Transnationalising (Child) Care Policy: the OECD and the World Bank

Rianne Mahon, Carleton University

Much of the work on the transnationalisation of care has focused on the forging of global care chains (Parreñas, 2001; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). Yet the transnationalisation of care also involves the elaboration and global transmission of social policy discourses. International organisations (IOs) like the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank have played an important part in this, along with international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) like the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the Aga Khan Foundation, the Christian Children's Fund and, in Eastern Europe, the Soros Foundation. The work of the major international organisations is also supported by transnational knowledge networks, such as the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. This chapter focuses on the role played by the OECD and the World Bank in working to put early child education and care (ECEC)[1] on national policy agendas around the world.

Although the OECD and the World Bank are often (rightly) associated with the diffusion of ideas and practices underpinning neoliberal globalisation, a closer examination of their policy discourses over the last decade suggests that they have clearly gone beyond counselling the brute neoliberal prescription of welfare cuts and structural adjustment. As part of their broader push for a focus on "social investment" (Jenson, 2008), they have become advocates of public investment in child care/child development programs. This does not mean that they have abandoned the broader globalisation project. Rather, for the most part "investing in children" has come to be seen as a critical component thereof.

Somewhat ironically, given the way globalisation has meant the intensified export of carers from South to North, investment in ECEC is advocated not only for OECD countries but also for the Global South. Both versions of the ECEC discourse aim at the modification of postwar regimes, from the goal of greater equality in the here-and-now to equality of opportunity over the life course. Both also reflect the impact of global political developments in the name of gender equality and the rights of the child. At the same time, they differ in important respects. The dominant discourse directed at the South by the World Bank draws especially on the American social policy model, emphasising provision through the market. It might be considered “neoliberalism plus”, in that it integrates elements of social liberalism, such as Sen’s emphasis on developing capabilities, into a residual social policy discourse refashioned to meet the demands of economic globalisation. In contrast, the discourse directed at OECD member states exhibits the stronger influence of Western European, especially Scandinavian, experience.

This article examines how the main international organisations dealing with social policy have framed their arguments for child care, including the scientific and normative knowledge bases of their truth claims. After reflecting briefly on the role of international organisations, the first section locates the 1990s discovery of investing in children in its broader political and intellectual context. The next section analyses two key reports produced through the OECD that call for increased investment in ECEC in the global North. The discussion then turns to discourses directed to the South, focusing on the early childhood development discourses articulated by the World Bank.

International Organisations: Key Nodes in Transnational Discourse Communities

The globalisation debate has helped to draw attention to the transnational flow of policy discourses, which has intensified in recent decades. In the field of social policy in particular, scholars have signalled the emergence of “global social policy” - modes of transnational governance and contestation around issues of redistribution, social provision and regulation (Deacon et al, 1997; Yeates, 2008). In the process, they have highlighted the formation of increasingly dense social policy networks operating at different scales. While Yeates is rightly critical of those who focus exclusively on elite international organisations like the World Bank and the OECD, the latter do occupy a privileged position within these networks and thus are well-placed to promote their policy agendas. Some, like the World Bank, are able to use their financial resources to aggressively promote their notion of “best practice.” For the most part, however, IOs rely on softer forms of governance drawing on the resources they deploy as sites for the assembly and dissemination of various kinds of expertise.

Reliance on soft instruments of governance does not mean the absence of power and contestation. The production of ideas and evidence-based arguments involves the exercise of power. As Bislev et al note, IO policy discourses “map out what can be said, thought and done about different aspects of life – discourses generate ‘effects of truth.’ And by normalising and naturalising specific ways of thinking and acting, often with a claim of scientific or other expertise, discourses produce ‘effects of power’…” (2002:209). Ideas gain added force when backed by a surveillance function. This occurs when “member states are not obligated to follow up specific policies, but they are required to ‘open up’ for others to examine and critically judge what they are doing’ (Jacobsson, 2006: 207). In turn, surveillance capacities enable the deployment of peer review (name and shame), putting pressure on states to conform to new standards and appropriate practices.

International organisations are able to exercise these powers more effectively if they possess a relative autonomy from national states. For organisations like the World Bank and the OECD, that autonomy is substantially based upon their professional expertise. This does not mean that the production of ideas takes place in isolation. Rather international organisations can be understood as critical nodes in transnational discourse communities ”that share a common language and discursive frame, consolidated through face to face communication at conferences and sustained by written and electronic forms of communication – papers, documents, websites, emails etc” (Bislev et al, 2002: 208). In examining the role of IOs therefore, it is important to look at the ideas debated and conveyed through such fora, as well as to identify the knowledge networks on which they draw as they engage in policy learning.

Within each organisation, moreover, expert knowledge is tempered by ‘organisational discourse’ – “claims encapsulating long term political projects as defined by the organisation in question” (Dostal, 2004: 445). These organisational discourses inform the ideational grid through which the organisation - or the relevant branch thereof - interprets the world. As “learning organisations”, IOs are to varying degrees open to new ideas. Nevertheless organisational discourses and internal practices designed to reinforce these often place limits on innovation. For example to gain acceptance of the new “gender and development” discourse in the World Bank during Wolfensohn's presidency, feminists had to learn to argue in "efficiency" terms, thus fitting the Bank's core mandate (Bedford, 2007). Broad (2006) and Hall (2007) illustrate how conformity to the dominant economic discourse is reinforced through a range of internal Bank procedures. Thus learning does occur, but just as national states translate the policy ideas purveyed by IOs, so too do IOs filter ideas through their organisational discourses.

In studying international organisations, then, it is also important to identify themes and concepts running through key studies and policy documents they produce, which infiltrate and modify generic expert discourses, and also to trace the wider networks they help to establish. International organisations are themselves involved in policy learning in response to ideas travelling through the transnational discourse communities of which they form a part.

Political Context(s) of Discovery

The promotion of ECEC at international scales is not entirely new. There is some evidence of efforts to promote preschool education in the early postwar years (Kamerman, 2006). In the 1960s, UNESCO began to collect data on preschools and in 1965 UNICEF's executive board recognised the period of 1-6 years as a "crucial missing link" in human growth and development (Myers, 1991). Preschool was still, however, considered a luxury, to be considered only after states had made primary and secondary education available for all. For the World Bank, preschool was not even on the horizon: its embrace of investment in human capital was confined to secondary and vocational education (Jones et al, 2005: 106). In 1972 UNESCO began to fund seminars on ECEC and its 1974 conference on education for children from 0 to 6 took a defensive tone, stressing that preschool would not harm the child's creativity (Kamerman, 2006). In the same year, UNICEF's *Report on the Young Child* rejected preschool education in favour of improved maternal care (Myers, 1991:8-9) while the World Bank concluded that investment in preschool "could not be justified" (Kamerman, 2006: 8).

The OECD began to reflect on ECEC in the 1970s, and its perspective was clearly marked by the push for gender equality and the care needs associated with women's rising labour force participation. The first report of the newly formed working party on the role of women in the economy (ROWITE) focused on *The Care of Children of Working Parents* (OECD, 1974).

Gender equality was clearly the primary normative lens through which it viewed ECEC. Yet the interests of children also figured in the calculus, perhaps because the OECD's Centre for Research and Education (CERI) was engaged in identifying common problems in ECEC. Exchange between these two units helps to account for the emergence of ECEC, i.e. the linking of spheres (preschool education and day care) that were then divided. In contrast to some of the later studies, these OECD studies also recognised that ECEC only formed part of the equality puzzle.[2]

Many of the points made in the OECD studies would reappear in the policy discourses of various international organisations twenty five years later. In the 1980s, however, ECEC largely disappeared from the international organisations' agendas: the ascendancy of neo-liberalism meant a push to cut social expenditure in the North. At the same time in the South – and, later, the former Soviet Bloc, many of which had had extensive publicly financed child care – the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund made access to financial assistance conditional upon the adoption of austere structural adjustment packages.

There was, of course, resistance to "roll-back" neo-liberalism, and not only at the grassroots level. Some international organisations entered the fray, led by UNICEF under the banner of "adjustment with a human face." Consistent with its mandate, UNICEF emphasised the cost of adjustment for young children "the most vulnerable section of the population, yet also the one more important for the future of the country" (Jolly, 1991:1810). UNICEF helped to open a space for the social investment paradigm, which focused on children (Jenson, 2007). Yet UNICEF did not challenge the need for adjustment. While it called for the preservation of minimum level of nutrition, income and services, it also sanctioned "serious restructuring" of social services to achieve the maximum cost effectiveness and internal efficiency," and pointed to the possibility of "more creative reliance on community action and the informal sector" (Jolly, 1991, 1810). Furthermore it conceded the need to scale back existing welfare regimes, while arguing for programs targeting the poorest, especially children.

At the 18th World Conference of the Society for International Development in 1985, Jolly presented "Adjustment with a Human Face" to an audience that included representatives from the

World Bank. In light of the debates which ensued, “some in the World Bank, such as Alan Berg and Paul Isenman, subsequently used the occasion to encourage broader thinking, circulating copies of *Adjustment with a Human Face* to colleagues within the World Bank and to others outside” (Jolly 1991:1814). Berg was one of the Bank officials who would go on to support the Bank’s embrace of “investment in children” in the 1990s.

The focus on young children was given added impetus by the widespread ratification of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. All states ratifying the Convention committed to report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on steps taken to implement the Convention. Although the Committee did not take up the issue of ECEC until 2005, the widespread ratification of the Convention added a potentially important rights basis to UNICEF’s case for investment in children. In addition, the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) recognised that “learning begins at birth” while the subsequent (2000) EFA Framework of Action made “expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children” as its first goal. The 1990 World Summit for Children similarly focused a spotlight on children’s right to survival, protection and development.

For some, the Convention introduced the concept of rights to the discourse on ECEC, helping to bring about a shift from the 1980s focus on needs (Myers, 2000:25). Such a rights orientation fit well with UNESCO’s discourse, especially during the 1980s (Jones et al, 2005:77). The dominant discourse, however, continued to emphasise needs, although the concept was broadened to include child development, in part as a result of the work of the then-newly formed Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development. The Consultative Group brings IOs like UNICEF, UNESCO and the World Bank together with major donor agencies and key INGOs in this transnational discourse community. It has been particularly close to UNICEF. One of the key figures in helping to broaden the IOs ECEC discourse was Robert G. Myers, author of an important report on early child development for the World Bank (1987) and later for UNESCO (1990). As a result, the IOs agenda was reframed from child survival = reduction in child mortality, to survival= a process “of change in which the child learns to handle ever more complex levels of moving, thinking, feeling and relating to others” (Myers, 1990: 19). In the 1990 Jomtien EFA declaration, however, the call for investing in child development was framed in a manner consistent with UNICEF's adjustment with a human face discourse. The EC goal was thus defined as "expansion of early childhood care and development activities, *including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children*." (Myers, 2000:4 Emphasis added). Thus, the emergent discourse favoured programs targeting "poor, disadvantaged and disabled children" and envisaged an important role for (cheaper) "family and community interventions."

While the leading role played by IOs in forging an ECEC transnational discourse community helped focus attention on the development of young children, the emergence of a transnational women's movement, aided by opportunities afforded by the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985) injected a gender dimension into the social investment discourse (Friedman, 2003; Kardam, 2004). Here again UNICEF contributed, by demonstrating that "the adjustment process typically added burdens to women in their roles as household managers and parents while often reducing the time and finance available to support them in these roles" (Jolly, 1991: 1817). Gender equity would also figure in the ECEC discourse of the World Bank, but less a matter of equality between men and women in the here and now than levelling the playing field between boys and girls in access to education.

Truth Claims

One strand of research that has proved particularly influential for the World Bank came from the field of neuroscience. This research helped to identify the very early years – especially children from 0 to 3 – as the critical period shaping the child's development. In the 1990s, major American foundations began to distil the policy implications and disseminate the results of this research. Thus the Carnegie-sponsored study, *Starting Points* (1994), focused attention on "the quiet crisis" affecting American children under three due to inadequate prenatal care, the rising number of lone parents, substandard daycare available to the adult worker family, and poverty. The study highlighted the critical development undergone by the prenatal human brain, which continues to develop rapidly in the first year, and pointed to the importance of environmental impact on the way the brain is wired. This research brought the early years to a "lifelong learning" agenda. While some find in this research a rationale for public support for ECEC for all, these findings have been primarily interpreted as justification for: 1) a turn from programs for older workers – or even tertiary education – to children and youth; and 2) ECEC programs targeting the disadvantaged. This is supported by the contributions of economists like J. J. Heckman of the University of Chicago, whose cost-benefit analyses of human capital formation at different stages of the life cycle strongly favour investment in the young over adults (1999:39).

While Heckman made the utilitarian case for early child development, the work of Amartya Sen on "human capabilities" helped to marshal ethical claims in support of similar programs. Drawing out the implications of his work for ECEC, Sen argued that "the capabilities that adults enjoy are deeply conditional on their experiences as children" and that "a securely preparatory childhood can augment our skill in living a good life" (2003: 78). Sen's capabilities approach draws on an important strand of social liberalism, one that harks back to the social liberalism of John Stuart Mill, who envisaged a positive role for governments in enabling individuals to develop to their full potential. While in the previous era social liberalism was interpreted as support for the Keynesian-welfare state, in the discourses of international financial organisations like the Inter American Development Bank, the capabilities approach becomes part of "adjustment with a human face", as the following quotation from Nancy Birdsall suggests:

> …the market reforms that are spurred by and reinforce the global integration of markets – ultimately a key to rapid growth in the region – can in the short run make the game even more unfair. This is especially the case…where the poor are especially poor and where the distribution of land…and of education is so unequal. Because the poor lack those productive assets, market reforms will not necessarily help them. Conventional reforms need to be supplemented with aggressive policies and programs to increase the assets of the poor, to ensure the poor can exploit new market opportunities. That means among other things putting a premium on programs of early child intervention. Birdsall, 1999

Thus structural adjustment measures need to be supplemented with investment in early child development to break the "inter-generational poverty cycle."

Other social scientists have contributed to the ECEC argument. In particular Gosta Esping-Andersen cast his argument for ECEC as part of a broader project of welfare redesign (1999). Echoing other critiques of Western European social insurance-based systems, Esping-Andersen was especially critical of the "conservative-corporatist" regimes of Western Europe, for clinging to social programs targeted at the male breadwinner family instead of engaging in welfare redesign focused on the needs of the time-pressed post-industrial dual earner family with young children. Although he drew his inspiration from the Nordic social policy model, characterised by substantial public investment in universal ECEC and programs to induce men to share 'parental' leave, he drew back from recommending its extension to other advanced countries, content to make a pitch for some form of investment in ECEC. His work influenced the social policy paradigm that began to take shape in the OECD's Directorate on Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DELSA). This in turn helped to pave the way for the *Babies and Bosses* study to be discussed in the next section.

Esping-Andersen's critique of continental European social insurance based systems has also been transposed onto the social security regimes of certain Latin American and Asian countries among others by the World Bank, which sees them as favouring "insiders" at the expense of the real poor. The Bank extends the critique to universal programs in the South. Thus, the World Bank argued: "1) governments do not tap the willingness of households to contribute resources directly to education; 2) current financial arrangements result in a misallocation with heavy subsidisation of higher education at the expense of primary; 3) in schools, resources are not used as efficiently as they might be…reinforced by lack of competition among schools" (Jones et al, 2005:119). Similar arguments appear in the World Bank's counsel on investment in ECEC.

The policy discourses emanating from these sources have not gone unchallenged. In the decade prior to Esping-Anderson's 2002 report the President of the European Union making a strong (gendered) pitch for investing in children, the European Commission had established a Childcare Network under the direction of Peter Moss, who was committed to an egalitarian vision of ECEC. The Network began to develop a blueprint for a European ECEC strategy and, more importantly for the longer run, to forge an alternative ECEC discourse community that found its inspiration in the Nordic and Reggio-Emilia ECEC approaches. The latter emphasize the importance of child development, while the Nordic model added strong public support and a concern to promote gender equality. Looking to these sources of inspiration, the Network developed a conception of quality quite different from the dominant "Developmentally Appropriate Practice" (DAP) that dominates the US discourse. For the Network, "quality is a *relative concept* based on values and beliefs, and defining quality should be a *dynamic, continuous and democratic process*" (European Commission Childcare Network, 2004:11).

Dahlberg and Moss highlight important differences between the discourse emanating from this network and the dominant Anglo-American one:

1. Whereas the dominant Anglo-American discourse stresses a future oriented instrumental rationality (child as human capital in the making), the alternative stresses ethico-political rationality or an "ethics of encounter" (child in the here and now);
2. Whereas the first sees ECEC as an enclosure for application of techniques to achieve predetermined outcomes, the second stresses a plurality of possibilities. In the latter the child is not seen as an object of such techniques but as a co-constructor of knowledge and an active citizen;
3. Whereas quality for the first is a measurement of the extent to which services conform to externally prescribed norms, a technology of normalisation, for the latter, as for the original European Network, quality develops in an open-ended, dialogical way. (Dahlberg and Moss, 2007).

While the Commission officially disbanded the Network in the mid-1990s, it has remained alive as a dissident segment in the ECEC transnational discourse community and has grown in scale, helped in part by another OECD thematic study we shall discuss, *Starting Strong*.

ECEC for OECD Countries: Gender Equality…And Children's Rights

The OECD's recent ECEC studies highlighted its importance as a service to the "time-pressed" adult earner family. There were, however, important differences as between *Babies and Bosses* and *Starting Strong* in how the argument was cast, the transnational discourse communities involved and ultimately their impact on the organisational discourses of the two

OECD Directorates involved. *Babies* reflected DELSA's organisational discourse and drew primarily on existing discourse communities constituted through the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs Committee and the Working Party on Social Policy. This is not to suggest that learning did not occur. As I have argued elsewhere (Mahon, 2009), throughout the course of its research, the *Babies* team developed a greater appreciation of the gender equality dimension and brought this back to DELSA. The lessons learned were institutionalised in the OECD's new family data base, making possible ongoing comparisons of member country performance in this area.

To head its *Starting Strong* project, the Education Directorate engaged an outside expert with stronger links to the alternative discourse community, John Bennett, who had been deeply involved in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child while in charge of UNESCO's Child and Youth program. Although the *Starting Strong* team clearly drew on the OECD's official education network of experts, it also worked to strengthen the alternative discourse community. Those involved hoped to sustain this network following the study's conclusion, which would have made it possible to have an impact on the Education Directorate's and Education Committee's ECEC discourse.

DELSA's organisational discourse, which had incorporated a new conception of social policy in the 1990s, helped to frame *Babies*' research. The *Babies* team moreover operated through the channels provided by the Working Party on Social Policy of the Employment, Labour and Social Affairs committee, which brings together leading social policy officials from the member countries. Visits to the participating countries organised by the host department allowed for interaction with a range of actors and this, plus research conducted by the team, opened up the possibility for learning and thus modifying DELSA's social policy discourse. The team did not, however, seek to create a transnational discourse community that went beyond the Working Party's network nor did it connect with the ECEC transnational discourse community.

DELSA's social policy discourse does not query the OECD's core goals of economic globalisation and the concomitant need for policy redesign. The *New Orientation for Social Policy* (1994) accepted non-inflationary growth and the need to reconcile social program costs with overall limits on public budgets, while conceding that these objectives could be "enhanced by the role of social expenditures as investments in society" (1994: 12-14). Where it differed from UNICEF's analysis was in its main object – the adult earner family. The main problem was not seen as (class) inequality, though that was clearly on the rise as a recent (2008) OECD study documented, nor even on lone parent families, and the poverty to which their children were exposed. Rejecting a narrow "workfare" approach, however, DELSA focused on all adult earner families and the resulting social policy challenges posed by the "new demands for services traditionally produced within the home, particularly those relating to the care of children and other dependent relatives, and an increasing need for policy directions that will facilitate a balance between work and family responsibilities" (OECD, 1994: 10). I have elsewhere labelled its approach "inclusive liberalism" (Mahon, 2006).

In line with DELSA's "new" social policy discourse, *Babies* carefully scrutinised tax and benefit policies to identify disincentives to women's labour market participation. It accepted the need for public support for non-parental child care as, on their own, markets may not be capable of delivering the number of spaces needed at a price many parents could afford. Nevertheless, public sector monopolies were to be avoided. Demand subsidies were to be preferred as they helped to develop a market for care, putting pressure on providers to keep costs down while meeting parental demand for things like more flexible opening hours. *Babies* did not ignore issues of quality, but in contrast to the dialogical conception of quality offered by the European Commission Childcare Network, it adopted a new public management perspective in which child care providers are seen as agents pursuing their own self interest at the expense of children and parents, unless checked by market like mechanisms. The best method therefore is "quality assurance" programs, backed by the discipline of market forces.

Parental leave was also an important part of the new family-friendly policy, but long leaves were rejected as destructive of a mother's human capital and thus weakening their labour force attachment. Initially, *Babies* assumed that it would be mothers who would take "parental" leave. On this issue, however, it began to develop a gender equality stance such that by the fourth volume, *Babies* was prepared to criticize Sweden – one of the countries that has done to most to push for shared leave in the interests of gender equality – for not going far enough (Mahon, 2009).

The *Babies* study, and the learning it entailed, in turn contributed to the modification of DELSA's organisational discourse. This is reflected in the new family data base, which provides the foundation for future governance through surveillance on these issues. The data base includes many of the areas highlighted in the earlier ROWITE studies: pay gaps between full and part time workers, male and female earnings, distribution of working hours between men and women, the gender distribution of leave and a typology of childcare benefits, including quality indicators. The head of the social policy division has also taken on the job as coordinator for the OECD's new gender site (www.oecd.org/gender) that assembles date from all the directorates.

The gender equality lessons that might have been learned from the earlier ROWITE studies thus had to be learned anew by the OECD's social policy division. Yet while ROWITE was working within an OECD still committed to the Keynesian welfare state, *Babies'* learning occurred within an organisational discourse that embraces economic globalisation and the macroeconomic "fundamentals" associated therewith. In this universe, however, there is a role for "good" social policies that encourage working-age women as well as men to remain active labour market participants.

Although ECEC formed only a part of the range of "family-friendly" measures *Babies* considered, it was central to the work of *Starting Strong.* While the latter by no means ignored gender equality, it focused on the child, much as the World Bank has done (next section). Unlike the Bank, which favoured a targeted approach, *Starting Strong* rejected the narrow 'child as human capital in the making' perspective, stressing instead children as active citizens in the here and now. The final volume in particular emphasised that "well-being, early development and learning [be placed] at the core of ECEC work, while respecting the child's agency and natural learning strategies" (OECD, 2006). Here the report singled out the Norwegian and Swedish systems for their systemic recognition of the agency of the child and Reggio Emilia for its outstanding work in this regard.

Quality was defined in a very similar way to the European Commission Network. This meant *Starting Strong* also took a very different view of child care staff than *Babies'*. Accordingly it was critical of the "low recruitment and pay levels…the lack of certification in early childhood pedagogy…; the feminisation of the workforce and the failure of pedagogical teams to reflect the diversity of the neighbourhoods they serve" found in many countries (OECD, 2006:17). *Starting Strong* paid particular attention to early child pedagogy, contrasting 'school readiness' approaches to the social pedagogy approach that combines "care, upbringing and learning, without hierarchy" (OECD, 2006; 59). In other words, 'educating the educators' combined with democratic governance is the solution, not market discipline.

The emphasis on the child did not mean that adults were forgotten. Equality between men and women received particular emphasis in the final volume, where it recognised the need for both gender equality – women's right to equal treatment in work, equal pay for equal value and equal opportunities for advancement and 'gender equity' – "equal sharing of child rearing and domestic work" (OECD, 2006:30). Like *Babies,* it was critical of the lack of shared parental leave as well as of long maternal child care leaves. *Starting Strong* also took up the issue of child poverty, recognising that ECEC helped by strengthening family income, especially for lone parents. It also saw a role for ECEC in preventing the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Unlike the World Bank, however, it recognised that ECEC could only be part of the solution to child poverty, which is rooted not in welfare dependency or poor parenting but in the underemployment of parents, income inequalities and insufficient transfer payments (OECD, 2006: 23).

While *Starting Strong* drew on the ideas generated by the critical element in the ECEC transnational discourse community, it also worked to broaden and deepen the networks sustaining the community. Thus although it worked through official networks, it reached out to like-minded experts across the OECD, organising several transnational workshops around particular themes and, on the occasion of the release of the two summary reports (2001 and 2006) two major conferences, strategically sited in Stockholm and Reggio Emila. As the final volume noted, "this systematic exchange of ideas on policy issues and their implementation was helpful and allowed participants to establish their own ‘critical friend’ networks” (OECD 2006: 233). At the Reggio conference, participants agreed to establish a permanent network, to report to the Education Committee that would have provided an occasion to press the Education Directorate to incorporate *Starting Strong’s* lessons into its organisational discourse. Housed in Flemish-speaking Belgium (*Kind und Gezin)*, the network functioned independently for a couple of years. In April 2008, however, it was taken over by the Education and Training Policy Division, whose understanding of ECEC is more in line with the Directorate’s organisational discourse.

Early Childhood Development as Poverty Reduction

The World Bank, UNICEF, and UNESCO are all involved in spreading the early childhood development message to the Global South, flanked by an array of INGOs and networks of experts such as the Consultative Group. Here the focus is on the World Bank. As Jones et al note, “the combination of its financing levels and the force with which it promotes its views help account for its emergence as the strongest player in the world of multilateral education” (2005:94). This holds true for ECEC. While in the 1960s and 1970s the Bank focused on vocational education, by the 1990s it had embraced early childhood development as part of its broader “investing in people” strategy. Now, “it regards itself as an important contributor to the debate about childhood; conversely it is lobbied by many organisations that regard it as a major player in the field” (Penn, 2002:122).

While the Bank draws on some of the same discursive elements as DELSA, the Bank’s ECEC message is shaped by its own organisational discourse in which poverty plays a central role. This, plus its clear bias in favour of American research, means that it focuses more on ‘early childhood development’ (ECD), drawing on the scientific case for intervention in the early years, including prenatal care. ECEC is thus just one part of a broader package of measures of which the primary beneficiary is the very young child. This is not to suggest that gender equality is ignored. Yet the Bank’s emphasis is more on girl children as future workers and mothers. Adult women figure mainly as maternal agents to be enlisted (and trained) in ensuring the development of the next generation. Their role as workers, while not unimportant, is clearly secondary.

The reformulation of the Bank's social policy discourse was in part prompted by UNICEF's campaign for "adjustment with a human face", although mounting resistance to the Washington Consensus provided the wider context (Naim, 1999; Wade, 2002). Some within the Bank were quick to seize the opportunity thus provided. In fact, under the Presidency of Barber Conable (1986-91), the Bank broke with the neoliberalism of the Reagan Administration as it began to fashion its new Core Poverty Program (Hall, 2007: 155). Initially focused on the need for residual "social safety nets", the Program was gradually expanded to incorporate the message that "investment in human resources through health, education and population was good for growth" (Hall, 2007:155). Like adjustment with a human face, the new organisational discourse in no way involved a rejection of the need for structural adjustment. This is clearly evident in two subsequent publications – *Investing in People* (1995) and *Building Human Capital for Better Lives* (1995).

Building Human Capital clearly argued the importance of working on two fronts – 'sound macroeconomic policies' to promote growth, now to be complemented by human investment "so that people have the skills to take advantage of the opportunities thus afforded." Investment in human capital was to enable the poor and disadvantaged to participate in the liberalising global economy (Psacharopoulos, 1995:2). Or, as *Investing in People* put it, "Investment in people implies striving to reach the point at which human capital investments no longer restrain growth or keep people in absolute poverty. Vital in this is equipping the poor to take advantage of the expanding opportunities that accompany growth" through "extending better health, nutrition and family planning to the poor" (World Bank, 1995:24). The Bank did not mean public investment in *all* people. Rather, social expenditure should be restructured, eliminating "subsidies for the elite." For example, "Bank operations have rationalized post-secondary and higher education spending [which are seen primarily to benefit the advantaged] and attempted to redirect expenditures to primary education".[3] (World Bank,1995:8). Public expenditures should instead focus only on the poor and disadvantaged: "to increase the human capital of the disadvantaged groups who need it most, targeted approaches are often essential. In recognition of this, Bank-financed projects are seeking innovative ways to reach girls, indigenous peoples and the very poor – to break the cycle of poverty." (World Bank,1995:8).

Women are thus numbered among the disadvantaged, but in quite different ways DELSA's discourse. Of particular interest are females as girls (human capital in the making) or as mothers able to affect the quantity and quality of future human capital. Thus in making the case for investing in women, *Investing in People* notes "Education leads to increases in women's income….But it also leads to important benefits for women who stay at home….Fertility rates and infant mortality rates decline with increases in the level of women's education…and indicators of child health improve. So, investments in girls' education have significant benefits for future generations" (World Bank, 1995: 7). Traditional maternal practices are moreover blamed for their children's malnutrition, ignoring the structural factors behind the poverty that has been exacerbated by adjustment policies. Thus *Building* states that "malnutrition of very young children rarely reflects a lack of food in the home. More often it is the product of feeding practices, child care practices and the health environment to which the child is exposed" (Psacharopoulos, 1995:31).

The new discourse retained the Bank's earlier concern to promote privatisation and "public-private partnerships." Like *Babies and Bosses, Investing in People* encourages the expansion of private provision in the name of greater efficiency, quality and equity. Thus, "rather than supporting only government 'monopolies' as suppliers of education, the Bank is working with 'vouchers,' community-run schools, and other instruments…to give families more choice…or more voice…" (World Bank 1995:8). The growth of private schools is also seen as an advantage as it would let the "elite," who can pay for their children's education, do so, thereby freeing spaces in public schools for poor children (World Bank, 1995:11).

Thus the Bank's social investment discourse holds to the original neoliberal thrust of the Washington Consensus. At the same time, it concedes a role for the "right kind" of social policy but while, like the OECD's DELSA it focuses on social investment, the World Bank takes a much narrower view, targeting the very poor, especially those of the next generation. While the Bank is prepared to offer financial support for such ventures, moreover, local governments are to free up revenue by disinvesting in social programs seen primarily to benefit the “elite.” As Deacon notes, “the Bank’s technical experts, who were very able to measure who received public services, were ill-informed about the political economy of welfare state building, which requires cross-class alliances in defence of public expenditure” (2007: 40). In other words, the Bank’s social investment strategy ignores the “paradox of redistribution” - that residual systems targeting the “needy” tend to be far less generous and more vulnerable to roll-backs than universal systems of sufficient quality to retain the loyalty of the middle class (Korpi and Palme, 1998).

By the mid-1990s, early childhood development had clearly become part of the Bank’s social policy discourse and its interpretation of the problem fit neatly into the Human Development Network’s investing in people discourse.[4] In fact, “multisectoral approaches to early childhood development” was the first of the next steps listed in *Building*. The push to include the “early years” actually began in the late 1980s, and involved the construction of links with ECEC experts linked to UNICEF such as Robert Myers of the Consultative Group whom the Bank commissioned to write a report (Myers, 1987). According to Myers, Bank insiders like Jacques van der Gaag played a critical role in making child development, not mere survival, part of the Bank’s broader social investment project. This was reinforced when, in 1989, paediatrician Mary Eming Young was hired as Child Development Specialist in the Human Development Network – the Bank Division most influenced by the social investment discourse described above.[5] Several bank country education papers provided additional support from the field (Young, 1995:9). By 1992 ECD components began to appear in Bank educational projects. Numerous studies of the issue were commissioned between 1998 and 2002. The Bank also hosted two major international ECD conferences (1996, 2000), as well as several regional conferences, on ECD. It is also involved in several projects in partnership with other IOs and INGOS.

The Bank’s ECD research draws heavily on mainstream American research, beefed up with examples drawn from the Bank’s own projects in the field and inputs from the US “High/Scope” educational research foundation, UNICEF, the Inter American Development Bank, USAID, Save the Children US, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, and the Aga Khan Foundation. Young’s first public report (1995) referred to the Carnegie and Rand studies mentioned earlier while later publications drew on Heckman's argument for the efficiency of investment in the early years. The Bank's first ECD conference was held in conjunction with the Atlanta-based Task Force on Child Survival and Development (now the Center for Child Well-Being). Penn is thus largely correct in criticising Young's work for failing to "mention any developed country except the USA, even though there is considerable documentation from various European and Antipodean sources to suggest that conceptions of early childhood programmes in these countries may be very different" (2002:123).

These sources, filtered through the Bank's own "investing in people" lens, framed the Bank's case for ECD, which drew heavily on American neuroscience and behavioural science discoveries. It also relied on the notion of "developmentally appropriate practice" (DAP), dominant in American early child development research. As the definition of ECD provided on the Bank's ECD home page notes: "all children progress through an identical sequence of physical, cognitive, and emotional growth and change. The ECD approach is based on the proven fact that young children respond best when caregivers use specific techniques designed to encourage and stimulate progress to the next level of development."[6] While Bennett (2008) notes that DAP was initially advanced as a counter to "schoolification" of ECEC, Penn underlines the liberal assumptions – the centrality of the individual, the need to encourage choice - that permeate the discourse (2002:125).

In line with the American social model, the Bank argues for a targeted approach to ECD in terms of a liberal definition of "equity" as well as efficiency. Here it draws on the normative claims advanced by of thinkers like Rawls and Sen. This is reflected in the following statement by one of Young's mentors in the Bank, who made the normative argument for ECD in terms reminiscent of Birdsall's (cited above):

> a minimum notion of what constitutes 'social justice' would exclude any state in which some groups of children are deprived of having a reasonable chance to live a productive life just because they are born poor. Even societies that are unable, or unwilling, to provide a 'level playing field'…may want to put policies in place that allow all who have

> reasonable talents and are willing to use them, a chance to enjoy at least a minimum level of well-being. (van der Gaag and Tan, 1998:32)

A corollary is that middle class families should be expected "to contribute to the cost of their investment in the future of their children" (van der Gaag and Tan, 1998:33). This means countries like Brazil err in investing scarce public dollars in universal preschool programs: "All Brazilian children, rich and poor, have the same constitutionally mandated access to preschool education; however, most public expenditures are disproportionately concentrated on educating non-poor children" (Young, 2002:132). Brazil is thus enjoined to shift to a targeted approach.

The Bank also commends non-formal, community-based programs and public-private partnerships (Young, 2002: 136) as less expensive forms of ECD while offering local women "employment opportunities." Thus *Investing in Children* argued that:

> Mothers can be effective ECD providers in home-based programs, such as in Colombia and Bolivia. The women receive training and minimum assistance, on credit, to meet facility standards. They are "accredited" as eligible to provide day-care services. Such efforts enable providers to benefit from public subsidies while also participating in a competitive, choice-based system of ECD programs. In addition, they benefit parents by increasing the number and type of care options to choose from (e.g., based on convenience, proximity, flexibility of hours). By helping to create new providers locally, government helps consolidate the players, power, position, and perception of early child development, primarily at the local level. (Young, 1995: 386-387)

Yet such programs not only fail to provide genuine ECEC, they also do not offer local women with the kind of employment opportunities they hoped for. For example, one of the Bank's "exemplary" programs in Medellin, Colombia "has almost petered out in disarray as women who had been hired as childminders objected to lack of employment benefits and security in the projects" (Penn, 2002:128). The Bank's advice to the Brazilian government has moreover resulted in the informalisation of care work, undoing years of effort to integrate daycare and preschools in a unified ECEC system (Rosemberg, 2006). In this sense, the Bank's preference for such "community-based" solutions builds on, and contributes to, the expanding informal labour market, which its original adjustment policies helped to fuel (Beneria, 2008:6).

Conclusions

The lines of division between the OECD and the Bank sketched above perhaps exaggerate the differences between the two. Thus the recent report by UNICEF's research division (Florence-based Innocenti), directed at OECD countries, draws on some of the same neuroscientific and economics research as the Bank in making its argument that the current "child care transition" holds the potential for harm as well as for good (Innocenti, 2008). While it favours a universal approach, it follows the American/World Bank line in arguing that disadvantaged children should be given priority (2008: 9). It also advocates a mix of public and private provision, although here its position is not much different from that staked out in the OECD's *Babies* series. The *Babies* discourse also shares a number of elements with the Bank's, notably the emphasis on the macroeconomic realities essential to economic globalisation and new public management's focus on the expansion of private provision, including cheaper forms of child care. This supports Craig and Porter's (2004) argument that the post-Washington Consensus social policy discourses directed to the advanced capitalist countries as well as to the Global South can both be described as "inclusive liberalism," which they regard as simply "roll-out" neoliberalism.

Nevertheless, the differences are not unimportant. The Bank and its networks draw inspiration from the residual American social policy model, targeting the poor, leaving the rest to rely on markets and families. In contrast *Babies* and *Starting Strong* both reflect the influence of European social policy models which, especially in the ECEC field, hold to the principle of universality. Another critical difference is in the treatment of women. The Bank, departing from American practice, if not from the "family values" of the American New Right, emphasises women's (current and future) maternal role. In contrast, both OECD studies echo the European Union's commitment to women's equality with men in the labour market and concomitantly, the importance of shared parental leave.

How can we account for these differences? At one level, they can be traced to the particular organisational discourses filtering their selection from research conducted elsewhere. More broadly, geo-political location seems to have affected their connections to the transnational discourse community(s). That the Bank's social policy model bears a strong resemblance to the residualist American social policy model is not accidental. As Wade has noted,

> The large majority of Bank economists have a postgraduate qualification from a North American university, whatever their nationality….The Bank's location in the heart of Washington…plus the fact that its staff read US newspapers and watch American TV, plus the fact the English is the only language of business, mean that American pressures structure the very mindset with which most Bank staff promote development. (2002:318)

In contrast, the OECD's headquarters are in Paris, the majority of member states are European and Europeans constitute the majority of its professional staff. This has enabled the addition of social democratic ideas to the ideational mix, especially with the victories of Left governments in key European states during the latter half of the 1990s (Jackson, 2008). In addition, there are strong connections between the European Commission and the OECD. The European Union is an active participant in many of its committees and has representation on the Ministerial Council. The two organisations collaborate on various projects, although the OECD's longer research involvement around labour market and social policy issues and larger staff complement means that it is the Commission that looks to the OECD rather than the reverse.

Another important difference is the addressee. While the OECD is broadening its reach, its membership consists primarily of advanced capitalist countries, ie of those considered "peers." *Babies* and *Starting Strong* examined the policies and practices of these countries, taking as their exemplars European social models. When the OECD addresses the South, however, its tone changes. As Deacon and Kaasch have argued "even if it is possible to characterize the OECD in terms of its views on national social policy for *developed* countries as even-handed and concerned as much with universalism, public provision, and equity as with targeting and market efficiency, this is not always the case with regard to its view on social policy in a *development* context" (2008:236). This is especially clear in the work of its Development Assistance Committee (Ruckert, 2008).

The Bank, while based in the North, focuses its attention on the Global South. Its soft loans come wrapped in policy advice that admonishes dependent countries of the South to follow "best practices" of the advanced capitalist countries. As Rojas suggests, this discourse "represents the Third World as in need of government, converting recipient countries into subjects of intervention and donors into their natural rulers. Aid establishes a relation between donor and recipient regulated by the promise of transforming the recipient country" (2004: 97-8). To be sure, countries of the Global South face quite different circumstances, where often the ready availability of informal care – nannies for the upper classes, kin and neighbours for the poor - reduces the immediate demand for childcare (Beneria, 2008). As Rosemberg suggests, however, "the difference in the wealth of the North and the poverty of the South may conceal a common aspiration: to have good, sufficient ECCE programs that allow mothers to work outside the home with tranquillity and include women educators who become professionals, receive decent salaries, work in adequate places and produce good care for children" (2006:82). The answer, then, is not to eliminate what public early childhood education exists in countries like Brazil, but rather to transform it in the spirit of ECEC while expanding its reach to the urban and rural poor.

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[1] Childcare usually refers to care provided for working parents while Early Childhood Education and Care refers to the integration of care and early child education. Early child development (ECD) has a broader scope, including things like prenatal care and parental education as well as ECEC. For convenience, I will use ECEC to refer to the transnational discourse in general, using ECD only when I turn to the Bank's version.

[2] See Mahon (2009) for more detail.

[3] Interestingly, both publications link the Bank's conversion to primary over tertiary education to the "dazzling success" of East Asian countries like Korea. While it is true that the latter did invest in basic education for all, it has also invested in higher education. Moreover, the Bank continued to ignore the larger role played by the "developmental state", no doubt because the latter's very active intervention in the economy flew in the face of the structural adjustment it favoured.

[4] Hall notes that the Network, the major Bank unit involved in formulating the investment discourse, spends the largest share of the Bank's social program budget and it "commands a strong position in the Bank" (2007:106).

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[5] In her first major public report on ECD for the Bank, Young,, thanked Alan Berg (one of the Bank officials who helped carry UNICEF's message to the Bank), van der Gaag and Psacharopoulos for their support within the Bank.

[6] www.web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTCY/EXTECD/0,,contentmdk;20260280~menuPK:524346. Accessed 17.01.09