children, which determines the amount of personal attention a child receives.” The sensitivity of the Lougheed government to this sort of unfavourable interprovincial comparison was demonstrated by the four studies it commissioned between 1978 and 1982 (two by civil servants and two by Price Waterhouse) and by the decisive action it took in 1980 to significantly improve the minimum required staff-to-child ratios.

Unfavourable interprovincial rankings also spurred the government to introduce minimum training standards for day care workers in 1990 and contributed to the decision made in 2002 to start enhancing the wages of day care workers. In the latter case, the “You Bet I Care!” national survey of 1998 found that the annual turnover of staff in day cares was considerably higher in Alberta than in any other province (Doherty et al. 2000a, xxi). The year after the release of the results of the national survey, the provincial government hired KPMG Consulting to assist an advisory committee “to examine ways to provide additional support to Alberta’s Day Care Professionals.” The consultant confirmed the validity of the “You Bet I Care!” survey results and reported that Alberta was one of only three provinces (the others being New Brunswick and Newfoundland) that did not enhance the wages of the staff in day cares as of March 2001 (Cleland 2002, 1, 4–5). Once again, Alberta’s laggard position on the national stage had a significant impact on the political process. It provided a focus for intense lobbying both during and after the 2001 provincial election. It also helped to finally convince both the government and the Conservative caucus that a policy initiative was needed: a modest wage-enhancement program was announced in December 2002.¹⁰

Nevertheless, there is an important limitation on the operation of this mechanism. In the 1980s, Alberta was among the provincial leaders in per

capita spending on day care. In the mid-1990s, however, Alberta significantly decreased its spending on day care (tables A.4 and A.5). In 1992 the province still ranked third in per capita spending, but by 1995 it had fallen to fifth, in 1998 it ranked seventh, and by 2003–4 Alberta ranked last among the ten provinces (CRRU 2005, 209). As was described in chapter 7, the neo-liberal government of the day prided itself on deregulation, privatization, and cutting government spending on social services. Therefore, Alberta's fall throughout the 1990s in the interprovincial rankings on spending for day care was a source of pride rather than embarrassment for the political elites. It turned out that they could only be embarrassed by evidence that Alberta children suffered because of low government spending or weak government regulation.

Finally, embarrassment through unfavourable interprovincial comparison can only work when other provinces are doing better on a salient criterion. This points to the importance of a complementary mechanism: the innovations of model programs tend to positively influence other day cares, even if that influence is only realized after a process of public embarrassment.

Model Programs Function as Exemplars

This book has documented many examples of the positive impact of lighthouse day cares and FDH programs. For instance, the satellite FDH program run by the City of Grande Prairie in the 1980s and 1990s was a blueprint for the establishment of a number of other FDH programs in northwestern Alberta. Model programs influence other programs in at least three different ways. First, as described in the previous subsection, they can trigger embarrassment for governments that support programs that are inferior when compared to the model programs; sometimes this causes those governments to improve the quality of care in the inferior programs. Second, the model programs can be an inspiration and a source of learning for people committed to providing quality child care: it is far easier to develop a quality program when an exemplar is available for emulation. Third, model programs can be a source of competitive pressure since other day cares or FDH programs may lose customers if their services are vastly inferior to what is available through the lighthouses.

In Alberta, large municipalities experimented with model day care and FDH programs in the 1980s but abandoned those experiments in the neo-liberal political climate of the 1990s. In general terms, the most influential model municipal

programs were those that constituted a relatively large proportion of the day care and/or FDH capacity in a community. This is why the City of Calgary's three municipal day cares had a much smaller impact on the quality of day care in Calgary than the City of Edmonton's eighteen municipally approved day cares had in Edmonton.

On the national stage, the Province of Quebec's commitment to financially accessible day care for preschool children has served as an important model reference program since the late 1990s. Quebec's approach has functioned as a "radical flank," causing other provinces to think about doing something new in child care even if those provinces reject the universalistic and heavily subsidized approach of Quebec. Furthermore, because Quebec is a relatively large province with a major impact on national politics, its universalistic approach undoubtedly made it increasingly difficult for the federal Liberal government to ignore its own 1993 election promise to introduce a national child care plan. The framework for a national system of ELCC was finally approved in 2004, and federal-provincial agreements were signed in 2005. However, these agreements fell short of the Quebec model since, as noted by Wendy McKeen, they "gave provinces considerable leeway to choose between the principles of universality and targeting, as well as between public and for-profit" (2007, 161).

It is worth considering whether the Alberta Child Care Accreditation Program (ACCAP), announced in 2002 and implemented in 2005, is a similar model program on the national stage. In its press releases, the provincial government proudly notes, "Alberta is the only province that has a child care accreditation program."¹¹ There is little doubt that in the context of Alberta politics, the ACCAP has been highly significant. It served as a means for advocates to leverage a wage-enhancement program from the provincial government at a time when day cares and FDH agencies were reeling from the loss of operating allowances. Furthermore, given the government's reluctance to move to higher licensing standards, particularly in the important area of staff training requirements, the ACCAP was a roundabout way to eliminate programs with very low-quality standards and at the same time re-establish a positive consultation process throughout the entire child care system.

The ACCAP provides accredited centres and agencies with financial incentives and thus penalizes those programs that either eschew accreditation or are unable to make the accreditation standard. In 2002, when the accreditation program was announced, these incentives were laughably small, including a wage enhancement for Level 3 staff of only \$0.62 per hour.¹² Two factors, however,

led to huge increases in wage enhancements between 2005 and 2008. The first was money provided to Alberta by the federal government through its ELCC program. As a consequence, in September 2005, the wage enhancement for Level 3 staff in accredited centres was increased to \$2.96 per hour. The second factor was the economic boom between 2005 and 2008 that created not only a spike in the demand for day care but also a child care labour crisis since, because of the overall shortage of workers, even routine service jobs were being paid more than Level 2 and Level 3 child care staff. To stabilize the child care labour force, the enhancement for Level 3 staff in an accredited centre was increased to \$4.14 per hour effective 1 January 2007 and to \$6.62 per hour effective 1 April 2008.¹³ After these increases, the wage enhancement for a child development supervisor (the new name for Level 3 staff) amounted to approximately \$13,000 per year. Since there is no regulatory requirement that a program hire child development supervisors to work with children, this particular supplement had no impact on unaccredited centres. However, by April 2008, the other financial incentives for accreditation were substantial. They included wage enhancements of approximately \$8,000 per year for a child development worker (the new name for Level 2 staff) and \$4,000 per year for an untrained child development assistant (the new name for Level 1 staff), and an operating grant of \$7,500 per year. Incentives of this size meant that unaccredited programs now bordered on being economically uncompetitive. They were consequently faced with three stark options: work to improve the quality of programming so as to attain accreditation and access the government funding, sell the centre to an individual or organization who would go after accreditation, or close the centre.

Accreditation is granted by the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services. Once a centre or agency joins the accreditation process, it qualifies for technical assistance grants that can be used to pay for advice, training, and mentoring through the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement. This resource centre was established in late 2004 by Alberta Children's Services in partnership with four child care organizations including the Alberta Child Care Network (ACCN) and the Canadian Child Care Federation. Sixty percent of the accreditation test score is based upon adult/child interactions. The resource centre supplies mentors to work with front-line staff to improve the quality of those interactions prior to formal observation for accreditation.¹⁴

Far from guaranteeing excellence, accreditation in the Alberta system simply means that a program exceeds the rock-bottom quality that is possible given lax licensing standards related to staff training. This was shown by the fact that,

as of early January 2010, the success rate on first-site visits was 86 percent and on second-site visits, an almost perfect 98 percent. Therefore, programs that commit to the accreditation process are almost guaranteed to succeed. This helps to explain why by the end of 2009, the vast majority of Alberta's day cares and FDH agencies (504 in total) had been accredited even though there is undoubtedly great variability in the quality of care among these programs. In light of this track record, the ACCAP is unlikely to serve as a model for other provinces unless they too are seeking a way to eliminate the poorest-quality programs without introducing higher licensing standards.¹⁵

Money Talks in Disputes Between the Federal and Alberta Governments

At three crucial points in this history, the Alberta government had a vastly different approach to the direction of social policy than did the federal government. The first was in the mid-1960s, when the federal government established national medical care insurance, the Canada Pension Plan, and national standards for welfare services funded through the Canada Assistance Plan. The Alberta government was deeply suspicious of the entrenchment of large, centralized welfare state programs. The second was in 1987–88 when the Progressive Conservative federal government of Brian Mulroney pushed its “National Strategy on Child Care.” At that time, the pro-family movement in Alberta had begun to have a significant influence on the provincial government of Don Getty. As a consequence, the Alberta government favoured new spending for stay-at-home parents ahead of new spending for regulated child care. The third was in 2004–5, when the Liberal government of Paul Martin worked to put in place its own ELCC national program. The Alberta government argued, contrary to the federal Liberals, that government subsidization should be available to unlicensed/unregulated programs.

It is noteworthy that Alberta's opposition at each of these junctures was overcome because the federal government offered Alberta so much new money for program spending that standing on principle and walking away from the federal proposal was out of the question. For example, under the terms of the 1987–88 child care plan, the federal contribution to Alberta's total spending on day care would have increased to 51 percent, far above the 12 percent reimbursement Alberta had received in 1985–86. And in 2005 the federal government offered \$70 million of new funding for child care in 2005–6, an amount

that exceeded the total amount that Alberta had spent on child care in the year ending in 2004 (table A.4). Even better, the agreement with the federal government projected that transfers to Alberta would increase to \$117 million by the third year of the plan. With this sort of money at stake, it is little wonder that Alberta signed an ELCC agreement in July 2005 that promised it would use the new federal funding to “develop and enhance its regulated early learning and child care system.” Public Interest Alberta later determined that the combined federal transfers for child care through the ELCC agreement and the Canadian Social Transfer exceeded total provincial spending on child care in by \$14.9 million in 2005–6 and fell but \$6.8 million short of the provincial total in 2006–7.¹⁶

These examples demonstrate that the federal government is in a much better position to strike a deal with recalcitrant provincial governments when it is in good fiscal shape and can promise to increase transfer payments by a significant amount. The Canadian federal system is highly decentralized and, as a consequence, it is difficult to come to any sort of national agreement. The events detailed in this book indicate, however, that generous amounts of new money for a province can pave the way for provincial acceptance of a federal initiative it might otherwise reject.

The Cadillac Metaphor: Opponents Frame Quality Child Care as a Luxury

In 1971 an oil industry executive described Calgary’s new PSS day cares as “gold-plated,” a metaphor that resonated with many segments of the public because it associated the publicly subsidized, high-quality PSS centres with luxury that was beyond the means of ordinary citizens. In 1978 Minister Helen Hunley used an equally evocative metaphor to justify the provincial government’s plan to set an upper limit on the amount it would pay to subsidize a child’s day care costs: “She stressed the government will refuse to finance ‘Cadillac service.’” In the Cadillac metaphor, the recipients of the government-subsidized Cadillac service are set up as a reference group in a process of invidious social comparison.

Framing quality child care as a luxury is a politically expedient means to limit government financial support for such child care. It encourages a backlash by families with middle incomes against the provision of high-quality, subsidized day care to children from low-income families. In doing so, it disregards the potential of child care to compensate for some of the inequalities in family-class

situations, thereby preventing some of the problems that disadvantaged children may run into later in life as well as promoting overall societal integration. It also fails to question whether the quality of care received by all preschoolers should be substantially improved as part of change to a less adult-centric society. Therefore, framing quality child care as a luxury serves to dramatically limit the range of policy options that can be fully considered.

The Labour of Child Care Is Undervalued

In 1917 the Children's Aid Society of Edmonton employed a staff of three to care for thirty-two children in a day nursery located in a former hotel. "No high salaries are paid at the Nursery," noted a newspaper story at the time, "and in this respect the total salaries do not represent the work that is actually done by the staff."¹⁷ Similar arguments were made eighty-five years later in Edmonton by those lobbying the provincial government for the introduction of a wage-enhancement program for child care workers. For example, one worker wrote, "I often wonder why the daycare system and its hard-working and poorly paid caregivers seem to be neglected by both the federal and provincial governments." Furthermore, at one commercial day care in Edmonton, the director talked about organizing a union drive that would culminate in a province-wide strike, if necessary, to back the demand that the provincial government double the wages of workers in day care.¹⁸

Eight main factors account for the systematic undervaluing of the work of child care in Alberta's regulated day cares, satellite FDHS, and OOSC centres. The first is market pressure from unregulated alternatives. As long as many parents are required to pay all or a significant proportion of the cost of regulated child care, alternatives will place downward pressure on the wages paid in the regulated system. In contemporary Alberta, one type of market pressure comes from unlicensed FDHS that can legally care for up to six children: these FDHS tend to be less costly than regulated care. The second type of market pressure comes from foreign workers recruited as nannies on special work visas. While nannies are not usually cheaper than regulated care, they are often cost effective for higher-income families since they provide a range of services besides child care and can be called upon to work extended hours. Nanny services compete with day cares for upper-middle-income and upper-income clients, and thus draw a significant amount of revenue away from the day care system.

As already noted, in 2005 the Alberta and federal governments signed a bilateral agreement that promised significant new funds for regulated child care. This led to important new public investments in the day care and satellite FDH systems. The maximum subsidy rate was increased for the first time since 1999 (table A.6), as were the turning point for receiving a full subsidy and the break-even point for receiving a partial subsidy. In addition, the government made significant improvements to the wage-enhancement program it had introduced in late 2002.¹⁹

Low-income Alberta families have the option of pursuing subsidized, regulated child care or unsubsidized, unregulated child care. The improvement to the subsidy system in November 2005 made regulated care the best financial choice for a larger group of low-income families. Indeed, the number of families receiving child care subsidies increased from 8,699 in September 2005 to 12,021 in May 2006.²⁰ This increase in the subsidized population served to modestly lessen the downward pressure that unregulated providers place on workers' wages in regulated care.

At the same time, an income-based subsidy system with much higher turning and break-even points would be that much more effective in making licensed services affordable for a wider cross-section of the population. Universal allowances are also efficacious in drawing significant numbers of families away from the unregulated sector and therefore limiting the ability of that sector to exercise downward pressure on workers' wages. Between 1980 and 1999, Alberta's operating allowances had this effect on the competitive playing field, even though workers' wages in the regulated sector did not generally benefit due to other undervaluing factors. The wage-enhancement program introduced in 2002 and generously expanded between 2005 and 2008 similarly made regulated services more affordable, thereby lessening the competitive pressure from the unregulated sector. It had the added bonus of placing public subsidies directly in workers' hands rather than in the hands of operators (although it created the possibility of operators limiting future wage increases to workers in an effort to indirectly appropriate a portion of the wage enhancements). Alberta's wage-enhancement program has now been joined by a second universal allowance of note, the latest version of an operating allowance program. Introduced in May 2008, it pays \$150 per month, but only for infant spaces.²¹

Even with these two universal allowances in place, however, Alberta parents are still required to pay a substantial amount out of their own pockets for better-quality day care or satellite FDH care. As a result, unregulated FDH homes

continue to be a competitive threat to the regulated sector and consequently exert a downward pressure on workers' wages.²² Only a program with a much higher level of universal allowance, such as Quebec's \$7-per-day child care, can eliminate such pressure since no unregulated, unsubsidized provider can compete with such a low price.

The second undervaluing factor stems from the high proportion of subsidized children in Alberta's day care system and the fact that the provincial government controls the maximum monthly amount that this segment of the market can pay. Subsidized children typically have made up 30 percent or more of all preschool children in regulated care in Alberta. As was documented in chapter 4, when the provincial government introduced a new portable subsidy day care system in 1978, it set a maximum subsidy level that was far less than the cost of high-quality PSS day care. This was a deliberate strategy: it forced the PSS centres that mainly served subsidized children to slash workers' wages since the only other way to balance their budgets—get parents to pay more out of their pockets—was unrealistic for a subsidized clientele.

Although in constant 2006 dollars the maximum subsidy levels in 2008 were somewhat higher than the subsidy levels that had been frozen in place between 1999 and 2005, they still fell far short of what would be required to run an excellent early learning program that was completely staffed by early childhood education (ECE) graduates. Therefore, subsidized parents are forced to look for a day care that charges close to the maximum subsidy level rather than a day care that offers a superior program but significantly "extra bills" parents. The provincial government could eliminate this source of undervaluation by setting a maximum subsidy level that equals the cost of care in high-quality programs. Such a strategy would have the extra benefit of maximizing the capacity of child care to lessen class inequalities.

The third undervaluing factor involves the substitution of "babysitting" (relatively unskilled) labour for skilled ECE labour in a group setting. As was noted in the first section of this chapter, when the Alberta government's support for day cares and FDH agencies was reduced at the end of the 1990s, many parents responded by calling upon relatives for child care. This sort of labour substitution happens in many fields of life: for example, people might get a friend or relative to help with mechanical repairs to a car instead of hiring a mechanic. But while the success or failure of a do-it-yourself repair job is usually easy to discern (i.e., the car runs well or it does not), the same cannot be said for the substitution of babysitting for trained child care. The benefits of ECE training in

a high-quality day care or the drawbacks of loosely organized babysitting are not always discernible on a daily basis and involve characteristics and capacities that often do not register with parents. Therefore, the inability to record a telling difference in a child encourages parents to substitute relatively unskilled for skilled labour in child care.

The ready substitution of unskilled for skilled labour devalues skilled labour in any field of human activity. When this sort of substitution occurs for technological reasons in a goods-producing industry, the devaluing of skilled labour is usually lamented but accepted as a component of societal progress (increasing productivity, standard of living, etc.). When unskilled labour is substituted for skilled labour in a human service like child care, however, a different dynamic is at play: the substitution almost always results in a decline in the quality of the service.

Substitution of unskilled for skilled labour in child care is not a new phenomenon, but it has taken on renewed importance since the early 1980s as a new regime of capitalist accumulation, usually called post-Fordism, has taken root across the capitalist world. Post-Fordism is characterized by labour market flexibility, flexible production systems, and the service of niche markets utilizing decentralized organizations (Munck 2002, 93–99). Post-Fordism uses two paradigmatic types of flexiworkers. First, there are multi-skilled, autonomous, and highly motivated workers who work in regularized jobs in core sectors of the economy. Second, there are relatively unskilled workers where flexibility describes the terms of their employment relationship: ad-hoc, contingent, temporary, and/or part time. In light of this pattern, Ronaldo Munck has argued that the new capitalism has both a “high road” and a “low road” for workers (2002, 98). It is also important to note that some of the jobs on the “high road” involve elements of the flexibility seen on the “low road” (e.g., temporary contracts).

What implications does post-Fordism have for the valuing of the labour of child care? This is the fourth factor to be considered in this section. Looking first at the “high road,” Munck notes that “behind the new male ‘flexiworker’ giving his all to his high-powered City job lies someone (usually female) who in a very ‘flexible’ way is caring for his household needs” (2002, 97). In the new capitalism, household tasks, including child care, are more difficult to manage and accomplish in combination with full engagement as a high-powered flexiworker. Dual-career couples need more help with child care and household tasks than is available through a day care or satellite FDH. This explains the popularity of nannies and care by relatives. It also explains why one member of the couple (usually

a woman) may opt for a job that has the built-in flexibility needed to leave time and energy to care for household needs. In the latter situation, the family only needs part-time child care and is relatively cost conscious when purchasing that service because they have far less disposable income than if both partners were working full time. Therefore, the career demands in post-Fordism make it more likely that the professional-managerial class will substitute relatively unskilled child care (by a parent, other relative, nanny, or part-time babysitter) for the skilled child care of an ECE professional in a regulated facility. This post-Fordist tendency toward an increase in the substitution of unskilled for skilled labour in child care puts further downward pressure on the value of skilled labour.

For many segments of the working class, flexible capitalism means lower wages, limited or no benefits, and greater insecurity. These conditions in themselves impel such flexiworkers to find flexible and low-cost unregulated child care. Given this dynamic, post-Fordism would have had a devastating impact on the value of labour in child care except for the fact that low-income families in Alberta qualify for child care subsidies that can only be used in regulated programs. However, the post-Fordist dynamic does indeed apply to those working-class families who fail to qualify for a sizeable subsidy. Once again, post-Fordist employment relations tend to encourage labour substitution, thus undermining the value of skilled labour in child care.

Undervaluing the labour of child care negatively affects two groups: children who need care and the workers who care for them. This suggests the fifth factor that contributes to the undervaluing of labour in this field: despite widespread lip service to the well-being of young children, children themselves are relatively powerless in our adult-centric world and are systematically disadvantaged in the distribution of resources across generations. Undervaluing the labour of child care thus reflects a deep-seated undervaluing (and under-resourcing) of young children in our society. This statement applies in particular to children from lower-income families for whom class and generational inequalities combine to create particular disadvantages.

Proponents of ECE argue that there are long-term societal benefits from investments in ECE. For example, Jacques van der Gaag (2002) maintains that ECE strengthens a society's human capital (education and health) and social capital (social integration), lessens inequality, and ultimately promotes economic growth. Such an instrumental argument, however, does not value children for who they are and what they contribute today but rather for who they will become and what they will contribute as adults. Consequently, it does not

address the fundamental undervaluing of children's lives that lies behind the undervaluing of the work of child care. Sociologist William Corsaro offers a more radical prescription for addressing generational inequalities. He argues, "We need to enrich children's appropriations from the adult world, to encourage their constructions of their own peer culture, and to better appreciate the contributions that children can and do make to our adult worlds" (2005, 310). In this framework, high-quality child care is an important means of creating a society that values young children's social worlds to the same degree that it values adults' social worlds.

As discussed in chapter 1, a gender order involves institutionalized power relations between women and men along with prevailing cultural notions of masculinity and femininity. When we look at the entire gender order instead of at gender as an element of individual identity and experience, we are able to recognize that gender relations influence what happens in every sphere of human life. Three of the undervaluing factors I have already discussed in this section are economic: market pressure from unregulated providers, substitution of unskilled for skilled labour, and the rise of a new type of flexible capitalism (post-Fordism). Each of these factors is gendered in the sense that gender relations contribute to how each factor operates to undervalue the labour of child care. For example, gender relations play an important role in the way that unregulated providers exert market pressure on wages in the regulated system. Women have the major responsibility for looking after young children in our current gender order, and unless they are well educated, their prospects for paid employment tend to be limited to low-paying, female-dominated occupations. As a consequence, many women with their own young children find looking after several additional children in their own home to be the best economic option for their family. Market pressure would not be an important devaluing factor without a large pool of women who are available and compelled to operate an unregulated FDH.

The sixth devaluing factor—the virtual absence of men in the labour force in day cares and satellite FDHs—involves the gender order in a more obvious way than do the other factors. Researchers have found that "through occupational segregation certain jobs have become identified as 'women's work,' and these jobs pay less because they are feminized and deemed 'unskilled'" (Figart 2005, 510). Analyses of survey data from both the United States and Canada have found that "men are represented stereotypically as productive, accomplished, and up for any type of challenge" while females are associated with a set of traits that are seen as relatively powerless and bad, including foolish, unstable, unambitious,

and weak (Langford and MacKinnon 2000, 41–42). The existence of these gender stereotypes helps to explain why the labour of female-dominated occupations such as child care worker is devalued.

Nevertheless, it is important not to exaggerate the influence of occupational segregation and gender stereotypes on the undervaluing of the labour of child care. In 1994 fully 97 percent of day care workers in Sweden were women (Jensen 1996, 31); this was virtually identical to the percentage in Canada at that time (Doherty et al. 2000b, 23–24). Yet despite this similarity in occupational segregation, trained child care workers tended to be paid at a much higher level in Sweden than in Canada. This observation indicates that however desirable it might be to get more men working in the field of child care and to fundamentally reorient the gender order at the level of entrenched stereotypes (European Commission Network on Childcare 1994), it should be possible to substantially revalue the labour of child care without waiting for these momentous changes to take place.

Child care workers' low level of economic and political power is the seventh undervaluing factor. The fact that very few child care workers are unionized is an indicator of this power deficit. As a consequence, with very few exceptions, workers lack the institutional means to directly bargain for a distribution of resources that better reflects their valuable contributions to child care.

Since unionization of small workplaces like day cares is a daunting if not an impossible task given the current state of labour relations law in Alberta, over the years child care workers have sensibly pursued their collective interests through interest groups and social movement organizations. The modest successes of the Alberta Association for Young Children (AAYC) in the 1970s and the ACCN in the first decade of the 2000s demonstrate that at opportune moments, child care workers and their allies are able to win political victories. Such victories, however, have been exceptions rather than the rule.

The eighth and final undervaluing factor is that governments are reluctant to systematically address the problem because to do so would be very costly. There is no way around the fact that the care of young children is labour intensive. In a typical elementary school, a single kindergarten teacher might be responsible for a group of eighteen children who are five or six years old. In comparison, in a day care in Alberta, a minimum of three workers must be assigned to care for a group of eighteen children who are two to three years old. Therefore, pay equity in child care requires adjustments to the wages of a relatively large number of workers relative to the number of children served. Furthermore, the higher the average skill level of the labour force, the more government spending is needed

to redress the systematic undervaluing. This factor therefore also helps to explain the resistance of the Alberta government to more rigorous training standards for all child care workers.

It was aggregate-cost considerations that caused the government of Peter Lougheed in 1978 to set a relatively low maximum amount for subsidies (chapter 3) and then in 1982 to abandon its promise to introduce a staff-qualifications regulation (chapter 4). Cost considerations were also front and centre in the province's policy agenda of reprivatization and deregulation for child care in the 1990s (chapter 7).

The increase in spending on child care in Alberta occasioned by the ELCC agreement signed with the federal government in 2005 gave the day care and satellite FDH systems their first sizeable financial boost since the 1980s. When this agreement was cancelled in 2006 by the incoming federal Conservative administration, the provincial government could have rolled back the initiatives supported by federal ELCC money. Because of large provincial surpluses and an overwhelming demand for child care during the 2005–8 economic boom, however, the provincial government not only replaced federal ELCC money with provincial money but committed the province to major new expenditures on programs such as wage enhancements and a new operating allowance for infant spaces. Economics alone does not explain the good fortunes of regulated child care in Alberta at that time: equally beneficial was the ascendancy of a new Progressive Conservative premier. Ed Stelmach governed during the boom years in a distinctly more centrist and activist fashion than had his predecessor, Ralph Klein, and selected child care as a priority issue from the outset of his premiership.²³ Nevertheless, to thoroughly address the undervaluing of the labour of child care, the provincial government would have to both increase its spending by many times beyond the levels committed to by Premier Stelmach during the economic boom and adopt policies that minimize the impact of market pressures on workers' wages. There is little chance that this will happen as long as a right-of-centre party forms the government.²⁴ Probably the best that can be hoped for in the coming years is that the valuation gains of 2005–9 will not be rolled back and that incremental changes will gradually improve the valuation of labour in the field.

Undervaluing the labour of child care is the strongest and most persistent pattern in this history. It has been sustained by the wide range of economic, social, and political mechanisms identified in this section. Until neutralized by new public policies, these mechanisms can be expected to contribute to how the work of child care in Alberta is valued.

DEVELOPMENTS FROM 2002 TO 2009

The changes made to Alberta's child care system between 2002 and 2009 did not quite match the momentous changes made in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but they were significant nonetheless, especially those in the 2007–9 period. Some of the new programs and policies have already been discussed while others will be identified here for the first time.

The policy changes can be organized into three types. The first is new programs of universal financial support: wage enhancements, grants to support the accreditation process, operating allowances for infant spaces, and space-creation start-up grants. The Space Creation Innovation Fund is the only one of these programs that I have not previously mentioned. Announced in 2007, it paid up to \$1,500 toward the costs of business planning, minor renovations, and equipment to open up a space in a day care, approved FDH, OOSC program, or preschool. The goal identified for the program in 2008 was to create 14,000 new child care spaces between 2008 and 2011, in addition to the 3,500 spaces created in 2007–8. In 2008–9, 9,449 new spaces were created, including 2,558 in day cares.

In the larger scheme of things, this is a relatively insignificant program: it involved one-time rather than ongoing funding, was a short-term commitment, and covered only a small proportion of the capital costs of creating a truly new space. The most notable feature of the program was its faulty design: because it subsidized the cost of opening new spaces but did nothing to preserve the continuation of existing spaces, the net gain of spaces was significantly less than the number of spaces created. For example, although the program subsidized the creation of 2,558 day care spaces in 2008–9, the net gain in day care spaces that year was only 354 (table A.3).²⁵

Second, the provincial government finally assumed full responsibility for OOSC programs and in so doing ended the long-standing arrangement whereby municipalities had primary responsibility for OOSC even though it was funded jointly by the province and municipalities through Family and Community Support Services.²⁶ A number of factors explain the provincialization of OOSC in 2008. A systemic problem with the old system was that subsidized care was unavailable in some smaller municipalities around Alberta. It also seemed that it was only a matter of time before municipalities would lose control of OOSC programs in light of two administrative developments. The first was the establishment at the end of the 1990s of regional Child and Family Services Authorities

to administer child welfare, day care, and a variety of other social services for children and families. Leaving OOSC in the hands of municipalities seemed to be a case of glaring administrative duplication. The second was the introduction in 2004 of provincial licensing standards for OOSC in response to a court case.²⁷ Finally, two factors specific to the 2007–8 period are crucial. The first was the strong demand for OOSC during the economic boom. The second was an unintended consequence of the wage-enhancement system for workers in day cares and satellite FDHS: the wage enhancements caused many OOSC workers to quit their jobs in favour of work that was eligible for the enhancements.²⁸

In September 2008, an income-tested provincial subsidy was first offered to families with children in OOSC. At the same time, the province provided a small staff-retention allowance to stabilize the workforce in OOSC centres. A few months later, a full-blown OOSC centre accreditation plan was unveiled along with hourly wage enhancements that equalled those available to those working with young children. Furthermore, in order to encourage OOSC in close proximity to elementary schools, the province committed \$42 million over three years so that school districts could buy modular buildings for OOSC programs. Whereas OOSC had formerly been a poor cousin to the day care and satellite FDH systems, it was now accorded equal status under full provincial jurisdiction.²⁹

The third type of policy change involved the province opening the door to major corporate investments in day care by removing the regulatory limit of eighty on the size of a day care facility (Alberta 2007, 219). This change was made without fanfare in May 2007 at a time when there was a severe shortage of day care spaces. It meant that the economies of scale associated with very large centres were now available in Alberta for corporations to exploit. The deregulation of facility size made possible a plan by a real estate investment company headed by Leslie Wulf, the Canadian Education Property Fund, to provide the funds to build eighty new day cares in Alberta, each with a capacity for 175 children. Wulf's company committed to raising \$300 million for the project but asked the provincial government to guarantee the leases made with operators (in effect guaranteeing a return on the fund's real estate investment). When the government refused this request in December 2008, the plan collapsed.³⁰

In early March 2009, Leslie Wulf maintained that the Canadian Education Property Fund was not affiliated with 123 Busy Beavers, the Alberta day care chain that had been created in 2007 by an Australian corporation with many contracting ties to ABC Learning Centres. Indeed, Leslie Wulf maintained that the fund's "goal is to provide capital to not-for-profit agencies, municipalities,

or private agencies that seek to build and operate child-care facilities.” Later that year, however, he emerged as the chief executive officer of Edleun Inc., a private company “involved in acquiring, developing and operating high quality community based learning and child care centres throughout Canada.” As its first acquisition, Edleun Inc. purchased the 123 Busy Beavers chain in Alberta. It is noteworthy that the president of Edleun, Mark Davis, had been “responsible for the acquisition and establishment of 123 Busy Beavers Limited” in the Canadian market.³¹

An immediate consequence of the deregulation of facility size was that a number of commercial day cares applied for space-creation grants in order to expand their licensed capacities in existing facilities beyond the former maximum of eighty. For example, the 123 Busy Beavers chain added 132 spaces in two existing centres in Calgary, and Cancare Children’s Centre in Calgary added 32 spaces to an existing centre. In addition, the Kids & Company chain received space-creation grants in 2008–9 to create 120 day care spaces and 30 OOSC spaces in a single facility.³² Buildings with combined day care and OOSC licenses for 200 spaces or more should soon be part of the child care landscape in Alberta’s largest cities. The conjunction of a deregulated facility size and generous universal allowances could well make Alberta a magnet for corporate investors in the coming years unless regulatory action is taken.

UNRESOLVED ISSUES AND FOUR COMPETING BLUEPRINTS

The list of major unresolved issues for quality child care in Alberta is short: (1) blocking the spread of corporatized day care; (2) strengthening staff training standards so that all program staff in a child care centre are required to hold a degree or diploma in early childhood development and education; (3) finding sources of capital to establish and maintain facilities for not-for-profit programs; (4) expanding the early learning opportunities available through the school system, particularly the establishment of province-wide full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten; and (5) incrementally increasing provincial funding for universal programs like wage enhancements as well as the income-targeted subsidy system.

For many years now, there have been four distinctive blueprints for child care in Alberta, each with its supporters and detractors. The preceding list of unresolved issues is written from the perspective of the social liberalism that

guided the rapid expansion of high-quality, community-oriented PSS day cares in the late 1960s and 1970s, and continues to be promoted by many ECE professionals and advocates based in the not-for-profit sector. If social liberalism were the organizing principle of Alberta's current social welfare regime, then substantial progress could be made on the unresolved issues without much contention or controversy. The existence of three alternate blueprints, however, and the fact that each of the alternates enjoys more support among Alberta's elites than social liberalism, explains why Alberta's day care controversy is far from a thing of the past.

The alternates to social liberalism are inclusive liberalism, which supports quality child care as a means to develop human capital and ensure that less people become dependent on state transfer payments; pro-family conservatism, which favours the care of children by stay-at-home parents; and free enterprise conservatism, which promotes market mechanisms and the unfettered involvement of private businesses in the provision of child care. Underlying each blueprint for child care are competing conceptions of what a "good society" looks like.

Social liberalism posits quality child care as a building block for greater gender, class, and generational equality. Because it has such ambitious, transforming goals for child care, social liberalism puts particular emphasis on the educational qualifications of the staff. It has consistently objected to the large proportion (approximately 40 percent in 2008) of the workforce in Alberta day cares who are essentially unschooled in early childhood development. It has also objected to the province's moves during the recent economic boom to circumvent the existing training requirements by granting certification equivalencies to "people with no background in early childhood development" and to consider an apprenticeship system of training as an alternate to college programs in ECE.³³

Especially in its fullest expression, it is hard to distinguish social liberalism from collectivist approaches such as communitarianism. Social liberalism is therefore quite distinctive from the three other blueprints current in Alberta, all of which are individualist in their conceptions of a good society. The AAYC's classic 1974 statement best represents the full scope of social liberal aspirations for day care: "It is a total service providing for the needs of children, and the needs of parents, contributing to the prevention of family problems, and problem families, contributing to the growth and development of children, of parents, of families and of society."³⁴

Social liberalism conceives of day cares as tools for building community rather than simply as providers of a service. This is why establishing public

and not-for-profit centres is a priority in social liberalism, beyond the concern that the well-being of children might sometimes come second to the pursuit of profit in commercial centres. Since 1980 the not-for-profit sector in Alberta has had to scramble to find money to maintain existing facilities and establish new ones. Beginning in the early 1990s, advocates for quality day care began to pursue the possibility of getting a share of the proceeds from Alberta's burgeoning gambling industry as a partial solution to this problem. After years of lobbying, not-for-profit day cares were finally granted eligibility for gaming licenses in 2003 (a gaming license for a casino can yield \$75,000 or more for a two-day shift by a team of volunteers, once every two years).³⁵ Even before this breakthrough, however, day cares had been accessing some gambling money through granting programs. While most of the revenue that the Alberta government generates from VLTs, slot machines, and ticket lotteries (an estimated \$1.3 billion in 2006–7) is utilized for general government expenditures, a modest amount (13 percent in 2006–7) is distributed by the Alberta Lottery Fund to not-for-profit community groups through a variety of granting programs. These programs include the defunct Community Lottery Boards, the Community Facility Enhancement Program, and the Community Initiatives Program. Between 1998–99 and 2006–7, seventy-two child care organizations (mostly day cares but including a few OOSC centres) secured a total of 170 gambling-funded grants with a total value of \$2.8 million. Many of these grants were less than \$10,000 in size and used to purchase equipment or undertake minor repairs or renovations to infrastructure. For example, Bowness-Montgomery Day Care Association in Calgary secured a grant of \$5,500 in 1999–2000 to “re-shingle and tar roof.” However, a number of organizations received grants for major repairs and renovations of existing facilities, and in a few cases, grants were used to construct or purchase/renovate new facilities.³⁶

Relying upon gambling money to provide capital for not-for-profit child care is a travesty, but given the lack of alternatives, it is better than nothing. Such has been the hold of free market conservatism over the provincial government since 1980 that the idea of a dedicated capital program for not-for-profit operators seems to have never been given serious consideration. Indeed, in 2008 the provincial government refused to provide special relocation funds to one of Alberta's oldest day cares, Primrose Place, when it was forced to move out of a building owned by the Catholic Church. A last minute rental deal with the Edmonton Catholic School Board was the only thing that saved Primrose Place from closing.³⁷ Furthermore, since the 1980s, the provincial

government has consistently opposed any federal money being used in Alberta to the exclusive benefit of not-for-profits. It thus seems that there is no magic governmental fix to this problem on the horizon. Instead, not-for-profit associations are going to have to continue to rely upon their own devices and their ties to the broader community to patch together the grants, donations, and fundraising schemes needed to keep existing centres going and new ones coming into existence.

Among the three alternate blueprints for child care in Alberta, inclusive liberalism is the closest to social liberalism (see Mahon 2008, 345). Inclusive liberalism assigns child care a positive role in creating its version of a good society. That society is individualist and highly competitive in character, so quality child care, just like quality education, is a means to create individuals with the skills and aptitudes to be successful in such a competitive environment. The inclusive liberal blueprint has gained more support among business and political elites in recent years as they have come to realize the importance of knowledge work in the post-Fordist globalized economy. The Alberta government's recent investments in wage enhancements and centre accreditation, as well as the provincialization of OOSC, are consistent with an inclusive liberal concern about the quality of young children's experiences. It is noteworthy that these investments were well supported by social liberals but drew criticism from those operating with free enterprise or pro-family perspectives.³⁸

Another initiative that is consistent with both inclusive liberalism and social liberalism is the inclusion of both full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten in the *School Act*, thus making their delivery mandatory across the province. These two recommendations were among the ninety-five recommendations tabled by the Alberta Commission on Learning in October 2003. The commission specified that the programs should be taught "by certified teachers with expertise and training in early childhood education" (2003, 46–47).

In the end, the provincial government accepted eighty-six of the ninety-five recommendations by the commission.³⁹ Given the strong influence of the pro-family movement on the Klein government, it is not surprising that the recommendations for full-day kindergarten and junior kindergarten were rejected. Nevertheless, the commission made a compelling case for this expanded mandate. In the intervening years, a few Alberta school districts have voluntarily introduced full-day kindergarten programs, although in doing so, they have had to take resources away from other parts of the education system. An example is the Medicine Hat School District, which in 2004 began offering the first full-day

kindergarten program in the province. In 2009 full-day, every-day kindergarten was offered at every elementary school in the district, with part-day kindergarten also offered at some schools. At the Herald School, where the school district runs a day care that it took over from the municipal government in the mid-1990s, full-day kindergarten is seamlessly integrated with before- and after-school care. This is a forward-thinking exemplar.⁴⁰

There have also been important developments in other provinces: British Columbia has initiated a full-day kindergarten program and Ontario has moved toward full-day kindergarten that is integrated with before- and after-school care along the lines of what happens at the Herald School in Medicine Hat.⁴¹ A similar initiative on a province-wide basis is not beyond the realm of possibility for Alberta, especially given the province's new-found commitment to OOSC in 2008–9. Perhaps the ultimate lighthouse to guide the comprehensive development of high-quality day care for very young children and high-quality OOSC for school-aged children will be new ELCC programs for four and five year olds offered on a statutory basis by school districts.

Pro-family conservatism is the third contending blueprint for child care in Alberta. It emphasizes traditional family relations as the template for a good society. In this ideal society, young children are cared for by a stay-at-home parent and governments use their taxation powers to support the ideal. Pro-family conservatism is the only one of the four perspectives that is generally unsupportive of the regulated child care system.

In the late 1990s, the Alberta government slashed its spending on day care (mainly by ending operating allowances). At the same time, it promoted greater private responsibility for child care by introducing a tax credit for children and increasing the spousal tax exemption to the same amount as the personal exemption. These measures were very popular with stay-at-home parents and were praised by the pro-family movement. The pro-family perspective even shaped the Klein government's initiatives after signing an ELCC accord with the federal government in 2005. One of the programs introduced the next year was specifically geared to the children of stay-at-home parents: Stay-at-Home Parents Support offers an income-tested subsidy of up to \$100 a month per young child for fees in "an approved early childhood development program," subject to the condition that at least one parent must be a stay-at-home parent (defined as not working, volunteering, or attending school for more than twenty hours per week). A better version of this program would make subsidies available to all children regardless of parental income and employment status. This change

would make early childhood development the unambiguous objective of the program, encourage enrolment in approved programs regardless of family status or caregiving pattern, and give higher-income families a stake in the program. As it stands now, Stay-at-Home Parents Support disallows subsidization if young children are being primarily looked after by nannies, relatives, or unregulated FDH providers. From an ECE perspective, this is illogical since these children would benefit from preschool programs as much if not more than children who are being cared for by a stay-at-home parent.⁴²

Public subsidization of quality child care is not logically incompatible with “baby bonuses,” tax credits, and other tax measures that favour families with children. It is not even incompatible with public subsidization of stay-at-home parents. Since all of these types of family policy are costly, however, investing in one policy limits a government’s financial ability to pursue a second approach (and, perhaps as important, gives a government a convenient financial excuse for not pursuing the second approach). This sort of policy trade-off was in evidence after the federal election in January 2006, won by the Conservative Party of Stephen Harper. One of the Conservatives’ major election planks was a new universal “baby bonus” of \$100 per month for all children under six years of age. (Its name, the Universal Child Care Benefit [UCCB], is a misnomer since families are not required to use the government transfer for child care). This newest incarnation of a universal baby bonus was projected to cost the federal government \$2.1 billion in the 2007–8 fiscal year. The new government covered over half of the cost of the UCCB by cancelling the ELCC agreements that the previous government had negotiated with the provinces in 2005.⁴³

The UCCB is a particularly crafty pro-family policy because while it appears to provide equivalent benefits to all families with young children, it provides the greatest benefits to two-parent families with a stay-at-home parent because the UCCB is taxed in the hands of the lower-income parent. Therefore, the family with a stay-at-home parent gets to keep most of the \$1,200 yearly benefit even if the family has a very high total family income.⁴⁴

The federal Conservative government extended its pro-family agenda with the 2007 budget, which contained two pro-family taxation measures that had been part of the Alberta tax reforms in the late 1990s: a child tax credit and a spousal tax exemption equal to the basic personal exemption. The total cost for these two measures in 2007–8 was approximately \$1.75 billion. Altogether, the price tag for the UCCB, the child tax credit, and the higher spousal exemption in 2007–8 was projected to be in the neighbourhood of \$3.85 billion—more

than triple the \$1.2 billion that would have been spent on regulated child care in 2007–8 under the terms of the cancelled ELCC agreements. The Harper government's spending commitments in the 2007 federal budget showed that it could have easily honoured the ELCC agreements signed by the Martin government and at the same time implemented its new baby bonus. Cancelling the ELCC agreements was a point of principle rather than a financial necessity: it simultaneously expressed the new government's pro-family conservatism and its belief that the federal government should not use its taxation power to take a leadership role in areas of provincial jurisdiction.⁴⁵

While it is true that in the late 1990s, the Alberta Progressive Conservatives pioneered some of the pro-family policies later adopted by the federal government of Stephen Harper, Ralph Klein's government was reluctant to commit to the heavy spending that would have been necessary to firmly entrench a pro-family mix of policies. Stephen Harper's Conservatives demonstrated no such reluctance in 2006 and 2007. Nevertheless, at least during their first four years in office, Harper's Conservatives refrained from adopting the two most costly of pro-family ideas. The first was promoted by the Action démocratique du Québec during the Quebec provincial election in March 2007: a government payment of \$100 per week to each child under six years of age not in subsidized day care. The second is income splitting among the adults in a family unit, a measure that would result in an estimated \$5 billion in tax savings for couples where one partner is in a high-income bracket and the other has much less income (this includes all stay-at-home parents). Adoption of either of these policies would result in a major new ongoing financial commitment from the federal government. Large subsidies to stay-at-home parents of young children and income splitting at tax time would not only limit the federal government's ability to fund new programs in early learning and child care but would also strengthen the allegiance of many Canadians to elements of the pro-family movement's program. This is why such aggressive and costly pro-family policies constitute a threat to the further development of quality child care in Alberta and other provinces.⁴⁶

The fourth blueprint, free enterprise conservatism, conceives of a good society as individuals participating in competitive marketplaces. While it shares inclusive liberalism's individualism and emphasis on competitiveness, free enterprise conservatism assigns a much narrower role for government: government intervention in the ideal marketized society is only supported when it enhances rather than limits the growth and profitability of private businesses. According to free enterprise conservatives, child care is like other commodities:

it can be efficiently developed and delivered by private investors competing with one another for the allegiance of customers. Therefore, whereas social liberalism actively promotes the decommodification of child care by supporting public and not-for-profit programs, free enterprise conservatism actively promotes its commodification. This helps to explain why proponents of these two perspectives have so often been at loggerheads over the years.

Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s, free enterprise conservatism was the organizing principle of Alberta's day care system. It was superseded by pro-family conservatism in the 1990s, but developments between 2007 and 2009 indicated that the Stelmach government looked favourably on the assumptions of free market conservatism at the same time as it pursued elements of the inclusive liberal blueprint. This was shown, first, by the eligibility of for-profit businesses for space-creation grants. These grants added to the capitalization of businesses and thus amounted to a transfer of wealth from the provincial government to business owners. Second, the deregulation of the maximum facility size for day cares in 2007 demonstrated a political openness to corporate investment in day care that had not existed in Alberta since 1980.

In the early 1980s, civil servants and the Alberta Day Care Advisory Committee proposed two anti-corporatization regulations aimed at preventing U.S.-based corporations like KinderCare Learning from entering the Alberta market and limiting domestic chains from growing beyond a capacity of five hundred children. As described in chapter 6, the provincial government refused to enact the first recommendation and then failed to enforce the second after it was enacted in 1983. As a result, only the regulation that limited the size of day cares to eighty children diminished the possibility of corporate investments (since corporations prefer much larger centres that reduce the fixed costs per child and consequently improve profitability).

Eliminating the maximum facility size in 2007 was a disappointingly short-sighted move that failed to take into account the historical lessons of corporatization of day care, both in Alberta and other jurisdictions. Chapter 6 detailed how in the 1980s the largest day care corporation in the United States, KinderCare Learning, compromised the quality of children's care by squandering financial resources in other investments, including junk bonds. It also detailed the rise and fall of Alberta's leading day care corporation, KinderCare, between the late 1970s and mid-1990s. KinderCare's principal owner, Dennis Sorensen, likewise invested the profits he made in day care in other businesses and by so doing starved the children and workers in his chain of resources. My

conclusion from these two examples is that in essential fields of human life (such as the care of young children), corporatization has public policy risks that are too severe to be tolerable. The collapse of ABC Learning Centres in Australia in 2008 with A\$1.6 billion of debt on its books supports this conclusion—the lives of thousands of families were disrupted as the receiver almost immediately announced plans to examine the future of 386 centres (out of a total of 1,042). It is highly significant that the majority of the bankrupt chain's centres were eventually sold to a new not-for-profit corporation formed by four well-established Australian charities.⁴⁷

The potential coalition against the corporatization of child care includes, at the very least, the owners of many smaller commercial centres as well social liberals. Small owners may join the fight against corporatization because they fear the competition from chains and/or because they object to the profit-centred focus of corporations. In the latter case, small owners put the well-being of children ahead of profit considerations (along the lines described by Williams [2009, 72]) and are thus crucial allies in social liberalism's campaign to shift the balance of forces in Alberta child care away from commodification. Therefore, opposing corporatization in day care is a wedge issue that has the potential to split the commercial sector much as it was split in the early 1980s between the Day Care Society of Alberta, on the one hand, and a variety of other owners, on the other. Child care politics in Alberta are unique among the large Canadian provinces because of the relative weakness of social liberalism and the relative strength of both the pro-family and free enterprise blueprints. This is why recognizing and mobilizing sympathetic commercial owners is much more of a requirement for successful anti-commodification campaigns in Alberta than in the other provinces.

My concluding point concerns the marked growth of provincial power in the Canadian federal system since the 1970s. In years gone by, advocates for quality child care sometimes worked around a recalcitrant Alberta government by allying with the federal government or a sympathetic municipal government. Such an end run is no longer possible because all policy and program roads run through Edmonton. While the future may yet yield a federal government that uses its taxation power and a strong electoral mandate to establish a medicare-like, national early learning and child care system, it would be unwise for Alberta advocates to hold their breath waiting for the day. In the meantime, advocates can proceed with confidence by keeping in mind a number of lessons from the past:

1. Certain arguments, such as “Day care costs less than welfare,” are effective in disarming opponents. Furthermore, studies that demonstrate the long-term economic benefits of high-quality child care (e.g., Heckman 2006) have the potential to win over those whose conceptions of a good society would not otherwise include extensive public investments in early learning and child care.
2. There is an opportunity for policy or program change whenever Alberta can be made to look bad compared to other provinces on a criterion that resonates with the public.
3. Model programs continue to be lighthouses for program change. Therefore, it is worth pursuing model programs not only for their own merits but also because they expand the range of viable policy options for other jurisdictions.
4. There is no guarantee that a regulation or funding program won’t be cut, even if it is long-standing and at one time seemed unassailable. Two examples are the deregulation of the maximum facility size for day cares and the end of the original operating allowance program. Therefore, advocates must continually defend and even call for the extension of programs that are crucial to a quality agenda. Of note in this regard is staff wage enhancements.
5. A significant proportion of Albertans, including political leaders, continue to hold that an ideal society is one in which young children are cared for by a stay-at-home parent. Group care of young children has a very limited place in this pro-family ideal, and universal funding for day care is vehemently opposed. The continuing strength of pro-family conservatism over time is a prime reason for the endless quality of Alberta’s day care controversy. It also means that Albertans with a social liberal conception of child care must always be prepared to pare down their demands and find common cause with inclusive liberals and/or free enterprise conservatives in order to counter the political influence of the pro-family movement.

In 1970 Dr. Jay Bishop, an educational psychologist at the University of Alberta, was interviewed for a story on the effects of poor-quality day care on young children. He offered this political observation: “We are still in a frontier province concerned with wheat sales and oil. The young child, here, is not considered relevant.”⁴⁸ This sweeping condemnation of Alberta’s myopic frontier

mentality may well have had a degree of validity in 1970 and it certainly aligns with a common anti-Alberta stereotype. The reality today, however, is more complex. The young child is indeed relevant, but relevant in different ways for different groups of Albertans. Therefore, the task facing those who support making early learning and child care a governmental priority on par with the tar sands is to put the case to all Albertans in a respectful but insistent fashion. The Alberta Association for Young Children is defunct. Its mission is incomplete.