

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CHILD POVERTY REDUCTION ADVOCACY

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ABSTRACT

In recent years child poverty has become a concern among poverty reduction advocates and social policy actors. This is evident in advocacy efforts of the National Campaign against Child Poverty (Campaign 2000), and the policies embedded within the National Children's Agenda and the Ontario Government's Child Poverty Reduction Strategy. In this current era of social policy, advocacy groups have changed the shape of their poverty reduction arguments to suit the current third way social policy approach (Dobrowosky and Jenson, 2004). In Hamilton a local multi-sector poverty reduction advocacy group formed in 2006, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR). Initially, this group chose to advocate for poverty reduction through a child centred framework. This research project examines what contributes to this social policy phenomenon as well as the potential consequences of a child focused policy response.

The local advocacy effort of the HRPR to reduce poverty mirrors this larger trend in social policy. In the following chapters I will examine whether and how the HRPR is illustrative of this larger trend and the strengths and weakness of this advocacy approach. As well, I will explore what the implications are for women and other marginalized groups who live in poverty when social policies or programs focus solely on child poverty reduction.

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother, Brenda. Your hard work, resiliency and determination have been and will remain a constant inspiration to me. If I am able to aspire even to half of your success, that will be an accomplishment.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 2007, the Liberal Government in Ontario announced their aspiration to develop a provincial poverty reduction strategy. After this announcement community groups across Ontario began to advocate for the type of poverty reduction strategy they would like to see implemented. At that time I became involved in poverty reduction advocacy efforts at the local and provincial level. Since participating in this form of poverty reduction advocacy I have maintained an interest in poverty reduction policies implemented by the province. In December 2008 the province announced a commitment to reduce child poverty and I had some concern regarding their reductive focus on child poverty. I have since noticed that in recent years child poverty has become a focus among poverty reduction advocates and social policy actors. This is evident in the policies embedded within the National Children's Agenda, and the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, as well as the advocacy efforts of the National Campaign against Child Poverty (Campaign 2000). In this current era of social policy, advocacy groups have changed the shape of their poverty reduction arguments to suit the current third way social policy approach (Dobrowosky and Jenson, 2004).

In 2006, a local multi-sector poverty reduction advocacy group formed, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR). Initially this group chose to advocate for poverty reduction through a child centred framework. As a poverty

reduction advocate I became intrigued with what contributes to this social policy phenomenon as well as the potential consequences of this approach.

I want to know how this has manifested locally in Hamilton and to further examine this local effort to reduce poverty, as it mirrors these larger trends. In the following chapters I will examine whether the HRPR is illustrative of this larger trend. As well, I will look at what the implications are for women and other marginalized groups who live in poverty, when social policy or programs focus solely on child poverty reduction.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY

The ontological perspective that I hold is rooted in a commitment to social justice. As a social worker and activist, I have a commitment to achieving an equal distribution of resources for all. Through my experiences as a child and youth worker, social worker, and as a student with a background in political science, I have developed critical world views related to poverty.

The theoretical frameworks which informed this study are critical social science and feminist theories. Feminist analysis is a way to assess how inequality is maintained in society and seeks to interrupt it (Callahan, 2010). The feminist tenets described by Neuman (1997) are as follows: research is meant to critique and alter social structures; it should act as a catalyst to entice social change and be empowering to those who read it.

The first element that is present in both critical and feminist approaches is the placement of the research project within a historical and socio-political context. In terms of a feminist approach to research Gringeri, Wahab and Anderson-Nathe (2010) state that there is a focus on social change and they highlight that it emerged as part of a “historical movement” and that it is “impossible to address ‘feminist research’ without invoking feminism and the politics that are associated with feminism” (p. 391). Critical theory explains that individuals may often be held back by “material conditions, cultural context, and historical conditions” (Neuman, 1997, p. 77). Feminist theory places the same emphasis on the historical context of social problems (Neysmith, 1995). Neuman (1997)

puts forth that research should place individual social problems within a larger socio-political context and look toward historical examples to learn how the world came to be or, to look at other parts of the world to explore how they are addressed elsewhere.

The next tenet of both feminist and critical perspectives to be discussed is the unveiling of structures in society that perpetuate inequality. Neuman (1997) points out that critical theory unveils paradoxes, conflicts, hypocrisy, and hidden truths within society. Lister explains that poverty is maintained by structures and policies that politically weaken the position of those who are poor. Poverty is perpetuated by a lack of political power, not by individual character flaws (cited in Krumer-Nevo & Benjamin, 2010). I would also add to this by stating that those who hold economic power in society also hold political power as those two spheres of society have become intertwined (B, Lee, personal communication, September, 29, 2010). Due to the concentration of wealth in our society, it is not just those with the lowest income who lack political power, but the large majority of society as well. Changes need to be made in the very fabric of our society to ensure a more level playing field for all. Not all persons in “Canadian society...start from the same spot, and do not compete on an equal footing with each other” (Saloojee, 2003, p. 4). Saloojee (2003) contends that the “struggle against class exploitation is not coterminous with the struggles against racial oppression and racial discrimination” (Saloojee, 2003, p. 3).

Bradshaw’s (2007) description of Structure of Poverty Perspective (S.P.P.) points to the cause of poverty as being structural barriers embedded within the institutions of society that inhibit the poor from access to participation or achievement within them.

From the S.P.P. individuals are not to blame for poverty, but the capitalist socio-economic-political system and the barriers embedded within that system, which impede the success of some actors within it (Bradshaw, 2007). The S.P.P. position calls for system wide changes claiming that social policies can be changed to widen the welfare state and ensure the poor have access to programs that enhance equality (Bradshaw 2007). This approach points to the inequality within society and how that contributes to the poverty that some citizens experience.

The next element that is present in both feminist and critical perspectives is the implications for practice and action developed through the research project. Neuman (1997) states that a critical researcher undertakes research projects that are action oriented. The researcher would find flaws with the current social structures and attempt to facilitate ways to improve them. Neysmith (1995) refers to this process as consciousness-raising. The research process is used as a mechanism to change the marginalized position of women. Praxis refers to the political aspect of research and its connection to emancipation, and it should involve both theory and action (Gringeri et al., 2010). It is my hope that through the sharing of this research project, this critical analysis will be of use for the HRPR, or be considered when addressing poverty among individuals, families, and children.

CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE

In this critical analysis of the literature I will be exploring the changes in social policy approaches in recent years to determine how social policy responses and poverty reduction policies have begun to make children the primary target of social investments. The way in which the welfare state has been transformed throughout the past three decades must be examined, as this historical outlook forms the foundation of this study and provides the context for this current phenomenon in social policy.

Neoliberalism

During the 1980's, discussions centred on neoliberal reforms began to take place in economic arenas (Hale, 2005). Neoliberalism can be described as a world view (Larner, 2000). Larner (2000) explains that neoliberalism can be conceptualized as a policy framework, an ideology, or through the "lens of governmentality" with "each of these interpretations of neoliberalism" all "has different implications for understandings of the restructuring of welfare state processes" (Larner, 2000, p.6). She proclaims that "Neo-liberalism is both a political discourse about the nature of rule and a set of practices that facilitate the governing of individuals from a distance" (Larner, 2000, p.6). The five values associated with this world view are: "the individual; freedom of choice; market security; laissez faire, and minimal government" (Larner, 2000, p.7). The neoliberal approach to economic institutions is contrary to the predecessor approach of "Keynesian welfarism" (Larner, 2000, p.7). A Keynesian approach to the welfare state entails a more

active government that attempts to lessen the inequality and negative outcomes of the global market, by providing strong social welfare programs.

Trimming Down the State

With an increased focus on privatization and deregulation, elected officials' willingness to enact universal services under neoliberalism is limited and the state is now seen as having a minimal role (Larner, 2000). To advocates of neoliberalism, there is a heavy emphasis on competition and consumer choice, and ideally the state would be replaced by the free market (Larner, 2000). In order to serve the interest of capitalist elites, beginning in the 1980's, the global economy began to consist "of laissez-faire policies where states (selectively) withdrew from active participation (regulation, planning, input provision) in the economic affairs" (Das, 2007, p. 352). Hale (2005) argues that neoliberalism has become a political strategy that includes not just economic tenets, but also requires reorganization of political society, along the lines of "decentralization, trimming down the state...and calling for minimal functional democracies" (Hale, 2005, p. 12). Below, Petra's (2001) description of the state's role under neoliberalism will be examined. First, a new fiscal and monetary policy comes into practise. Next the state provides the basic infrastructure for corporatist activity to take place. Following that the state also supplies social control, order, and stability. "The state has been generally downsized, decentralized and modernized, and has had its regulatory and policy-making capacities hollowed out" (Petra, 2001, p. 24). This new emphasis on the private sector, international competitiveness and the free market lessened the governments' concern with social policy development (McKeen, 2006).

Following up on Petra's description of state supplied social control, it is important to note that although state social investments have decreased under a neoliberal regime, state surveillance has actually increased. Bashevkin (2002) puts forth that the state's regulation of its citizens has increased in recent years (cited in Baker-Collins, Reitsma-Street, Neysmith & Porter, 2011). Baker-Collins et al (2011) have noted that although supports for citizens who utilize social assistance, or are involved in the criminal or refugee systems have been reduced, the surveillance and punishment of these individuals has grown.

A Reduced Welfare State

With a smaller state, pressure has been placed on governments to reduce the size and scope of the welfare state. Neo-liberal "ideals include the valuing of a smaller welfare state, whereby governments do less, and individuals, families, and volunteers undertake to do more in the area of social services" (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2008, p.48). The welfare state restructuring under neoliberalism began in the 1980's returning to former model which existed prior to the great depression (where independence of families with little state support was the prevailing model) away from viewing the welfare state as part of citizens' social right (McKeen, 2007; Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004).

"Neo-liberal ideals also stress the commodification of social goods (e.g., health care, education, and welfare services)" (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2008, p.48). Abu-Laban & Gabriel (2008) explain that citizens are now perceived as individuals, clients or consumers, and the lines between what is private or public goods are blurred. The size

and scope of the welfare state has been reduced, and in turn has impacted citizens, but most of all marginalized groups.

Recent Welfare State Restructuring in Canada under Neoliberalism

The longstanding approach taken by the federal government prior to this neoliberal turn was to provide social programs that redistributed wealth, through progressive taxation, and to “reinforce collectivist” attitudes (McKeen, 2007, p. 152). Since then many changes in social policy have taken place, and one which has predominated has been the focus on economic growth. “Social policy decisions were placed under the control of the Ministry of Finance and the social policy agenda was reoriented towards the goals of international economic competitiveness, which was also seen as the key to domestic well-being” (McKeen and Porter, 2003: 125; Banting, 1996 cited in McKeen, 2006, p.868-869). Canada has experienced numerous cuts to social programs due to the adoption of neoliberalism (Hale, 2005; McKeen, 2006).

A Shift from Universal to Targeted Programs

The Family Allowance was a universal program that was first implemented during the 1940’s which was designed to make Canadian society more equal (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004). Traditionally the federal government has provided programs like The Family Allowance, which provide monetary contributions to families with children such as tax incentives and direct payments (McKeen, 2009). This was done through a progressive tax system which acted as a mechanism of redistribution from the wealthy to the poor in order for the government to care for citizens as a collective (McKeen, 2009). The Family Allowances are a horizontal transfer from people in the

same income bracket without children to those in the income bracket with children (S, Baker-Collins, personal communication, June 30, 2011). When Mulroney was elected as Prime Minister he made promises to protect Canadian social programs. Finkel (2006) documented Mulroney's comments at that time, "Universal social programs, proclaimed the would-be prime minister, were a 'sacred trust, not to be tampered with'" (p. 288). In the 1988 election, following Mulroney's first term, the universal component was removed from the family allowances with the introduction of a claw back if an individual had an annual income greater than \$50 000 (Finkel, 2006). In 1993 the Liberals came into federal power and throughout their term further cuts were made to Canadian social programs and the Family Allowance was terminated (Finkel, 2006).

In 1992 significant changes were made to federal benefit programs. The Universal Family Allowance was replaced with the National Child Benefit and Canada Child Tax Benefit. This targeted income tested program was designed to benefit the working poor (McKeen, 2007). The universal component of this policy had lent credibility to the view that to raise a family was an important contribution to society. The current Child Tax Benefits are only provided to people who are considered to be at-risk or living in poverty (McKeen, 2007). The benefit program has been restructured in various ways with increasing monetary contributions from the federal government (McKeen, 2007). The consequences of this change will be discussed in greater detail below, when the third way reconfiguration of social policy is introduced. Prior to doing so, the significance of changes in the federal funding structure will be highlighted.

Changes in Transferring of Federal Funds to Provinces

After a decade of the neoliberal approach, by the mid-nineties a change occurred in the traditional structure of federal transfer payments to the provinces. In 1996 the Canadian Assistance Plan was replaced by the Canadian Health and Social Transfer (Finkle, 1996) which allowed for the provincial governments to restructure social programs and remove many stipulations the federal government had placed upon provinces in terms of national standards (McKeen, 2006). Graefe (2004) speculates that this replacement allowed and encouraged the provinces to reconfigure social programs to be more consistent with the “individualization and employment agenda” consistent with the tenets of neoliberalism (cited in McKeen, 2005, p. 4). “The result was significant privatization of services and the closure of services and many schools and hospitals. About \$7 billion was cut out of social spending” (White cited in McKeen, 2006, p.869). In 1999 the Social Union Framework Agreement was implemented, restricting the federal governments right to “intervene in existing or future provincial programs and guaranteed it would not ever introduce a program before it won the support of a majority of provinces and territories” (Finkel, 2006, p.292). Both changes allowed for provinces to do what they saw fit with social programs, and in most cases what ‘fit’ was a continued, yet more severe reduction in spending on universal social programs with a national standard. Following this, social policy was approached in a different manner than it had been in the past.

A Third Way Reconfiguration of Social Policy

McKeen (2007), Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004), and others characterize more recent changes to the welfare state under the theme of third way social policies. Stephney

(2006) states that third way social policy was implemented to try to find a balance between minimalist social spending to “appease the political right, whilst attempting to win over the left with policies to tackle disadvantage and exclusion” (Stepney, 2006, p.1293). Under the “Third Way style, this new state is neither purely neoliberal nor is it social democratic. The most recent approach to social policy is between the former Keynesian approach and a Residual approach, what has been called, a third way reconfiguration of social policy (McKeen, 2007).

Since the 1990’s governments are shifting away from “cuts and constraints of neoliberalism... toward new programs and different—sometimes new—spending (often couched in terms of investments)” (Dobrowolsky & Jenson, 2004, p. 155). Unlike the passive neoliberal state, “the social investment state is more active. It spends, but in contradistinction to the welfare state, the social investment state's spending is costed; calculated and highly strategic” (Dobrowolsky, 2002, p.44).

Renewed spending on social policies began to emerge under the third way era. After years of cut backs from 1980 onward, governments decided to start to make social investments again, however the targets of these investments had a new face, children (Dobrowolsky & Jenson, 2004). More specifically, government’s approach to addressing poverty was done so through the lens of child poverty reduction. This sense of duty to make new investments in the future generation is evident in the approach taken by the governments in Ontario and Canada, as well as internationally.

An International Context

In recent years, the “era of economic globalization and managerialism – a new ‘third way’ social policy was formulated by governments in the UK, USA and Germany”, (Stepney, 2006, p. 1290) and in many European states and “the English-speaking world” (Dobrowolsky & Jenson, 2004, p. 155). Garret (2003) explains that at the start of the new millennium in the UK the New Labor party made a commitment to “eradicate child poverty within 20 years” (p.197). This government did not address poverty among children through social policies which focused on redistribution, but “the government’s preferred orientation” was “to shift the focus of debate from poverty to social exclusion” (Garret, 2003, p.197). The Blair Government’s poverty reduction approach largely influenced other governments around the globe, even the social democratic governments across Western Europe (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2008). There is a “broader aim...to ‘accelerate the move from a welfare state that primarily provides passive support to one that provides active support to help people become independent’” (Blair, 2000, p. i cited in Stepney, 2006, p.1291). The poverty rhetoric in the UK at the time matches the same approach in Canada. Dobrowolsky (2002) has documented this shift in social policy in both Britain and Canada. She finds that social policies that focus on children and child poverty played a large part of the New Labour’s time in office. Myles & Quadango argue that the third way approach to social policy “has a ‘soft spot’ for children” (cited in Dobrowolsky, 2002, p.44). Dobrowolsky (2002) highlights that:

it is the discourses, policies and institutions that pivot around representations of the child, that form the centrepiece of the social investment state. Because they are future citizens, workers and consumers, children are depicted as sound investments in this new state's calculus. In its rationale, spending on children now

can help to improve a nation's long-term productive potential (Dobrowolsky, 2002, p.44).

It appears that this most recent approach to social policy is no longer designed in hopes of achieving a society of equals, but policy makers and governments now have a vested interest in ensuring their citizens and the nation are economically competitive in the future (Wiegers, 2002).

Human Capital Approach to Social Policy

As I mentioned earlier social policies began targeting families with incomes that range from low to moderate. This is what many academics identify as the “social investment era for social policy (Dobrowolsky and Saint-Martin cited in McKeen 2006, p.869). McKeen (2006) proclaims that investing in children pairs well with the state focus on economic growth and international competition, as by investing in children, the state gets a return on their investment. McKeen (2007) explains that the rationale for these changes lies “within an investment in human resources and capital” (p. 154).

In Canada social policies have developed to focus on employment measures, and targeting benefits to those who are the neediest in society (McKeen, 2006; Wiegers, 2002). These changes are “reflected in a switch in metaphors, from the safety net that compensates people for the failure of the market, to a trampoline that bounces people back into the job market” (McKeen, 2006, p.869). This approach “views social policy primarily as an instrument for ‘activating’ citizens (i.e., giving them a ‘hand up,’ as opposed to a ‘hand out’) in order to facilitate their entry into paid work (McKeen, 2009 p.78). Jenson & Saint-Martin (2003) explain that the rationale of investing in children is

they are the future citizens and will provide an optimal return on the investments made (cited in McKeen, 2006).

Changes in Representation – Framing Poverty as Child Poverty Reduction

Since the 1990's social policies were designed to benefit those who were economically productive and contributed to Canada's domestic and international competitiveness (Dobrowolsky, 2002). Under the third way configuration of social policy, children are seen as the ideal citizen in which to invest because of the economic benefits of a healthy and educated workforce (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004). By the 1990's the Canadian Senate and House of Commons began to view poverty through the lens of child poverty (Wiegers, 2002). However poverty among women was not connected to their child poverty focus. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) have documented the representational shifts initiated by the state from families to children. They have found that child care as a public service has been marginalized, transformed into just another of a range of investments in children. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) argue that the child is *the new worthy citizen* in which the state targets and invests in through social policies.

Poverty is no longer seen as a social issue but more related to problems and dysfunctions within individual families, without any attention being directed towards people who are poor who do not have children (McKeen, 2007). These changes can be seen as a shift in thinking and framing of social problems. Both Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) and Garret (2002) find that the new discourses used by governments find the main cause of poverty within the individual behaviour of persons who are poor. In the

following sections I will examine how a changing citizenship regime, the dismantling of the women's movement, and how the child is used as a symbol to mobilize citizens have all contributed to a reframing of poverty as child poverty.

A Changing Citizenship Regime

Citizenship Regime is described by Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) and refers to “the institutional arrangements, rules, and understandings that guide and shape concurrent policy decisions and expenditures of states, problem definitions by states and citizens, and claims making by citizens” (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, p.156). A citizenship regime is seen to be a set of complex interactions between several different actors who influence and decide the social issues and the direction social policies should take to alleviate those problems. Both McKeen (2007) and Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) describe the current citizenship regime to consist of social policy makers, advocacy groups and politicians, working to address poverty through child centred policies. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) point out that a citizenship regime defines politics, and determines the organization of political rhetoric and debates, as well as how social problems are viewed. The newly adopted focus on children “marked a shift in the citizenship regime in which the child replaced the adult as the central object of state action, and became the new ‘model citizen’ (Dobrowolsky and Saint-Martin, 2002; Jenson, 2001 cited in McKeen, 2006, p.869-870). To understand how the citizenship regime has been constructed to focus on child centred social policies, the influx of new social policy actors and the progress and regress of the women's movement will be investigated.

New Policy Actors

McKeen (2006) states that during the time of the implantation of the National Children's Agenda an increased attention was given to a "population health perspective" by policy actors. McKeen (2006) also documents that "neo-conservative and neo-familial actors" also became viewed as creditable contributors to policy development (McKeen, 2006, p. 876). During this time period discourses centred on "health...enhancing employability, encouraging provincial flexibility, and eliminating welfare dependency" (McKeen, 2006, p.877).

In terms of the values inherit in these policy developments of the 1990's many are at play. Professionals in the child health and welfare fields were more legitimized, and policy focused on enhancing parenting abilities (McKeen, 2009). There was a "scientific discovery that parenting style is an important factor influencing child well-being and behaviour and has a stronger influence than income on a child's behaviour" (Canada 2003 in McKeen, 2009, p.80).

Dismantling of Women's Movements and "Special Interest Groups"

Canadian women between the years of the early 1970's until the early 1990's contributed to an atmosphere across the nation in which feminism flourished in comparison to other countries around the globe (Rebrik cited in Cohen and Pulkingham, 2009). Concerns of women were at the forefront of local, provincial and national debates in developing policies that recognized women's unique positions from that of men's (Cohen and Pulkingham, 2009). According to Brodie, Canada was a leading nation around the world in terms of the enhancement of policies that promoted women's

position among various areas in Canadian society (cited in Cohen and Pulkingham, 2009).

A recent survey conducted by Statistics Canada found that three decades ago 39.1 percent of women with children under the age of 16 worked outside the home, today 72.9 percent of women with children under the age of 16 are participating in labour outside the home (CBC News, 2010). Although the number of women who participate in the labour force has almost doubled when compared to rates of the 1970's, policies that enhance and promote women's dual positions appear to have stagnated. Canada's position is no longer as a global leader in terms of policies that enhance women's lives. Hausmann, Tyson and Zahidid (2007) claim in a recent study that measures gender gaps globally, that out of the 130 countries included in the survey, Canada ranked 31st, which is behind the United States (cited in Callahan, 2010). Grant (2010) also documents that Canada ranks 20th in terms of gender equality which is below Sri Lanka and Latvia, and in terms of an earned income gap Canada ranks 33rd internationally. Considering Canada is no longer ranked as a leader in terms of the promotion of gender equity policies, perhaps the momentum of the women's movement that once held in the past has dissipated.

Callahan (2010) finds that in the past decade quite a bit has changed "including the vibrancy and currency of the women's movement" (p.166). Callahan (2010) explains that women related social issues are no longer debated, as policies are developed that diminish social programs and increase the role of privatization. Men control the architecture of Canadian institutions and policies due to unrecognized, normalized processes that reflect the patriarchal nature of Canadian society (Callahan, 2010). In

contemporary social policy there has been a shift from women centred social policy toward child poverty centred social policy. It appears women's true equality is no longer a prominent concern in this nation. In order to understand these phenomena a historical context must be provided.

During the 1980's, groups advocating for women's rights received a great deal of attention in the media (Rebick and Roach in Dobrowolosky and Jenson, 2004). Feminist groups played a large role in opposing the Charlottetown Accord of the Mulroney government. However after the Charlottetown Accord was stopped in the early 1990's, the government began to label many of the opposing groups as "special interest" groups, including women's rights groups, which in turn contributed to their lack of public support (Dobrowolosky and Jenson, 2004). Callahan (2010) also documents that women's groups received the label of special interest "who seek to advance exceptional privilege for its members without regard for the whole" which has been successful in lessening support for women's efforts (p. 174). Marginalized groups in Canada have been further pushed to the sidelines under this era. During this phase of neoliberalism, groups traditionally seen as disadvantaged such as "women, racial and ethnic minorities, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities and the poor have increasingly been represented as special interest" impeding their achievement of true equality (Abu-Lavan & Gabriel, 2008, p.48). Brodie (1995) explains that in this era, citizens making claims to the state "on the basis of difference or systemic discrimination" is no longer accepted. Brodie (1995) states that these groups, specifically women, are painted as "bad individuals... 'who are different, dependent, and blameworthy' and needing the kind of

therapy provided by policy offering micro-individual self-help solutions” (cited in McKeen, 2009, p.81).

Thus the support of minority groups was then lost in the media and over time the funding for advocacy groups diminished (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004). Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) branded this as the delegitimization of feminism and claim that this is “why many activists dropped their middle name and redefined the child care issue as being overwhelmingly about children. By the mid 1990’s child care was no longer a “women’s issue”; rather, child poverty had become key concern” (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, p. 166). Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) list several movements where children were the focus such as the 1989 Federal Governments commitment to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000, the United Nations 1990 World Summit for Children and The Rights of the Child as a UN convention to name a few. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) examine recent history in Canada to locate the altering processes regarding the representations of women, their rights and needs, which has resulted in the sidelining of women’s rights, replacing them with children’s. In the 1990’s child centred social concerns were put at the centre of claims making activities of advocates. Child care was absorbed by concerns related to child poverty; in turn sidelining the women’s movement (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004).

The result was that advocacy groups acting in the name of the child participated alongside policy makers to refashion a citizenship regime that would put a greater emphasis on equality of opportunity for children in the future than on the inequalities confronted by their mothers (and other women, to be sure) in the present (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, p. 172).

Callahan (2010) points out that even though the state does not appear to be overly concerned with issues related to women, for the most part women have not pushed back, and feminist activism has not increased. Callahan (2010) attributes the diminishing of feminist movements to the fact that women have shifted their focus on other social issues such as the inequality produced in the global economy. Advocacy for child care also diminished. “Child care advocates were folded into a larger movement focused on children and poverty in it, increasingly, the women’s movement was sidelined. As Wendy McKeen has detailed, the focus on child poverty helped eliminate the space for claims making accorded to the women’s movement” (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, 163-164). Since then talk “about combating exclusion replaced that of equality” (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, p. 167). The movement “through the era of Neoliberalism both effectively sidelined talk of social rights and spending and made equality claims for adults difficult to sustain” (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, p.155).

The federal government’s role in developing policies that respond to the issues facing Canadian women specifically, has been minimized. Since 1995 the federal government has cut several programs that enhance the lives of women (Block, 2010). In 2006 a vital program was cut by the federal government, the Status of Women Canada (Block 2010). The current Conservative government appears to be focused on reducing budgets instead of investing in Canadian families, minimizing the government’s role in providing for society at large (Block, 2010). With “spending on the military and police, border crossings and ports taking up more of the spending room, the programs that most benefit women — housing, child care, education, health care, unemployment insurance

and legal aid — take a back seat, in monetary and policy terms” (Block, 2010, p.9).

Block (2010) states that in the 416 pages of the 2008 Federal Budget, concerns related to women were only mentioned six times in total, proclaiming that a plan would be implemented “to improve women’s economic and social conditions and participation in democratic life” (Block, 2010, p.5). Block (2010) recaps that Canada already developed a similar plan in 1995 that was never utilized. This demonstrates that poverty among women does not appear to be a priority of the current government. This is evident in the cuts to Status of Women Canada, which include the withdrawing of funding to research policies that impacts women’s equality, and the closure of important programs that advance women’s interests (Townson, 2009). The Harper government has also restricted women employed in the federal public service right to pay equity (Townson 2009). In addition the Conservative government also backed out on an agreement with provinces to develop a nationalized system of child care/early learning (Townson, 2009). The Conservative government provides families with “\$100 monthly (amounting to about \$85 after tax), an amount far short of the cost of child care, even if spaces were available” (Callahan, 2010, p. 169) in order for Canadians to choose the best option for child care available to them. The amount provided to families is not adequate in terms of paying for day care throughout the month. While government support of social issues decreased, social advocates changed the shape of whom and what they represented, toward child centred issues, without women’s concerns attached (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004).

The Child as a Symbol to Mobilize Citizens

In Canada, since the 1990s there has been a growing concern regarding child poverty. It has acted as catalyst to mobilize citizens seeking social policies to reduce poverty (McKeen, 2006). Child poverty provided the rationale for all the changes that would be made to child benefit programs throughout the nineties (McKeen, 2006). “Just as significantly, several anti-poverty groups deliberately adopted a child-centred advocacy strategy and developed an effective media campaign as a way of keeping poverty in some form on the policy agenda” (Wiegers, 2002, p.9). This shift in policy changes also presented a shift in advocacy, from advocating in the name of women and other marginalized groups toward advocacy in the name of the child (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004). Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) found that women’s interests were put against interests of children, although they are closely tied.

One of the reasons for this shift is highlighted by Dobrowolsky and Jenson, (2004) who note how powerful a symbol can be in gaining support for social programs. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) state that the symbol of the child unified many different actors, consolidated the interests of communities, as well as determined who would be represented in political claims. Through claims making in the name of the child, women’s claims no longer remained prevalent in policy making communities, and were replaced with children’s claims (Dobrowolsky & Jenson, 2004). Instead of advocacy groups making claims in the name of women and others “new patterns of inclusion and exclusion took form, whereby women ‘exited’ and children ‘entered’ the scene” (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, 158).

Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) point out the significance of the change in name from Family Allowance to Child Tax Benefit, and “this was only one of many representational shifts initiated by the state to indicate its new interest in children” (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, p. 167). This program change reflects several values inherent within these policies. The first, identified by Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) is that the child is “the new worthy citizen” for the state to invest (p.154). Dobrowolsky (2002) finds that in this period of social policy, children “increasingly act, literally and metaphorically, as the ‘poster child’ and take the starring role in these new discourses and policy instruments” (p.51). Dobrowolsky (2002) acknowledges that children are seen to be what has long been named as the deserving poor, and its “hard to disagree with the fact that children need to get an education or work at learning and acquiring skills for the market. At the same time, children reinforce parents' obligations to find paid work” (Dobrowolsky, 2002, p. 51). What Dobrowolsky has highlighted is how child centred policies pair perfectly with current social policy which has developed under the third way social policy reconfiguration of recent years.

Weiger (2002) discusses the rationale some women’s groups may use in advocating for child poverty programs such as the Child Tax Benefit, is that the monetary contribution is provided to the parents. However, Weiger (2002) warns that if poverty reduction among women is framed this way, it reinforces the long standing patriarchal assumption “that women are important primarily as a resource for children...and that women’s independent welfare is not a matter of social or community concern” (p. 56).

Poverty Reduction Social Policies and Programs

The approach to poverty reduction has changed due to the new interest in children, coupled with the restructuring of our welfare state. Presently social policy in Canada is approached “with a more casework-style orientation” concerned with transforming individuals behaviour (McKeen, 2007, p. 152). This case work oriented approach will be looked at more closely below, along with the discourses and programs that have developed to enhance Early Childhood Development (ECD).

The National Children’s Agenda

Under the third way reconfiguration of social policy, in the 1990’s the federal government initiated several child centred social policy shifts through the National Children’s Agenda (NCA) (Dobrowolsky & Jenson, 2004; McKeen, 2007). The NCA is an overarching term that encompasses the Canada Child Tax Benefit/National Child Benefit (CCTB/NCB) and initiatives on early childhood development (McKeen, 2007). Within the NCA a wide array of programs and benefits had been developed with an overarching goal of ensuring Canadian children are healthy (McKeen, 2007). The first early childhood development agreement (ECDA) began in 2000 and ended in 2006. It entailed a transfer of funds from the federal government to the provinces to target maternal health, parenting and supporting families, and early childhood development (McKeen, 2007). “Beneath the rhetoric of the NCA, the onus was on individuals to transform themselves (or their children) into healthy, successful, independent, autonomous people who are fully integrated into the labour market and adaptable to shifting market conditions” (McKeen, 2009 p.78). In the following sections policies

implemented under the guise of the NCA will be looked at, more specifically the way in which child poverty has been couched within this framework.

Early Childhood Development (ECD)

McKeen (2007; 2009) and Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) point out that research on child development provided by child health and child welfare professionals, grounded in a human capital framework, have had a significant impact in changing the focus away from women toward children. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) find that a report provided by McCain and Mustard (1999) largely informed the programs of Early Year Centre's in Ontario. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) explain that scientific information that highlighted the "science of brain development in children" gained significant attention which further exacerbated concerns related to child poverty (cited in McKeen, 2006).

McKeen (2007) attributes this new found respect from federal policy experts toward these professionals, to the fact that their proposed solutions for addressing the problems of families with children fit well with the recently mobilized "neoconservative actors" and their residual perspectives. The central goal of ECD programming was to provide parents with education and capacity building in parenting in order to enhance the lives of Canadian children (McKeen, 2009). "The interest in parenting partly reflected the 'scientific' discovery that parenting style is an important factor influencing child well-being and behaviour and has a stronger influence than income on a child's behaviour" (Canada 2003 in McKeen, 2009, 80). Therefore providing parents with financial resources to ensure they are able to spend time with their children was not of grave

concern (McKeen, 2009). This approach to social policy and programming sends a clear message of inferiority to parents that face barriers related to income.

The neoconservative actors, as McKeen (2007) refers to them, felt that poverty had to be addressed but felt that the cause was “dysfunctional families and bad parenting practices” (McKeen, 2007, p. 156). In these discussions a form of consensus was reached but McKeen (2007) says that “a shift in understanding about the definition of the problems, their causes, and how to address them” was evident. In summary a shift toward health framed social problems, where “individual families and their parenting practices” became the priority in policy....Problems stemmed from “individual short comings” such as “psychological or emotional disturbances, lack of parenting skills, lack of training or poor academic achievement, alcohol and drug abuse, and so on”(McKeen, 2007, p. 156). Murray (2004) points out that many of the aims of these child centred initiatives were based in supporting parents “in raising happy, healthy children’, promoting ‘healthy pregnancies’, ‘improving parenting and family supports’, and ‘strengthening early childhood development, learning and care’ (p. 60 cited in McKeen, 2006, p. 872). However, material supports, barriers to employment and marginalization of families did not appear to be of grave concern, yet there was an objective to assist those who were deemed as “vulnerable families” (McKeen, 2009, 80).

Risk Oriented Approaches

By presenting child poverty as an impediment to healthy child development, child poverty was seen as problematic by social policy actors. Inequality was not a problem in and of itself but only because it further contributed to a lack of child development.

McKeen (2006) states that the research disseminated by Mustard connected child poverty to poor child development, however the solution to the problem of child poverty “tended to be conceptualized as community programmes that serve individuals seen as being ‘at risk’ – i.e. individuals who have come into contact with human service agencies (i.e. are poor)” (McKeen, 2006, p.872). McKeen (2007) argues that federally social policy actors have reconfigured their methods for addressing social policies toward an approach which favours the market “over the social entity” by moving toward “individualized programs and practices, the growing acceptance of risk-oriented approaches, and the growing acceptance of direct interventions in families’ lives with in the latter realm of programming”(McKeen, 2007, p.153). This targeted approach “constructs parenting as a private issue and occupation” sending a message that “it is parents, as individuals, who are responsible for making the right choices to keep themselves and their children out of poverty, and therefore those who receive benefits have somehow failed to do their jobs properly” (McKeen, 2007, p.159). The former social safety net is no longer available to all families; instead it was redesigned to address child poverty as well as reinforce an incentive for children’s parents to seek out employment in the market (McKeen, 2009).

The tools which had been developed to assess at risk families were grounded in

statistical correlatives, and they invariably identify as at risk the groups that least fit into standard, white, middle-class norms of family and family life and who are most disadvantaged under the existing social structures. As such, these programs effectively intervene in ways that are highly classed, gendered, and raced-targeting the poor, lone-mother families, families of racially marginalized communities, and so on (McKeen, 2009, p.82).

In exploring one of my central research questions, are child poverty reduction policies and programs the best means of reducing child poverty? Do child centred social

polices help women to achieve true equality? I reviewed literature and recent studies to assess and understand the extent of women and child poverty in Canada.

Women and Child Poverty in Canada

Townson (2009) points out that women's poverty is not put in the centre of policy debates, although women continue to have high rates of poverty, particularly women who are single parents, as 23.6% live with a low income. Female lone-parent families are approximately five times more likely than two-parent families to live in poverty. In Canada, in 2007, 1.22 million adult women lived in poverty (Townson, 2009). When comparing unattached women to unattached men, females fair worse than men, 45.3% of women were living in poverty compared to 33.4% of single men (Weiger, 2002). In 2005, 320,000 children — half of all the children in low-income families — lived with a single mother” (Block, 2010, p. 19). Older Canadian women tend to experience higher rates of poverty with 14.3 % living within a low income bracket in 2007. These figures were developed after government “transfers and tax credits” were taken into account (Townson, 2009, p.6).

Women who have children with disabilities, visible minorities or aboriginal children experience higher rates of poverty. Visible minority Canadian families have high incidents of poverty with 18.7 percent of that population living in poverty in 2005 compared to non-racialized families, where six percent lived in poverty in 2005. It becomes evident that this population is at a further social disadvantage due to race (Block, 2010). But among all the vulnerable groups, poverty rates for women are higher than those of men. “Gender creates a cleavage of vulnerability that cuts across all other

groups” (Townson (2009, p.5). Although many women experience poverty the government has not developed policies to address this issue (Townson, 2009). Instead child centred policies have been developed.

Since the adoption of child centred policies Canadian children’s lives have not improved greatly as a result of these policies. A recent report published by UNICEF stated that income inequality is prevalent among Canadian children. Monsebraaten, (2010) says Canada ranked 17th in terms of children’s material well-being, which includes family income and housing” out of the other OECD countries (p.1). Monsebraaten (2010) points out that this data was gathered prior to the global recession of 2008, which can only mean that inequality has increased. Poverty among children has remained the same for the most part, since 1989 when the federal government promised to eliminate child poverty by the year 2000 (Battle and Torjman, 2009). In 1989, 11.7 percent of children lived in families in poverty and by 2006 this only decreased by .5 percent to 11.3 percent (Battle and Torjman, 2009). Although child poverty has not decreased over the past 20 years, as highlighted above, many groups have advocated in the name of the child, including the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction.

Throughout the remainder of this paper I will investigate whether the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction is illustrative of this larger social policy trend discussed above. I will also critique whether this change in the focal point of policy makers is working to enhance women and children’s lives, or if child centred social policies are the best approaches to reducing child poverty?

CHAPTER FOUR: STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The City of Hamilton has a large portion, 20% of the population living below the Low Income Cut Off. In 2004 a local agency, the Social Planning and Research Council produced a report analyzing poverty trends in Hamilton based on the 2001 census data. This report demonstrated the high rates of poverty in this city. Based on these findings in February 2004 The Hamilton Community Foundation started an initiative called Tackling Poverty Together. In 2005 the City of Hamilton Partnered with the Hamilton Community Foundation and formed the Roundtable for Poverty Reduction in order to prevent and reduce poverty in Hamilton. This multi-sector group consists of key stake holders from Hamilton, from various sectors including business and not for profits. After initial consultations and discussion the Hamilton Roundtable arrived at a mission statement: To Make Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child. Following on that mission statement their activities focused on enhancing the lives of poor children and youth and their families.

According to a Report provided by The City of Hamilton's Social Services Downloading Committee from February 15, 2006 the early priorities determined by the Roundtable were as follows:

Poverty reduction in Hamilton has to become a priority, The focus will be to prevent poverty in children and youth, One in four children (25,000) in our community live below the poverty level , 42% of single parents and 38% of families in our community live below the poverty level. The Poverty Round Table is developing a community plan that will be released in the spring and that will focus on solutions to decrease infant mortality rates, incidents of low birth weight,

teenage pregnancies, school drop out rates, school mobility rates and fewer children having to use our food banks. The Plan also focuses on increasing education levels, participation in athletic and cultural activities and providing added affordable housing to families (City of Hamilton Social Services Downloading Committee, 2006, p. 3-4).

In June 2006 this advocacy group launched the Document *Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework*. “The Change Framework is a strategic vision for the community, and identifies five critical points of investment in children and youth to break the cycle of poverty and level the playing field for all children” (Starting Points and Strategies, 2007). The report stated that the Roundtable’s role was to be a convenor and facilitator to help support a change process in the community. The framework outlined key areas in various life stages where the community could target poverty reduction efforts (Johnson, 2006). The change framework looked at the progression from birth to adulthood, as well as the community and the systems surrounding individuals through this progression in society. Children were placed at the centre of this ecological model and the outer circles surrounding a child also became essential areas of poverty reduction. The outer circles consisted of family, school, neighbourhood, community and policy. Addressing the outer circles was also viewed as essential for poverty reduction in order to achieve the goal of making Hamilton the best place to raise a child (Johnson, 2006). This model looked at children as an entry point into a larger conversation about poverty reduction at a community level.

I want to examine this local effort to reduce poverty as it mirrors other poverty reduction efforts such as the National Campaign against Child Poverty (Campaign 2000) and the Ontario Provincial Poverty Reduction Plan. This study will allow me to gain an

understanding of what contributes to the contemporary social phenomenon in which poverty reduction claims are made to the state in the name of children. In this study I want to gain further understanding from the persons involved in the development of the Hamilton Roundtable about how the initial focus on child poverty came to be and what factors influenced that decision. In order to understand the implications for marginalized groups when advocacy efforts focus on child poverty, the strengths and weakness of a reductive policy focus on child poverty will be analysed.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY

Epistemology

Epistemology is defined as “issues about an adequate theory of knowledge or justification strategy” (Harding in Carter and Little, 2007, p. 1317). It is how a researcher views knowledge creation and how we justify it. Carter and Little (2007) state that epistemology is informed by values and cultural context. Researchers may struggle with identifying epistemology as I did because it “is normative” (Carter, and Little, 2007, p.1322). When discussing knowledge creation, Olesen and Clarke put it forth best: “it is important to recognize that knowledge production is continually dynamic-new frames open which give way to others which in turn open again and again” (in Gringeri et al., 2010, p. 391). Knowledge is something that is created, constructed, fluid, changing and ever growing depending on the socio-political context. This view differs from that of a positivist researcher who views knowledge as scientific, unbiased, without a historical or structurally critical analysis and that knowledge is out there waiting to be discovered (Neuman, 1997). Carter and Little (2007) go on to say that “the praxis of social inquiry is an important means by which theories of knowledge can be constructed” (p.1317). This further highlights that knowledge is constructed and through research we can add or modify existing theories of knowledge.

Critical and feminist methodologies claim that knowledge is something that can be co-created. Similarly, the knowledge of those who have lived experience is valued

under these approaches (Neuman, 1997). Great importance is placed on expanding ‘ways of knowing’ (Fook, 2003). Harding; Harstock and Reinharz state that a strong tenet of feminist research is the recognition that conventional science, which can be described as a positivist approach, (Neuman, 1997) is viewed as a “male-dominated paradigm” (in Gringeri et al., 2010, p. 392). Feminist researchers ask questions related to “who are seen as experts in our society, by what means someone acquires this status, and by what means competing knowledge claims are adjudicated so that some are legitimated while others are dismissed” (in Neysmith, 1995, p.101). Therefore a feminist researcher’s goal is to oppose this dominance of the male point of view (Gringeri et al, 2010). It is important to be cognizant of one’s theory of knowledge because when conducting research one’s assumptions or beliefs about knowledge construction become evident based in their approach to research, whether a researcher was intending for it to or not (Carter and Little, 2007).

A Qualitative Approach

Methodology is another part of knowledge production and is connected to one’s epistemology. Carter and Little explain that “methodology justifies method, which produces data and analyses. Knowledge is created from data and analyses. Epistemology modifies methodology and justifies the knowledge produced” (Carter and Little, 2007, p. 1317). Methodology is an important component in the research process as it is a guide in determining how one’s research should proceed (Harding in Carter and Little, 2007). Methodology is an analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry (Schwandt, in Carter and Little, 2007). Methodology provides an

approach to research and has an impact on the “objectives, research questions, and study design” therefore having an impact on the chosen methods a researcher may use (Carter and Little, 2007, p.1326).

Qualitative “research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context sensitive...decisions about design and strategy are ongoing and are grounded in the practice, process and context of the research itself” (Mason, 2002, p.24). A qualitative approach fits well with my desire to examine the historical context, issues of difference and power relations. By using a qualitative approach for this study I will gain insight into the complexity of decision making that went into choosing how to approach poverty reduction, and the cost and benefit analysis HRPR actors undertook when coming up with their framework. Rain (1992) states that qualitative “researchers tend to use a “case oriented approach [that] places cases not variables, centre stage” (cited in Kreuger and Newman, 2006, p. 159). The Roundtable was chosen as a case study to illustrate how larger trends in social policy have manifested at a local level. A critical gender based analysis in a policy context will be used through this study. I will do this by utilizing tenets of Feminist Methodology and elements of Critical Discourse Analysis.

Gender-Based Policy Analysis

Olesen describes three elements that should be included in feminist approaches to qualitative research, which include: Qualitative research makes evident the diversity of problems women experience along with the structures that surround them; the problems are examined in relation to “theoretical, policy, or action frameworks to realize social

justice”; most importantly “it generates new ideas to produce knowledge about oppressive situations for women, for action or further research” and without a qualitative account, those ideas may be missed (in Gringeri et al., 2010, p.392).

Callahan (2010) states that a strength of feminist thinking is that it assesses how structures in society perpetuate inequality for all citizens’ not just women. She goes on to say that when examining policies feminists assess who will benefit from policies and who will not. There is an understanding that persons will be effected by policies differently and they are not gender, class or racially neutral. Callahan (2010) states that “now, more than ever, it is crucial to include feminist perspectives in dealing with problems, policy, and practice in the human services” (p.166). She goes on to explain that it is women who are predominantly employed in human services, as well as compose most of the clients who use services (Callahan, 2010). Callahan (2010) points out that equality among the sexes has not yet been accomplished. Therefore enacting policies which are designed to be gender neutral can actually maintain inequality while simultaneously reducing the amount of understanding and empathy for women who are disadvantaged. Mulvale (2001) points out that “feminist as well as anti-racists critiques of the welfare state point to intersecting and frequently compounding forms of domination based on gender differences or ethno-cultural identity that contribute to....inequality” (Mulvale, 2001, p. 31).

The BC Ministry of Women’s Equality (1997) lists several principals that are present when using a gender based policy analysis such as: Policies enacted by governments always have a human impact and those impacts affect women and men in

unique ways. Women as a social group are not homogenous. Policies should be designed to produce equality among women and men and that women and men cannot be seen as having similar needs and positions (cited in Callahan, 2010). In my own research of the Hamilton Roundtable it appears that this group chose a gender blind approach to poverty reduction and have separated child poverty from women's inequality. It is my hope to illuminate gender inequality and its relation to poverty by utilizing a gender based policy analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Van Dijk (1993) highlights the very political nature of a critical discourse analysis, which aligns with tenets of critical and feminist methodology. The targets “are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice” (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). It was in the 1980's that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) first emerged from scholars such as Fairclough, Wodak, and van Dijk (Bloomaert and Bulcanen, 2000). Lazar (2005) explains that the basis of CDA is to critically examine how social structures that produce inequality are maintained through the way language is used. Similar elements present in both critical and feminist theory are found in CDA.

CDA methodology places emphasis on the historical and socio-political context as society is looked at as a whole within the current socio-historical context (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) state that CDA researchers see language as a “social practice,” and the context of language is vital (cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p 3). Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) explain that discourse is a significant feature “of the

economic, social and cultural changes of late modernity” (cited in Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). Discourse “means anything from a historical monument, *a lieu de memoire*, a policy, a political strategy, narratives in a restricted or broad sense of the term, text, talk, a speech, topic-related conversations, to language per se” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p 2-3). Discourse comprises “situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258 cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p.5-6). A CDA researcher wants to expose “ideological assumptions” which are concealed in text or speech, in order transform power relations in our society (Fairclough, 1989, cited in McGregor, 2003). Language changes over time, and currently this is visible in the contemporary approaches to social welfare, which are now couched in terms of social investments in human capital (Dobrowolosky and Jenson, 2004).

CDA researchers are concerned with how power dynamics contribute to and maintain inequality. Processes which produce cultural meanings (discursive practices) can help create and maintain “unequal power relations...between...social class, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people” (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258 cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p.5-6). Discourse helps to support the “social status quo” and can also be a factor in challenging it, by highlighting concerns related to power (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 5-6). CDA focuses on illuminating power structures and unveiling dominant “ideologies which appear as ‘neutral’ holding on to assumptions that stay largely unchallenged” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p.8). This can be done consciously or

unconsciously by some actors, however Wodak & Meyer (2009) point out that power hungry organizations attempt to influence ideologies present in society, in order to shift society in a way which suits those actors. Although the HRPR has become largely responsible for framing how poverty is conceived and how poverty should be addressed in the City of Hamilton, I do not think the way they chose to frame poverty reduction was in order for the actors involved to maintain power. But perhaps they recognized a need to frame poverty in the way in which they did, in order to garner support of those with economic power in the city and beyond. Perhaps if poverty was framed in terms of redistribution those with economic power in the city would feel less compelled to act.

McGregor (2003) provides an analysis of power:

Discourse and language can be used to make unbalanced power relations and portrayals of social groups appear to be common sense, normal, and natural when in fact the reality is prejudice, injustice, and inequalities. Using just words, those in power, or wishing to be so, can misdirect our concerns for persistent, larger systemic issues of class, gender, age, religion, and culture seem petty and nonexistent. Unless we begin to debunk their words, we can be misled and duped into embracing the dominant worldview (ideology) at our expense and their gain (p. 4).

Framing issues related to poverty solely in terms of poverty reduction among children diminishes a focus on structural inequality, which perpetuates poverty among citizens to begin with. The focus on redistribution, economic disparities, and gender, racial equality is lost (McKeen, 2007). “Oppression, repression, and marginalization go unchallenged if the text is not critically analyzed to reveal power relations and dominance” (McGregor, 2003, p. 4). In contemporary society “issues of gender, power and ideology have become increasingly complex and subtle” (Lazar, 2005, p.1).CDA fits with my analysis of the

HRPR as a case study of a larger trend in contemporary society to address poverty through child poverty reduction, as this approach links texts at the micro level with “the underlying power structures in society” (Thompson, 2002 cited in McGregor, 2003).

One limitation of CDA is that often it assumes and looks for intent to marginalize the poor, and what it does not capture is unintentionally doing so. CDA is useful as it uncovers the negative impacts of how poverty is framed and how inequality is maintained, but it does not reveal the poverty reduction intent on the part of some of the wealthy and powerful. CDA tends not to examine, how an end goal may be for society to be more equal, however the means to achieve that end tend to do the opposite, which is largely due to the current political configurations (Baker-Collins, June 21, 2011).

Approaching power as a way of one person having power over another is a fairly binary conceptualization of power, where power is only understood as power over. Hayward (1998) conceptualizes power as much more complex than one having power over another. She finds that the powerful and powerless are both faced with limits due to social boundaries which inhibit or enhance their ability to exceed power over another. Social boundaries “such as laws, rules, norms, institutional arrangements, and social identities and exclusions” influence how power yields for those perceived as powerful and those perceived as powerless (Hayward, 1998, p.1). Traditionally students tend to focus their studies of power on situations where “actors appear to meet the moral qualifications for being designated powerful” such as a coal miner owner in Gaventa’s study (Hayward, 1998, p. 3). Some of the actors who are part of the HRPR also meet similar qualifications of powerful, but their involvement in poverty reduction endeavours

is committed to reducing poverty in this city, they too have exemplified feelings of limitations in how they can approach poverty reduction. It appears that the way this organization has framed poverty reduction is consistent with how poverty has been framed by other social actors in the Canadian context. Therefore I want to use a more careful conceptualization of power in my discourse analysis.

Through a CDA researcher's analysis of power, the structures in society which perpetuate inequality are unveiled (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000). By utilizing this method it is my hope to analyze how inequality is not addressed, but in fact is maintained by framing and addressing poverty through children. CDA is a tool to track the language used by elites to maintain inequality in society (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). "CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, constituted, legitimized, and so on, by language use (or in discourse)" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10).

The next element of CDA to be examined is the implications for praxis and action which can be developed through the research project. Lazar (2005) finds that embedded in CDA are emancipatory goals. The dimensions of language use are "the object of moral and political evaluation and analyzing them should have effects in society: empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilizing people to remedy social wrongs" (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p. 450). Whether or not the HRPR is conscious of the implications of their decision to frame poverty as child poverty, by engaging in CDA, I will highlight inequality and power dynamics in hopes to evoke change. Toolan (1997) claims that a researcher who is using Discourse Analysis can make suggestions for change as well as put forth "corrections to

particular discourses” (cited in Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p. 450). A researcher using this methodology is transparent in expressing a strong commitment “to change, empowerment, and practice” (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, p. 450). From using a CDA methodology I hope suggestions of change become evident and a more structural analysis of poverty will be illuminated through my research project.

The final component of CDA to discuss is reflexivity and tending to difference. Wodak and Meyer (2009) stress that a researcher using CDA, must be aware that they are motivated by socio-political and economic factors. Using CDA “implies specific ethical standards” for a researcher, “an intention to make their position, research interests and values explicit and their criteria as transparent as possible without feeling the need to apologize for the critical stance of their work” (Van Leeuwen, 2006, 293 cited in Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7). This unapologetic attitude has been a point of contention in my research because even though I was transparent in explaining my research interests and values to the participants, I felt tension critiquing the HRPR member’s good intent. In our conversations it became evident that they were not consciously aware of some of the negative implications of framing poverty reduction through children. CDA offered a structural analysis that was missing from the HRPR which I felt was unintentional. Throughout the study I remained open and transparent about my own position with the participants in this study in order to mitigate these effects.

A Feminist approach to CDA takes on a more comparative approach rather than one that is universal and uniform for all women, tending to multifaceted forms of oppression that impact women differently and in some ways can unite or divide them

(Lazar, 2005). In the patriarchal structure of society, women are inferior to men, yet among gender “other relations of power based on race/ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, age, culture and geography means that gender oppression is neither materially experienced nor discursively enacted in the same way for women everywhere” (Lazar, 2005, p. 10). This comparative approach was a useful framework while conducting this study.

Ethics

This study received ethics clearance from the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

Data Collection

For this study two types of data were utilized, the initial Roundtable documents: *The Framework for Change* and *The Starting Points and Strategies*. In addition, interviews were conducted with informants from key sectors that were and are involved in the development of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and its mission statement.

A semi structured interview guide was used to interview six key informants. A purposeful sample was chosen for the interviews. These included an employee with the City of Hamilton, a representative from the Hamilton Community Foundation and the former chair, the former and current director of the HRPR, and an individual who worked closely with the Roundtable Members with the lived experience of poverty.

The interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length. The data was collected by taking hand written notes augmented with an audio recording (with permission of participants) to ensure that the notes were complete and to ensure quotations were

accurate. Both forms of data were analyzed in order to illuminate the factors which influenced how poverty was framed by the Roundtable in the early stages of its formation.

Data Analysis

CDA illuminates how social problems are “mediated by mainstream ideology and power relationships, all perpetuated by the use of written texts in our daily and professional lives” (McGregor, 2003). The unit of analysis is written texts or spoken words. In my own analysis I wanted to look at poverty framed as child poverty reduction, and how framing poverty this way maintains inequality. McGregor (2003) explains that text is evidence of incidents where ideological truths are presented, the truth or message is framed in a certain way, in a particular social context. Since I am most interested in the earlier approaches of the HRPR, I examine text mainly from key informant interviews, and the earlier documents, the Starting Point Strategies and the Framework for Change.

The data collection tools and strategies used within CDA vary widely. “There is no accepted canon of data collection” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p.32). “CDA offers a sophisticated theorization of the relationship between social practices and discourse structure...and a wide range of tools and strategies for close analysis of actual, contextualized uses of language” (Lazar, 2005, p.4). One author recommends that a researcher should first review text in an uncritical way “accepting the reading and offering unquestioning support of the status quo” (Huckin, 1997 cited in McGregor, 2003, p.5). McGregor (2003) offers several strategies. First when reviewing the text a

second time, in a more critical way, question the text and think about ways it could have been different. Then conducting a broad analysis, a researcher should first notice the *genre* of text, and then how the message is *framed*. A genre refers to the type of orientation of the text with its own characteristics, similarly to a template, such as a journal article...“Because these rules, for how to structure the genre, belong to the institution that owns the genre, the genre becomes a means through which the institution extends power” (McGregor, 2003, p. 5). Huckin (1997) put forth that the perspective represented should be analyzed next. A researcher would look for how the text is framed, an “angle, slant, or point of view” by using several techniques (cited in McGregor, 2003, p. 5). The final step is a micro level analysis, where “sentences, phrase, and words” are examined, which is called *topicalization* (McGregor, 2003, p. 5). In “choosing what to put in the topic position, the writer creates a perspective or slant that influences the reader’s perception” (McGregor, 2003, p. 5).

I used qualitative approaches to analyzing data formed during interviews with the participants. The data was coded to find themes which demonstrate at three levels how the Roundtable is illustrative of a larger trend in social policy where poverty is addressed through child poverty reduction. First open coding was conducted to locate initial themes, codes and labels to categorize the data (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006). What Krueger and Newman (2006) refer to as axial coding was the next step completed. At this phase of analysis the sets of codes and concepts that were derived in the first stage were looked at to assess new themes that emerged and the initial codes were reviewed and examined. A “researcher asks about causes and consequences, conditions and

interactions, strategies and process, and looks for categories or concepts that cluster together” (Kreuger and Neuman, 2006, p. 439). The researcher links concepts as well more questions about the data are provoked in order to build support for their arguments (Kreuger and Newman, 2006). The final stage is selective coding. At this phase major themes have been identified by the researcher (Krueger and Newman, 2006). Also previous codes and data are scanned. A researcher begins “after they have well-developed concepts and have started to organize their overall analysis around several core generalizations or ideas” (Kreuger and Newman, 2006, p. 439). In the final phase major themes are elaborated on and connected (Kreuger and Newman). To assist with coding throughout data collection I conducted what Kreuger and Newman (2006) refer to as analytic memo writing. While transcribing interviews many notes were taken, which helped me to form categories and codes during data analysis.

CHAPTER SIX: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Early on, the HRPR launched their Framework for Change document and announced the slogan “Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child.” These earlier advocacy efforts focused on child poverty reduction (although not limited to) through their ecological model where the needs of children were placed at the centre. Many participants identified that advocating through the eyes of the child was a powerful entry point into a larger conversation about poverty that would engage the broader community. The Poverty Roundtable provides a local case which illustrates a larger trend in social policy where advocacy groups in the third way era had to change the nature and shape of their poverty claims. This was done by shaping their claims in a way that was receptive in this third way social policy era, with those with power and those with policy making capacity in society. Throughout this chapter the following three areas will be discussed: themes which demonstrate that the Roundtable for Poverty Reduction mirrors this larger trend in social policy; the strengths of this advocacy approach; and the weaknesses of a reductive policy focus on child poverty.

Through interviews with former and current staff or members of the HRPR, I was provided with insights into the development of their approach to poverty reduction through the entry point of the child. The interview transcriptions and literature on third way approaches to social policy’s reductive focus on child poverty were used to derive themes to evaluate whether this group is illustrative of this trend. Three main themes that

highlight this trend both locally and beyond are: a human capital approach to social policy; changes in representation; and the child as a tool for mobilization. One other theme which arose through the conversations I had with the Roundtable members was the similarity between the Roundtable's approach to poverty reduction and the Ontario provincial government's poverty reduction strategy. How these two similar approaches to poverty reduction further demonstrates the third way era focus of the Roundtable will be explored below.

A Human Capital Approach

The first theme, a human capital approach to social policy, will be broken down into two subthemes: the economics of poverty; and investing in future citizen workers. Similarly to the language and the way poverty reduction has been framed in this era of third way social policy, poverty reduction is often couched in terms of costs and investments (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004). One participant explained poverty from a human capital development perspective:

Poverty and prosperity are directly linked, clearly. Health and poverty are directly linked, a, justice costs in, in taxes are directly linked to what we do, from human capital development. Because poverty is really a human capital development issue as well, it's a social issue; it's an economic issue (Roundtable Member).

Prior to examining how the Roundtable mirrors this trend in social policy it is important to clarify that I support making arguments grounded in economics and how the cost of poverty will impact our collective futures as citizens. I believe in, and use, much of the same rationale in my own advocacy efforts. What I am most interested in is how arguments for poverty reduction have changed in nature over time. In terms of the

illustration of this social policy trend, the economics of poverty theme will be examined first, followed by the theme, future citizen workers.

The Economics of Poverty – Strategic Investments

All of the participants spoke about poverty reduction in terms of financial costs and the return society will get from making poverty reduction investments. Often poverty was referred to as a community cost, and a healthcare cost by the participants. One participant explains:

kids are going to school hungry, they are coming home hungry and we know if they are hungry they are not learning as well as they could, a, they're having a, health impacts, a, there are potential costs you know, down the road in society, not only in lost income, lost revenue, or cost to the social justice system as well. Um, so how do we um, how do we stop that in its tracks, school nutrition was identified as a big piece of that (Roundtable Member).

The participant makes an important point, poverty does cost society. Poverty impacts the health of our communities, the education of our young, and results in the loss of human capital. What is striking is that in order to spark an interest in poverty reduction, the arguments of a collective cost must be put forth in order to ignite action by those with the power to do so. The Roundtable has picked up on this trend and often the participants explained that in order to garner wide support for poverty reduction, the costs of poverty must be made clear. One participant points out the societal costs this generation will face due to poor policy decisions:

We know as a result of some very bad government decisions um over the last 20 or 30 years, I'll particularly point to the cuts to social assistance in the mid 1990's. You know there was a whole generation of kids growing up in low-income house holds that will very likely a, as a result of not having the supports when they needed it continue to live in poverty for the next 40 or 50 years and they will die early and they will cost the health care system more, and they'll cost the justices system more (Roundtable Member).

The participants clearly understood and stressed the importance of poverty reduction, not just to better improve the conditions faced by those who are living in poverty, but for society as a whole. Yet, the Roundtable demonstrates that in order to put poverty on the agenda, the costs of poverty must be stressed to non-traditional poverty reduction actors such as the business or political community. The participants highlight that framing child poverty as a societal cost has been one way to gain wide spread support and drive for decreasing poverty, especially among children.

Under third way approaches to social policy, poverty reduction is often referred to as an investment. One Roundtable member stated that the use of language centred on investments and framing poverty this way was strategic in avoiding a charitable response: “framing a lot of the work that we were doing as poverty, and moving it away from being a charitable conversation to being an investment into health, an investment into a, individuals education skills, things of that nature” (Roundtable Member).

Prior to discussing poverty reduction as an investment, it is important to clarify what is meant by investments. The Roundtable Members that were interviewed for this study often referred to investments in two ways. The first was referring to investments that could be made in terms of poverty reduction efforts by key stake holders in the community, for example: funding a school nutrition program. The second was investments in our collective future as citizens, on a larger scale. The latter form of investment is what I am referring to in this section.

Interestingly, all participants referred to poverty reduction as an investment, and child poverty reduction was often described as one of the best avenues to get a larger return on those investment efforts. One participant explains:

I think if you're looking for the biggest bang for the buck in terms of poverty reduction, um, you are not going to get a better one than if you invest in children. Um, because that, a, again, looking at a, whether it's looking at brain development, looking at education. Um, just making sure kids get off to a good start in life is going to be tremendously helpful for society down the road (Roundtable Member).

Young people were described by one participant as our community's sustainability index. I found this comment to be interesting and it led me to question how adults who are marginalized fit into a society's sustainability index. Based on the participants comment it appears that many of the participants felt poverty framed as investments was a strategic approach to take in the goal of poverty reduction and elimination. One participant explains that

what we actually did was, we, we, said if it is going to be about investment, investments into humans and human capital and development essentially, a our framework actually became that and our framework became a frame work of, from the time a child, in fact prenatal through to when a person actually dies (Roundtable Member).

One participant felt that as a collective society, if we make “investments now, the return for society is huge, absolutely huge” (Roundtable Member).

One Roundtable member explained that when engaging multiple sectors to become involved in poverty reduction that they had “to prove that a, making these investments is going to have a pay out, and all the literature and best practices showed that, that, those types of investments [child centred] would reveal a good rate of return down the road”. Spending is economically strategic and at the centre is making sound

investments for our future. Costs and cuts take precedence over equality. The Roundtable also took the same approach, and when convincing business sectors that would not traditionally be leading poverty reduction efforts, that these investment centred arguments increased the participation of these non-traditional sectors.

The Roundtable approached poverty reduction in a way which centred on strategic investments that will have a return. The participants explained that children and youth would likely produce a return on poverty reduction investments. Also, non-traditional groups felt that children and youth were a sound investment that they could contribute toward. One participant explained:

you know the real goal for us is, let's get kids ready for that employment. Probably a little less research than we could find in terms of asset building. It was that piece, a, probably came more out of a stability context from our private sector folks at the table. Who were beginning to say to us how do we build a culture of, of um, sustainability financially? (Roundtable Member)

The comment regarding getting children ready for employment further demonstrated the entrenchment of the HRPR's approach within the third way.

Investing in Future Citizen Workers

More specifically, investments were discussed in relation to our future citizens and workers. The early years are often referred to in terms of an important time for investment. Due to research on the early years of life, this stage of development is perceived as one of most strategic. Helping children who are at risk of poor development informs much of the programming and early childhood development social policy. This research has influenced much of the Early Learning Programs in Ontario (McKeen, 2007) and has clearly influenced many of the actors involved in the decision making of the

Hamilton Roundtable. I acknowledge the importance of investing in early years, but as Wendy McKeen has also clarified, what's important is how we design programs to enhance development at this early stage of life. The programming approaches will be discussed in greater length in the discussion of strengths and weakness section.

One area that has proved to be central to third way approaches to social policy is making investments to assist families who are At-risk and in the Early Years. One participant explains that she “felt that this community was at risk” and the participant would often hear:

all sorts of horrible stories, you know, about kids and no food, and about wearing cloths three sizes too big, about one school where three young kids there a, three kids had committed suicide and their mothers were committing suicide, schools where they didn't have any toilet paper, no hand towels, um, etc. (Roundtable Member).

The participant clearly felt that this population was at-risk and efforts should focus on minimizing these symptoms of structural poverty. Many of the participants referred to the concept of at-risk in conjunction with early childhood centred themes.

Many of the participants explained how the research on the early years done by Fraser Mustard and others had an impact on their child centred focus. This evidence was useful in arguing for poverty reduction efforts as they were seen as investments that would have a return and was backed by respected research. One participant explained why investing in children became an important part of their advocacy strategy:

Of course the Fraser Mustard work and others a, would indicate that um, huge investments in the early years a, makes the greatest difference in terms of the cost further on and such. Not to eliminate the later years in our thinking, and in terms of individuals and seniors and such. But, um, the early years would be certainly a very, very important investment to make (Roundtable Member).

Early Childhood Development was mentioned by all the participants involved in this study in one form or another, and was mentioned on over 25 different occasions. It is very clear that the Roundtable members were largely influenced by research and literature that focused on this stage of life, similarly to other advocacy groups and political actors that were mentioned in the earlier sections. The Early Years was viewed by many participants as the right investment as a large number of people could support this type of social investment and that the research supported this type of investment as instrumental to poverty reduction.

Finally, the community has a well-established best start network which appeared to be a natural partnering body for poverty reduction efforts at the community level. The frequency the Early Years was mentioned further demonstrates that the Roundtable poverty reduction efforts mirror the larger trend in social policy which tends to favour a reductive focus on child poverty. One participant even picked up on this trend when discussing the current Liberal Provincial Government of Ontario:

this has been, this provincial government I think has probably, a, been, although some may question it, but, I think in comparison to others they have been probably the most progressive when it comes to investments in early childhood development and in children's services (Roundtable Member).

One participant explains that the Roundtable's child centred focus could really reduce or eliminate poverty. The members considered "where can we have the biggest impact and there was some thinking that, you know again, looking at early childhood development, looking at key investments in those early years um, would have the biggest impact" (Roundtable Member). Another participant explains:

it's the right investment um, if you are going to solve poverty at all, um, and make the right investments in children, which impacts, it's almost like um... investing in early years is like providing a vaccination. And the vaccination to poverty, as we know, poverty is a huge health care cost, and a whole bunch of other issues associated with it including education and justice and things of that nature. So, a, it's the right vaccination a, if you want to call it that (Roundtable Member).

Was this participant implying that if you don't get the right vaccination (the right education) then you deserve to be poor? Vaccinations are provided to prevent the onset of communicable diseases. This participant refers to poverty as a social ill that can be prevented.

One Roundtable member felt that if investments in the early years were not made, then society would face consequences later on. The participant spoke about these investments with a sense of urgency:

if you don't a, make those investments early on it becomes much more difficult to break the poverty cycle down the road. Um, so again, best practices looking at changing the trajectory of child poverty to ensure that isn't a long term cycle for them.... Brain development is not going to wait um, for you know, investments down the line, a you know, that is where we need to make the, that is where we really need to make the impact a quickly, and a, if we are going to be successful looking at long term poverty reduction. So it was really those best practices and the realization that we needed to make the investments quickly (Roundtable Member).

One participant highlights that the childhood focus sparked an interest in citizens to become involved in poverty reduction efforts for the early stages of development:

we start to talk about, you know, the impact of not having quality choices in early learning and childcare from an economic perspective, from a child development perspective, um all the sudden there is a lot more people that, that are interested in early child hood development and they actually come up and say, ya, you know that, that's that Fraser Mustard. Instead of, ah, that's that Fraser mustard, it's ya that's Fraser mustard he is involved in that, I read a bit about that this and that. So I think you engage, you just engage better through that. And part of our role in building campaigns and changing culture is we have to bring more and more people into that tent of discussion and we just keep trying the entry points and I

think an entry point that we need to give some time to see is this children's agenda (Roundtable Member).

The same research that largely influenced the National Children's Agenda in Canada also impacted many of the actors of the Roundtable. The research of certain scholars was frequently mentioned by all participants. One participant explained that the work of Fraser Mustard and Dr. Jean Clinton influenced the decision to garner support of investments in Hamilton's Early Years. One participant referred to the science behind poverty, and the science behind solutions. Fraser Mustard's work informed this scientific evidence based approach to strategically place financial investments into poverty reduction in a way that there would be a return for society in later years to come. One participant describes:

And the research tended to back that up very much, whether it was obviously the work of Fraser Mustard and his, a, colleagues in terms of um (Pause). The very compelling links to health issues and poverty related issues, of adverse early childhood development, a, impacts. So, the fewer adverse early childhood development impacts you have the more likely you are to lead a more prosperous life and a sustainable life (Roundtable Member).

One final indicator that the Roundtable mirrors other child poverty reduction advocacy efforts is their close link to the Best Start Network of Hamilton. The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services funds Best Start, yet, programs provided by the Best Start Network are locally designed (Hamilton Best Start, no date). Best Start's mandate is to provide support for families who are expecting, or have children between the ages of 0-6 years to "ensure their children receive the best possible opportunities early in their lives" (Hamilton Best Start, no date). Best Start has also been heavily influenced by Early Years Studies, and is attempting to put this theory into practice at the Early

Learning Centres located around the City of Hamilton. Best Start is a collaborative approach to providing children services. “The long-term nature of Best Start means that we will move beyond preparing children for early learning successes to preparing the next generation of adults to be full participants in their own communities” (Hamilton Best Start, no date). This provincial wide program was announced in 2004 “to deliver more timely and cost-effective children’s services through Ontario Best Start Child and Family Centres. It builds on full day kindergarten and is part of the government’s plan to deliver more convenient and seamless supports and services to children and their families” (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2010). The goals of Best Start are achieved through the Ontario Best Start Child and Family Centres. One participant explains the development of Best Start in Hamilton:

Initially it was going to be a huge infusion of funding from the federal and then the province, when the feds a um pulled back, then the province stepped up with some funding. And, um, so that, but it did not become this huge infusion it was supposed to be, it was much more scaled back, but Hamilton was one of the initial um communities a around Best Start (Roundtable Member).

One participant stated that at the time the Roundtable was starting to form “data was perculating in the community” about the early years, poverty, and poorer neighbourhood inequities on testing outcomes of tests such as EQAO. The trend and interest in the early years Federally and Provincially led the Roundtable to seek out natural partners to collaborate on poverty reduction in the community. One participant pointed out that early childhood focus of poverty reduction was a clear choice “if you think about the people that were at the table somehow influencing that work and the work that they were already doing in the community around Best Start” (Roundtable Member).

The Roundtable chose to partner with Best Start to address one phase of their framework for change: the early years. One participant pointed out the reason for this: The Roundtable's "early year's partner was essentially Best Start, because they already had a very strong network of all the individual groups and organizations in that area... and look at what they have, um, how they are investing and how we can support" (Roundtable Member). One participant highlighted that the Roundtable's involvement with Best Start might have influenced the ecological model of their framework for change, the participant stated:

I would just say I think it's because, a lot to do with Best Start. I, I, you know in the work, because we were seen as a leader in terms of Best Start too across the province in terms of how we started it here. How we did it here, because we were a demonstration site. Um, the province continues to come back to us to consult in terms of early childhood you know as they change the system etc. So Hamilton seems to have that reputation um, in terms, from that perspective (Roundtable Member).

Another participant stated that:

We had obviously a very powerful collaborative that had come together on the early learning pile and Best Start. So we had a number of pieces that were there, which I think um, I don't think that that blinded us in terms of direction, but when we also lined up where we would step out, we said to ourselves, boy, you know, we had some strong partners and strong tables to look to, to continue to push it forward (Roundtable Member).

This strong collaborative became an essential partner for the Roundtable. Best Start was forming prior to the Roundtable beginning their work. Both the Roundtable and Best Start had been influenced by the research centred on early learning. Under third way approaches to social policy, the scientific support of this research led policy actors to believe that this was a strategic investment that would produce a return, as future citizen workers would have the best start possible. The Roundtable as an advocacy group also

clearly understood that this type of poverty reduction effort would garner support and funding, therefore, was a strategic choice for their poverty reduction efforts. The decision around risk factors and early learning further demonstrates that the Roundtable's approach mirrors the larger trend in social policy where poverty reduction efforts that focus on child poverty appear to be most successful with government and private sector actors in the current third way social policy era.

Changes in Representation: The Child as an Entry Point

The next major theme that emerged from the data was changes in representation. As mentioned earlier, current arguments centred on adult poverty reduction have become difficult to sustain. Under the third way, child centred advocacy efforts have met more success and this appears to be one of the reasons advocacy groups have centred their efforts on child poverty reduction. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) state that the symbol of the child has unified many different actors, consolidated the interests of communities, as well as determined the political claims made on behalf of this representative child. Dobrowosky and Jenson (2004) have argued the child is now the central entity of state action, which they have labelled the new model citizen. This has made equality seeking adult centred advocacy efforts very difficult to sustain. Because of this other poverty reduction advocacy efforts have begun to change the nature of their claims making activities to centre on child poverty (Dobrowlosky and Jenson, 2004). This theme, Changes in Representation will be explored below.

The Roundtable members explained that when engaging multiple sectors in poverty reduction efforts, starting with an adult poverty focus can often disengage those

who are not traditionally part of the sector. Therefore, the advocacy efforts of the Roundtable needed to be shaped in a way that would engage a wide variety of sectors from diverse backgrounds. The participants stated that this largely influenced the choice the Roundtable made to develop an ecological investment model with the child at the centre. One participant explained the decision to approach poverty through children as being able to engage the wider community: “Do I approach poverty through a living wage, do I approach poverty through inequality, generally. And all that’s relevant, and real. The problem is that if I approach um, through inequality um, what’s my, what’s my change framework, how I am going to sell it” (Roundtable Member). This demonstrated that people may not easily *buy in* to advocacy efforts that centre on inequality due to the current climate in social policy. After years of cut backs in the name of deficit reduction and efforts to blame those whom are experiencing poverty, it is much more difficult to see the connection to inequality. The Roundtable members, like other advocacy groups, change the nature of their claims making activities (Dobrowlosky and Jenson, 2004) in hopes to gain wide spread support for poverty reduction. One participant stated that most people will feel compelled to act on child poverty reduction and it was a way to get people thinking about poverty reduction as a start. The participant mentioned:

we have tried to use this as a way of bringing people into the equation and bringing people into the conversation and using it as a way of moving out. I just believe most people can relate to child poverty, um not personally I don’t mean that. But I think they can get a better picture of that, than if we talk about other things (Roundtable Member).

The initial focus on children and youth was quite strategic in getting people engaged to start poverty reduction activities in the community. One participant stated that one of

their main objectives was to get people started, but they did not want to lose sight of focusing their efforts on other needed areas of poverty reduction:

I don't really care how we get people engaged and move the agenda forward. Um, I just want to make sure that we have the right way of doing that. So, if you are telling me we seem to see as we move forward that we can do that through a children's agenda, I will never back away from income inequality, I will never back away from those other pieces. Um, but I want to make sure we can start the conversation strongly. Rather then, you know continually to wonder why people just don't get the social determinates of health (Roundtable Member).

When discussing some of the poverty reduction efforts in the City of Hamilton, one participant put forth that “the conversation that got us there, was through the eyes of children” (Roundtable Member). As one participant put it:

it [child poverty] brings you to all the other aspects of poverty, whether it's a, single moms, or whether it's a, a, ailing seniors in terms of the kind of communities that we want to live in and our children growing up in, so you can get to almost all the other conversations I think through the eyes of the children (Roundtable Member).

Currently the Roundtable is focusing their advocacy efforts on a review of social assistance rates and a living wage. One participant felt that they may not have been able to start off with a conversation of this nature, but early conversations related to child poverty allowed them the space to advocate for these more adult centred social policy changes. Therefore, children became a strategic entry point into larger more expansive conversations of poverty. It is clear that in this current era of social policy, advocacy groups including the Roundtable anticipated a need to be strategic in their claims making activities. One participant highlighted that child poverty “allowed us some wiggle room to talk about the other side of this, which is the adult component. Children don't grow up on their own, they grow up in families” (Roundtable Member).

Another participant made a similar point:

if you look at the change framework, they say, they tried to take an ecological approach to thinking about children, right, and really saying you know, that children do not live in isolation, and they live in families and they live in you know communities and they live in neighbourhoods and so by focusing on children you can actually have those other circles, and you can reach through those other circles to children (Roundtable Member).

Child poverty was seen as an entry point for many of the participants. A few participants felt that engaging business sectors on topics such as providing a living wage were more likely to be supported if you used child poverty as an entry point. This further demonstrates that those who hold economic power in society respond to poverty that is framed through the lens of the child. One member described how one of their members uses child poverty to lead toward a living wage discussion:

if you are not paying the parents a living wage, then in fact what we are doing is subsidizing the kids, because they, you know, through school supply programs, and through um, walk in closets and all of that kind of stuff. So you know, he says, I can go and talk to a business person about why you should be paying a living wage, because these kids are not getting ahead. Right because they don't have the same kinds of things that others have. So it becomes an entry point for a lot of reasons (Roundtable Member).

The participants expressed that one of the reasons they initially had to shape their poverty reduction efforts around child poverty was due to different beliefs about the cause of poverty. The participants did not point out that there appears to be a larger trend in social policy where new government investments are child poverty focused, but saw this as a way to engage different sectors who hold different beliefs about the causes and nature of poverty. One participant explained their view of this:

I wouldn't say the whole community of Hamilton but a substantial subset of it, um that, probably people that are acting now, but ah, um, (pause) perhaps there are still different understandings of the nature of the issue out there. So the actions

that some of them will do, um, depend on that understanding, um, and it comes down to that, you know, is this a systemic problem or is this an individual problem (Roundtable Member).

The Roundtable members expressed that people's attitudes and beliefs about the cause of poverty had been a barrier. This speaks to the difficulty in sustaining equality seeking claims making activities for adults in poverty reduction efforts. The Roundtable recognizes this difficulty and has recently developed a working group to look at "how do we change people's attitudes about people living in poverty" (Roundtable Member). Therefore, this poverty reduction advocacy group felt a need to strategically shape their poverty reduction efforts to gain wide spread support. Through interviews with some of the members it has become obvious that when the Roundtable formed many members felt adult equality based arguments would have minimal resonance when engaging the broader community in this effort. This further demonstrates the Roundtable's approach is similar to other advocacy efforts that centre on child poverty in order to enact poverty reduction social policies.

Child as a Symbol to Mobilize Citizens

The final theme which emerged from conversations with the Roundtable members was the Child as a Symbol to Mobilize Citizens. Two subthemes emerged centred on the child motivating citizens to act: The Child would engage a broad section of the community; and child poverty is often seen as unacceptable. These themes were perceived to help to engage broad community support by focusing on an ecological model of poverty reduction with the child at the centre.

The Child Would Engage the Broad Community

The Roundtable Members that I interviewed explained that one of the main reasons the change framework was grounded in an ecological model with children at the centre was in order to gain wide community support, from a broad spectrum of actors. One participant described that “I think by and large the children’s agenda is something we can galvanize around”. One participant felt children served as an advantage, as child poverty “is a rallying call, um it’s one that is much more visceral than a lot, um to get the broader community speaking about learning about, understanding poverty in that context” (Roundtable Member). The focal point of the framework for change was “really about building energy and enthusiasm for tackling poverty and it’s [child poverty] an entry level to do that” (Roundtable Member). One participant explained that using the ecological framework for change and placing children at the centre was strategic in getting those who are not engaged in the sector involved. The participant stated that

the hardest group to bring to the table and show relevance is the business community. The business community has a huge impact and say, if you want to call it, in terms of where we are going to go with this. So if you can make the link right from day one to the economic well-being it is directly linked to the social, and cultural and human capital well-being of our community, every person in the community, you might get an early buy in (Roundtable Member).

Another participant pointed out that one of the goals of the change framework document was to engage the whole community in a conversation about poverty reduction. The Roundtable wanted to avoid a “very cloistered small conversation on poverty but actually one that would engage um, a broad amount of folks in the community” (Roundtable Member).

The Slogan “Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child” was designed to gain wide spread support from the community for poverty reduction efforts. A consultant in the area of community collaboration stressed the importance of having an “aspiration that the community can rally behind” (Roundtable Member). The Roundtable decided that investing in the lives of children, youth and their families would have a big impact and would be something the community would rally behind. One of the Roundtable Members explained that if “you want to get the entire community behind the issue, um, you need to come up with as much of a common goal or aspiration as you possibly can.” The participant explained that if people argue over the aspiration it may not be high enough, something that would be engaging enough to get people to start having a conversation. One participant felt that investing in children, youth and their families was “strategic enough to get people to the conversation the easiest and fastest, um, and then to solve the other issues maybe through the eyes of the aspiration of children”. One participant explained that the City of Hamilton has adopted and expanded on the slogan, explaining that it was something city councillors felt they could stand behind and demonstrated that the engagement that formed from this slogan reached a wide base. Another participant said speaking directly about issues like a living wage was often met with resistance but when discussing the impacts on a child where the family is not in a living wage scenario, the participant was able garner more concern and support. The participant explained:

when you get into, you know ideas and concepts that people can get their heads around in any way, supporting children to be, to be healthy, and strong family units, people do get that...And, you know, you can tell these great stories about

the child, and all of the challenges and people are, ya we can't let that child fail, we need to help that child (Roundtable Member).

Another important subtheme that surfaced from the interview conversations was the way in which a focus on children and youth was useful in attracting larger strategic partners in the community. The symbol of the child was useful for gaining broad support, but also in gaining partnerships to invest in the lives of children and youth. One participant explained that children and youth attracted large organizations and services, such as the School Board, because they felt a connection, and could see their role and engagement in the issue of child poverty. The participant described child poverty as pivotal in gaining strategic partners. One participant felt that child poverty could bring a lot of “players in the field” of children, youth and the early years. The same participant explained that investments from the province could also be leveraged by focusing on poverty among children and youth. One participant described the thought process behind this decision: “I think that initially the Roundtable said you know, there is some momentum in the community around this focus, um, there is some investment coming in to the community that could be leveraged, particularly the Best Start investment” (Roundtable Member).

In terms of raising financial contributions to work toward poverty reduction, one participant felt that some of the Roundtable members may have been drawn toward approaching poverty through the ecological model of child, because child poverty would be more lucrative in raising funds. The participant pointed out that:

certainly for those who you know, who, whose agenda's would coincide with that [child poverty], you know, people offering children's services, um some of the funders, like the united way, and the Community Foundation, who know, who

would know that, you know, appearing to support kids would be an easier fund raising sell (Roundtable Member).

Child Poverty is Unacceptable

One of the reasons why the child serves as a symbol which more easily mobilizes citizens to become involved is that children cannot be blamed for their poverty circumstance. They cannot simply find employment, which is often described as the solution to poverty from a residual perspective. Many of the participants identified that child poverty is seen as unacceptable. Therefore, people will feel more compelled to act to reduce or eliminate child poverty. As one participant pointed out that “everybody feels some heart for a child” (Roundtable Member). Another participant explained why they think children who live in poverty resonates with a wide variety of people, “I think children because of their vulnerability, because they are not independent people, are, it’s a, there is less of a debate, and but I think it offers you a chance to open up all of the other pieces” (Roundtable Participant). This individual and many other participants felt the child could serve as an entry, due to the deplorability of child poverty. The child would allow you to have a conversation about their parent’s situation, whether they are not earning a living wage, or receiving an inadequate social assistance payment. Many members felt that child poverty was a less ominous way to approach individuals and groups to become engaged in child poverty.

Many participants expressed that child poverty is often seen as socially unacceptable and they are more likely to work toward change in their community. One participant explained:

to get people to want to congregate around a solution a, it was very strategic to look at children, um at first. And again partly because it frames it in a way that everybody says you know what even if I believe some people are lazy, no child should live in poverty. No child, it's more DISGUSTING to think of poverty and children living in poverty in Canada than almost any thing. So there is a much more visceral response, there's a, you know, truly a way of getting people to, to the table (Roundtable Member).

One participant explained that child poverty can tap into the emotional side of people. One participant shared that people feel compelled to take care of children in our communities and our nation. He shared that even people from the private sector felt compelled to act, a private sector friend said to the participant:

To me it's really simple, you take care of the young and you take care of the old, and you provide opportunities for everyone else. And he's a pretty rabid capitalist. But even for that guy who wouldn't be into a lot of the other programs in the middle, he got that caring for young kids was really critical (Roundtable Member).

Similarity of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy

When I began interviewing Roundtable participants, the similarities between the Ontario poverty reduction strategy and The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction was continually mentioned. In the latter interviews I began to ask participants about this directly. One participant explained that after the Conservative Government in Ontario “literally obliterated any social welfare” the current government had to make decisions regarding how to approach poverty reduction provincially. The participant felt that if the province were to

approach it as starting with the welfare, I mean OW ODSP, um, may not get a lot of traction and unfortunately that's just a reality, right. Um, do they like it, do I like it, no but it's a reality. Being where we were and where we wanted to go, so they too, a, in a very similar way as we did, say well let's get started, like what's the starting point, how do we enter into the conversation provincially. Um, and it was children again, why because the system, more acceptable, and its more attraction, and I hate saying it, but that's the way to sell it. But you can see where

they are today, and they're into a full review of OW and ODSP for example (Roundtable Member).

To further demonstrate how the HRPR mirrors this larger trend. In the following section I will discuss the prelude to the Ontario poverty reduction strategy, the parallels identified by the Roundtable participants and some of the policy outcomes of the strategy.

During the 1990's in Ontario two changes took place. First, a recession occurred, and following the recession the welfare state was reconfigured and reduced (Mahon & Macdonald, 2010). At the same time "deindustrialization" began to take place in Ontario which led to "precarious work – part time, temporary work, and self-employment – offering low wages and insecure jobs" (Mahon & Macdonald, 2010 p.212). In Toronto during the period of 1997-2005 precarious employment rose by 68% (United Way cited in Mahon & Macdonald, 2010). During the recession the provincial government simultaneously froze the rate of minimum wage (Mahon and MacDonald, 2010). This meant that even having a full time job would not save one from the grip of poverty. Mahon & Macdonald (2010) state that "among advanced countries Canada stands out for its relatively high poverty rate reflecting a labour market with a substantial share of low wage jobs" (p. 209). Mahon and MacDonald (2010) point out during the same time period, social assistance rates were also reduced, further contributing to increased poverty in Ontario. Cities had difficulty responding to the increasing poverty due to downloading "and restructuring by the federal and provincial governments" (Mahon & Macdonald, 2010 p.212).

Prior to the October 10th provincial election in 2007, Premier Dalton McGuinty made a promise to address poverty in Ontario (Gillespie, 2007). McGuinty declared if the

Liberals were re-elected, poverty reduction would become a priority for his government (Gillespie, 2007). Most importantly McGuinty promised to put targets in place within a year to enable the measurement of the government's success in reducing poverty (Gillespie, 2007). McGuinty declared that "It's really important that as a society we begin to recognize that there is poverty, let's agree on some telling indicators, let's make those transparent, let's measure those on a regular basis and let's put in a focused strategy so that we can show we're making progress – and if we're not making progress, we'll be held to account." (Premier McGuinty cited in Gillespie, 2007). Twenty days after his re-election, on October 30, 2007 the Premier announced that a committee on poverty reduction would be formed. Premier McGuinty appointed Hon. Deb Mathews the Member of Provincial Parliament for London North Centre as chair of this cabinet committee (Davy, 2007).

On December 4, 2008 the first long term poverty reduction strategy in Ontario was announced (Meilleur & Smith, 2009). The government chose to focus their efforts on reducing child poverty by 25 percent in 5 years. The government proclaimed that 90,000 children would be lifted out of poverty (Meilleur & Smith, 2009). A bill regarding poverty reduction was introduced in the provincial legislation. The first reading of Bill 152, an Act respecting a long-term strategy to reduce poverty in Ontario was introduced in the legislature on Feb 25, 2009 (Matthews, 2009). Bill 152 was successful with all party approval and received Royal Assent May 6, 2009 (Matthews, 2009; Blackstock, 2009). This new legislation obliges the government to set targets and have an action plan that will be reassessed every 5 years. It also requires the government to consult with low

income persons and key stakeholders regarding poverty reduction in Ontario (Blackstock, 2009). Bill 152 will use indicators to measure the success of this initiative which are linked to determinants of poverty such as “income, education, health, housing and standard of living” (Matthews, 2009, p.2). The government will also provide an annual report outlining the success of this strategy (Matthews, 2009).

The government also developed “a cross-ministerial Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction” (Maxwell, 2009, p.22). This cross-ministerial cabinet is similar to the structure of the multi-sector approach of the Roundtable. One of the participants that I interviewed described how the Roundtable may have influenced this decision:

Um so the people who set up the Ontario Poverty Strategy told us, um, that we did have that influence. Um, but we weren't alone; um so, we were one of many players across the province who were calling for an Ontario Poverty Strategy. Um, I think where our influence a, came may have been a bit in the structure of what that Ontario Poverty Strategy looked like, so again the focus on children um, was part of that, a, really the development of a cabinet committee a, that took an inter-ministerial approach to looking at poverty. Early on we had said if um, if an Ontario poverty strategy is going to be successful it can't be relegated to one a, ministry, it can't just be in community and social services, it has to transcend all those ministries, because every um, ministry and every ministry really has to have a stake in poverty reduction (Roundtable Member).

Many of the participants put forth that the Roundtable in Hamilton engaged politicians and senior level bureaucrats about poverty reduction. The participants explained that Deb Mathews had been watching the work of the Roundtable and had consulted with the Hamilton community on more than one occasion. One participant stated that they had thought there were many parallels between the provincial approach and that of the Roundtable, the participant explained:

I think the actual work around children, um, and being the way in which they approached it was heavily influenced by the work we were doing here in

Hamilton. Because I think Hamilton um, was much further ahead of most communities, um, and the, I guess the full informality of the deliberate nature of our approach to solving poverty, um the strategic approach as you call it. Um, I think we were quite ahead of most communities in Ontario, all communities in Ontario and in Canada; we were quite a ways head. Um, and so I think we probably had a fairly heavy influence on that table, so much so I think, is that um, uniquely, um I am the only community member a, in Ontario that sits at that table, and from Hamilton from the PRT here, so I think that's an indicator itself um, that a, we had things going on here that would benefit the provincial view (Roundtable Member).

Perhaps the Roundtable did have some influence on the Poverty Reduction Strategy for several reasons, whether it is the working relationships that developed between actors in either groups, or the pressure of the Hamilton community. A likely possibility is that both poverty reduction strategies have occurred during an era of third way approaches to social policy. Under this approach poverty reduction efforts targeting children are the seen to be the most economically beneficial avenue.

It is an era where advocacy efforts in the name of equality have become difficult to sustain, and the child is used as a symbol to attract a broad support base for these efforts. As one participants pointed out “they [the Hamilton Roundtable] reinforced where the minister [Deb Matthews, The Minister of Child and Youth Services at the time] wanted to go anyway. And it was almost inevitable with her at the lead that Ontario strategy would be child focused, because that's her interest” (Roundtable Member). It is symbolic that the poverty reduction strategy was placed in the Ministry of Children and Youth. This further highlights the dominance and as Dobrowlosky and Jenson (2004) put it, the third way approach has a ‘soft spot for children’.

Thus far, most policies developed provincially have focused on the needs of poor children, such as the integration of full day kindergarten (Mahon & Macdonald, 2010).

The Roundtable in their early years also focused on child poverty, but has begun to shift away from this to a broader approach. The government made steps to address the situation of those who are working that live in poverty by raising the minimum wage to \$10.25. The Hamilton Roundtable has begun to work vigorously on a Living Wage campaign, and has identified this as an essential part of poverty reduction.

The two social policy areas, children and employment, are main policy objectives of the third way approach to social policy. Both areas of social policy are present in the Ontario and the Roundtable's poverty reductions strategy. Legislation was also introduced provincially in order to regulate precarious temporary work as well as employing enforcement officers to ensure the Employment Standards Act is being enforced (Mahon & Macdonald, 2010). Other policies and programs the government attributes to the development of the poverty reduction strategy include: increases in the Ontario Child Benefit providing up to \$1, 100 per child per year; new funding to maintain 8500 spaces for child care; a complex review of social assistance; more access to preventative dental care for children from poor families; nutrition programs; a summer work experience program; changes to Ontario student loans; training programs for new comers; increase in Employment Ontario Service Network centres; and establishing new indicators to measure the governments success in reducing poverty (Goloshchuk & Spadoni, 2010). The current government has been more progressive than the last. Yet much more progress needs to be made, especially a more broad focus on poverty reduction for all, as well as structural policy changes. In the following chapter the strengths and weakness of addressing poverty through the lens of child poverty will be

examined.

By comparing the literature on third way approaches to social policy which include a reductive focus on child poverty to the interviews on the Hamilton Poverty Roundtable, several themes demonstrate that the Roundtable's poverty reduction efforts were rooted in a third way approach. Three main themes that highlighted this trend were identified: a human capital approach to social policy; changes in representation; and the child as a tool for mobilization. Another indicator was added, the similarity between the Roundtable's approach to poverty reduction and the Ontario Provincial government's poverty reduction strategy. All of these indicators demonstrate that the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction mirrors a larger trend in social policy where advocacy groups make claims in the name of child poverty, and policy responses under the third way appear to favour those focused on child poverty reduction. In the following section the strengths and weaknesses of approaching poverty through the lens of the child will be examined.

Strengths

Two strengths were identified by the participants and will be discussed below: the approach would impact a large number of the population; and this poverty reduction effort could significantly reduce or potentially eliminate poverty among future generations. Wieger (2002) points out that a child poverty focus has the potential to improve conditions for parents who live in poverty. An obvious strength of this approach is the engagement with the broader community and the support that could be gained to reduce child poverty. One participant stated that:

I think that's the strength of it, that its, for one thing in terms of its brevity, alright. The best place to raise a child and focusing on children people get, they do get that. They may not see how it does, but they definitely get that. So, I think that's the strength of it was, it had resonance right across the city so other people were able to pick it up and use it too (Roundtable Member).

The Roundtable did succeed in reaching one of its goals and that was working toward changing the conversation about poverty in this community and using child poverty as an entry point in doing so. This allowed the Roundtable to engage many sectors not just those traditionally involved in social welfare advocacy. Since the formation of this advocacy group the community has become more aware and engaged with poverty as an issue. Remarkably, in a poll conducted during the municipal elections in October 2010, 80% of those surveyed supported City Council contributing more funds to combating poverty (Reilly, 2010). The Roundtable and their others succeeded in changing the local conversation about poverty in this community. If this poll was conducted in another city would there be a similar response? The interviewees identified that by targeting children in their advocacy efforts more people would feel compelled to act. It appears the strategy succeeded in bringing a wide variety of people to the table.

Strength of a Child as an Entry Point

In terms of this local advocacy group, one of their strengths was using the child as an entry point. They did not simply advocate for child poverty reduction solely and specifically but other groups as well. Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child spoke to a sustainable, viable, and strong community in which children, families and others would want to live. One participant stated "Because if it's the best place to raise a child then it's the best place for the grandmother and it's the best place for everybody that

lives here because of the wrap around” (Roundtable Member). One of the strengths of the Roundtable’s approach was that it did not stop at children.

Would Measurably Impact a Large Proportion of the Population

One other strength of this approach that was identified by the participants, that also helped to engage the community, was that focusing on child poverty could produce real outcomes in terms of poverty reduction. One participant felt that by focusing on children and their families there would be a significant portion of the population who would see change since 50 000 community members fit into that demographic. One participant said that 25% of children in Hamilton live in poverty and in some neighbourhoods up to 60% to 70% of children live in poverty, therefore, a significant number of community members would benefit from this. Another participant stated that people want to see outcomes of their contributions and offered that something like a school nutrition program would allow people to see their contribution helping children in need.

Eliminate Poverty among Future Generations

The participants identified that by focusing their efforts on child poverty reduction, the children will be less likely to live in poverty in the future as adults. One participant explained:

if we can reach those kids early, provide them with the supports they need. A, we can stop that process before it begins and ensure they’re on the right trajectory to ensure that they a, they’re able to achieve what they want to in life (Roundtable Member).

All of the participants explained that one of the goals of the advocacy efforts of the Roundtable would be to eliminate poverty, not just focusing on alleviation. One

participant explained: “because if we are going to talk about alleviation you can come in at any stage and at every person right. You can say okay if you are a senior we are going to do this, but that’s alleviation that’s not about turning the whole tide around”

(Roundtable Member). Using similar language as the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, one Roundtable member referred to breaking the cycle of poverty when describing the strengths:

the strengths are if you approach it through that lens you are, you are looking at breaking cycles and actually reducing poverty over time. Your setting yourself, setting yourself not only up for success in the short term, but you’re setting it up for success in the long term. Quite frankly when your, by the time you’re dealing with abject poverty with someone who is 45 or 50 years old, your tool box is very thin and your chances of for trajectory to change significantly are, are slim to none. So, um, I think in terms of the lens of children and families, you’re provided such a wonderful opportunity to have immediate impact and lasting impact with that (Roundtable Member).

The Roundtable members that I met with felt that their approach to poverty reduction and the ecological model of the child was part of a “true reduction endeavour” and the child was the best approach to doing so. Thus the participants implied that adult poverty is intractable. In summary the strengths of this approach to poverty reduction are the wide spread support of the community, the large number of children who will benefit and the future impact of reducing poverty among future generations by providing opportunities and supports to children. In the following section the weaknesses of approaching poverty as child poverty will be examined. .

Weaknesses

It is important to clarify that I am offering these critiques to those who advocate predominantly for child poverty reduction at a local, provincial, national and international

level. Many participants expressed that a reductive focus on child poverty reduction would have severe consequences for our society. As explained earlier, the Roundtable members used the child as an entry point to a larger conversation about poverty reduction. Part of the Roundtable having to shape the nature of their poverty advocacy in this manner is largely due to our current political and social policy climate under the third way. The Roundtable members have not worked solely on child poverty issues, they did not stop there.

Driving a change framework agenda from a multi-sectoral approach is not an easy task and setting a framework for poverty reduction will not be met without critiques from each of the respective sectors involved. The true test of a poverty reduction campaign is the impact on the lives of those who live in poverty directly. Therefore children may be a viable route to take in order to align those from sectors which often do not engage in this work, such as the business class, but what is lost when taking this approach? What if the HRPR advocacy efforts were met with large National success in achieving poverty reduction policies aimed at child poverty? By examining the limitations of child poverty reduction policies, the ineffectiveness of this advocacy effort become clearer.

Focusing on child poverty implicitly places the cause of poverty in the “poverty cycle” or in intergenerational poverty that is passed on from one generation to the next. Although the child cannot be blamed for their circumstance, what if that child’s face is gendered or racialized? In the following section the short comings of a reductive policy focus on child poverty will be looked at. Along with systemic issues, the notion of diversity and poverty will be examined.

Since there has been a policy focus on child poverty, the depth of child poverty has not been significantly reduced (Wieger, 2002). One of the participants explained the ineffectiveness of a narrow poverty reduction approach through the lens of the child. The participant stated that a recurring theme in social policy in Ontario has been:

if you don't wanna do, if you don't wanna really look at, tackle the hard part of the issues, you then sort of go and do little bits and pieces around the edges. Saying that you're dealing with the problem um, and that's the real difficulty with the child poverty focus is, for all of those groups, ya little bits of pieces of things that might help them happen, but there's not a systemic kind of approach to dealing with it in total (Roundtable Member).

Two prevalent weaknesses of this approach, which have been identified through social work literature, will be discussed below. Critiques of this approach that were offered by the participants will also be folded in. Firstly, a discussion of equality in society will take place to highlight the inadequacy of the currently popular social policy approach of finding individualized solutions to be found through the market. Secondly, how the needs of particular groups in our society are not being met when poverty reduction is approached this way will be examined. In particular the notion of diversity will be looked at in relation to child poverty reduction social policies. These elements will exemplify the weaknesses of poverty reduction efforts which place children at the centre. Prior to discussing the weaknesses mentioned above the participants perspectives will be briefly touched upon.

When the participants were asked to identify what they felt the weaknesses of approaching poverty reduction through child poverty were, all of them identified that this approach tended to be exclusive. Many participants explained that it had the potential to silence the needs of particular groups or unintentionally raised feelings of exclusion for

particular groups in the Hamilton community. One participant felt that individuals and groups that did not identify within a child and family poverty context would become disengaged.

The draw backs of course are that um, not everybody is in that situation, you are dealing with adults who live in poverty with seniors that live in poverty. So it cannot be a, a, strict focus only on, on children and families, there has to be a balanced approach (Roundtable Member).

The other main theme identified by the participants was that this approach was not comprehensive enough. One participant felt that “it can be a very dangerous approach to ever focus and say your solution will be by this vehicle, it won’t, the solution to poverty is a huge holistic package of things moving forward together” (Roundtable Member). In the following sections the weaknesses of a reductive policy focus on child poverty will be looked at more closely.

Inequality

The current emphasis on market provisioning of the welfare state under the neoliberal model has shifted how inequality is understood and how it should be addressed (Larner, 2000). Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) point out how advocacy groups became less focused on current inequities present in our society:

The result was that advocacy groups acting in the name of the child participated alongside policy makers to refashion a citizenship regime that would put a greater emphasis on equality of opportunity for children in the future than on the inequalities confronted by their mothers (and other women, to be sure) in the present (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004, p. 172).

Larner (2000) points out that progressive social policy of the past reinforced beliefs that injustices should and must be addressed. One of the main issues of

approaching poverty through child poverty reduction efforts is that equality among citizens is not a main concern (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2008). Currently, “social justice has been redefined in terms of opportunity and inclusion rather than redistribution and transformation” (Stepney, 2006, 1291). The current third way approach to social policy, reinforces three current beliefs about poverty, one is that solutions for social problems can be found in the market. Another is, who are the worthy citizens is constructed in a particular way. Lastly, the blame of poverty is place on the individuals without looking at the structures which help to perpetuate inequality.

Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) note that social rights and the achievement of equality for all citizens, especially women, is often missing when addressing poverty through the lens of child poverty reduction. This social policy focus stems from the longstanding liberalist framework in Canadian social policy. Emphasis on the individual, competition and the market, are embedded within the foundation of most social policies under the liberalist frame (Luxton, 2002). Luxton (2002) explains the liberal framework as one where “the individual is always assumed to be a property-owning man with a dependent wife and children; white, western European, heterosexual nuclear families are culturally normative” (p.4). Therefore, under this approach to social policy, those who do not fit within this ‘norm’ are not the majority, and social policy which benefits minorities, will not likely take priority (Luxton, 2002).

In the UK and else where, entrance into the labour market has been the main focus of social policy, instilling a sense of responsibility among its citizens (Stepney, 2006). Garret (2002) warns that social workers should be wary “of conceptualizations

and schemes which present market solutions to problems generated by the market” (p. 199). If the market is creating social problems such as poverty, do the solutions lie within that system which excludes and reproduces inequality? Presently there has been a large growth of low wage, part-time, contract jobs in places like Ontario. These jobs keep people in poverty instead of helping them to get out (Mahon & Macdonald, 2010). Currently in social policy “a norm of self-sufficiency for adults” is reinforced, where the only viable form of work is found in the market (Weiger, 2002, p.57). The market produces inequities especially for women, as the various forms of work they take on are not recognized. Social policies must consider how the multifaceted forms of work women take on impacts women’s position in participating in market employment, as well as the inequities present within the labour market.

The focus on children portrays children as the only citizens worthy of social support, reinforcing concepts of the undeserving and deserving poor and down playing the severe consequences faced by poor adults (Weiger, 2002). Adults living in poverty are no longer a concern of the public but are viewed merely as individuals who have failed (Weiger, 2002). Poverty that is only discussed in relation to children has the potential to severely limit Canadian society’s understanding of poverty and will therefore inhibit the ability to devise solutions (Weiger, 2002). Dobrowolsky (2002) points out that children are seen as worthy investments to make, meaning that inequality for some is acceptable. “The exclusion of certain individuals is justified if they do not meet state requirements, regulations, responsibilities” (Dobrowolsky, 2002, p. 66). Structural poverty

will not be addressed since children are portrayed as helpless, enticing charitable responses to poverty reduction (Weiger, 2002).

Weiger (2002) warns that a child poverty focus can also place the target of blame on mothers, without looking at their position as women, and how that can further entrench their inequality.

A child poverty focus is particularly helpless against the stereotyping of poor mothers as “bad mothers” who cannot manage their resources responsibly for the benefit of their children. Working class, single mothers, lesbian mothers and racialized mothers are most likely to be perceived or constructed as bad mothers as a result of racism, class inequality and deviation from the idealized heterosexual nuclear family form (Weiger, 2002, p. viii).

Women or mothers are seen as the cause of child poverty, and the oppression they experience is ignored when taking this approach (Weiger, 2002).

The third way approach to social policy places the blame for social problems, such as poverty, on the individual and not the structures and institutions which create and maintain inequality (Stepney, 2006; Garret, 2002, Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004). Lund (1999) and Stepney (2000) state that “by denying the structural basis of inequality, such an approach will do little to tackle the problems in disadvantaged communities or do little more than ameliorate the difficulties experienced by oppressed groups” (cited in Stepney, 2006, 1291). When examining the federal governments interest in assisting families who are ‘at risk’ under the guise of the National Children’s Agenda, the outcome of that approach was more support and the legitimization “of targetting and advancing individualized and privatized views on social problems and solutions” (McKeen, 2007, p.152). A focus on child poverty “reinforces the view that adult dependence is deviant and that adult poverty is primarily the outcome of individual or family (mis)behavior”

(Weiger, 2002, p.56). Brodie identifies this as an element of Neoliberalism, where social issues are viewed as inherent within the individual and the government is no longer viewed as the entity in which collective social needs can be met (cited in McKeen, 2009). “In further ruling structural analysis out of the equation, including attention to issues such as poverty, inequality, and discrimination and injustice, this approach further advances social norms that effectively ‘blame the victim’” (McKeen, 2006, p. 882).

Garret (2002) states that the new labour’s focus on social inclusion, has been part of the third way social policy reconfiguration. He offers some useful critiques of this terminology and policy. Garret (2002) states that the New Labour Party would apply the term to discussions regarding adolescents getting pregnant, which shifts the focus away from the structural factors associated with poverty and inequality. Garret has identified that poverty reframed as social inclusion ignores structural issues. Many terms can be used to reframe poverty in ways that allows the state to disengage from social policies which address structural inequities. Saloojee (2003) points out that children living with disabilities were not included in discussions related to the National Children’s Agenda. Asserting “the primacy of class without looking at other forms of oppression and the related forms of exclusions and marginalization” can be problematic (Saloojee, 2003, p.3). Certain groups are more likely to live in poverty due to the structural inequality that exists in society, but through the lens of child poverty their needs may not be met.

A reductive focus on child poverty does little to illuminate women’s oppression, and instead looks to the market for solutions. This focus reinforces ideas of who is deserving of social support and who is not, and places the causes and blame of social

problems on those who are poor, instead of examining the structures which perpetuate poverty.

Masks the Needs of Certain Groups

A reductive focus on child poverty renders invisible the inequality some groups in our society are subjected to. The unique social policy needs of particular groups are not attended to when devising policies which focus on child poverty. In the following section the implications of a reductive focus on child poverty for social assistance recipients; single individuals and couples without children; and women will be examined. One Roundtable participant pointed out that: “ultimately a lot of those folks, the um, single males or females, the, a, a, people with disability, um, people in the aboriginal community, don’t see a lot of benefit” [referring to provincial approach to poverty reduction]. The exclusion of particular groups will be discussed further below.

Groups which are excluded include women and men who are not mothers or fathers, or women and men who are not employed and must rely on social assistance rates which are inadequate (Weiger, 2002). The benefits of the policies such as Child Tax Benefits, are often women who find employment or have the support of a “(typically male) breadwinner” (Wieger, 2002, p. iv.). The National Child Benefit is often clawed back from social assistance recipients in most provinces in order to provide an incentive to work (Wieger, 2002). “The NCB, therefore, benefits least those households that generally suffer the worst poverty. The NCB functions as a wage supplement and as an incentive program to reduce social assistance caseloads through either employment or another income source, generally nuclear family formation” (Weiger, 2002,

p.78).Townson (2009) states that poverty among women is rooted in how women are regarded when employed, as well as, how they are supported if they are not employed. Many policies developed can actually hinder women's ability to be lifted out of poverty (Townson, 2009).

Although part of the Ontario Governments Poverty Reduction Strategy has been an increase to Child Benefits (Goloshchuk & Spadoni, 2010), this does not benefit some of the poorest children in the province. This benefit has been restructured in recent years, similarly to the Child Benefits at the National Level. There is a distinction between the children of parents who are employed and those who are not. According to Dr. Sally Palmer, children whose parents rely on social assistance as an income source have this extra income clawed back (cited in Cattari, 2011). The government has changed the social assistance benefit structure for children since implementing this policy. The basic needs portion of the social assistance payment for a child was reduced in 2007. Therefore the family on social assistance does not receive the full amount of the funds that are provided through the collaborative benefit structure of the National Child Benefit and Ontario Child Benefit (Palmer cited in Cattari, 2011). The Winter Clothing Allowances and Back to School Benefits for children of parents on social assistance have also been reduced under the current provincial government, reducing their total income (Palmer in Cattari, 2011). One participant identified the short comings of this policy approach:

For all, for most of the people living in poverty in all those other groups, the OCB does very little, and in fact the way they implemented it, for people on disability, they in fact, um, just, you know, re-arranged the deck cards, right. They didn't actually increase, they lowered their own, the benefits of the parents in order to give their children the Ontario Child benefit and the families end up, at best only

marginally better off (Roundtable participant).

This demonstrates the Ontario government is taking an approach to social policy that encourages employment. It is evident that people do not want the extra benefits to go to parents who are on social assistance. Therefore, a distinction is made between children in this child centred approach. Although they have committed to reducing child poverty, children among some of the poorest families, those on social assistance see little benefit from the OCB. This employment promotion is a distinctive element of the third way approach. Wieger (2002) points out that the lack of clarity in the policy structure of the National Child Benefit (which holds true for the current Child Tax Benefit and Ontario Child Benefit) excludes families on social assistance and reinforces the stigmatization of this group. How beneficial are child centred social policies when they do not meet the needs of the provinces poorest children?

A child centred approach fails to meet the needs of those who live in poverty and do not have children. A “focus on child poverty could not alleviate the poverty of women who are not and will never be mothers. Such women are undoubtedly affected by a lack of jobs, low wages, systemic inequalities in the labour market and extremely low rates of social assistance” (Weiger, 2002, p.40). Many women who are single also experience high rates of poverty and a focus on child poverty will do nothing to improve the circumstances of poor women and men who do not have children.

More women than men live in poverty. This can be attributed to their role as care providers, the child rearing responsibility women take on, and how this puts them at a disadvantage in the labour market. However, there is a lack of attention to these issues in

social policy design (Wiegers, 2002). In the next section women's dual and often multiple roles will be discussed. First the care giving responsibilities of women will be examined; following inequality in the labour market will be examined.

A reductive focus on child poverty fails to recognize that women more often than men provide care to members in their immediate and extended family (Weiger, 2002). The lack of policies that address women's role as caregivers is a shortcoming of a child poverty approach. "Studies have established that employed women are 50% more likely than men to be caregivers to individuals with a disability" (Evans cited in Weiger, 2002, p.40). With cut backs to social services women's role in informal care giving has increased significantly (Weiger, 2002). Block (2010) outlines the spending reductions that took place in the federal budget of 1995, specifically programs that benefited women and families were reduced.

Funding for health care, post-secondary education, unemployment insurance, social assistance, legal aid, housing and children's aid was deeply cut. In the absence of these vital public services, many women have filled the void — caring for their loved ones at home, juggling work and family responsibilities, living in poverty. Despite record surpluses, these programs remain cash-starved (Block, 2010, p.17).

Child care appears to be conceptualized in our society as predominantly a women's role. Weiger (2002) proclaims that unpaid child care is one of the leading contributing factors to women's poverty, especially women who are lone-parents. Although women take on this extra responsibility of child rearing they receive little recognition or support for it (Weiger, 2002). For a long period of time Canadian society has tended to believe that women "destined for, or best suited to, caring for children" (Wiegers, 2002, p.29).

Child centred poverty reduction policies do little to assist families with supportive child care. In Ontario at the present moment a universal child care program does not appear to be a policy objective for our current government's approach to poverty reduction. Some may attribute this to the federal government's lack of involvement in child care provision. Weiger (2002) discusses how there is disconnect between child poverty and women's care responsibilities. "Rather than connecting the plight of children with the costs of parenting labour, child poverty discourse separates mothers from children and obscures the persistently gendered nature of caregiving labour and its consequences for women as a group" (Weiger, 2002, p.57). "Women continue to perform a disproportionate share of child care that is not only unpaid but impairs their status in the labour market. Perhaps most importantly, labour markets must change to reflect the norm of a worker with child-care responsibilities" (Weiger, 2002, p.40). The weight placed upon women in terms of care, does not appear to be a policy concern in child poverty reduction policies.

Callahan (2010) states that women are often providing care for their children and therefore they may be recipients of benefits longer than men. Even if women transition from social assistance to employment, they earn less, as well, they "have to cope with inadequate and expensive child care provision" (Callahan, 2010, p. 173).

The challenges women face due to their care giving roles is further exacerbated by their position in the labour market. Although women take on several roles and responsibilities related to providing care, they also are assumed to be treated as equals in the labour market (McKeen, 2007). Bakker discusses how woman face double the

pressure of men because they are now fully placed in the labour force, and the former support provided by the welfare state to minimize this pressure has significantly diminished (cited in Mulvale, 2001). McKeen (2007) points out that income support programs that serve low income children “encourages the emergence and growth of low-waged labour...building a bridge from social assistance to employment” (McKeen, 2007, p. 160). McKeen (2007) points out that inequality and poverty, even child poverty, has increased in the last 20 years even though more people are employed. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) conclude that “the feminization of poverty is a root cause of child poverty, yet the gendered structures of inequality in the Canadian labor market, increasingly shaped around low-paid service work and precarious employment, are rarely surfaced” (p. 173). The lack of support for women will be discussed below, including their overwhelming presence in low wage forms of employment.

Misra et al. (2007) discuss the consequences for lone parent women as the welfare state has shifted toward a promotion of active citizenship where governments have heavily favoured employment incentive based social policies, “treating women primarily as potential employees and only secondarily as carers” (cited in Pulkingham, Fuller and Kershaw, 2010, p.268). Women face broad disadvantages in the labour market and due to a lack of supportive social policy, having children further exacerbates them.

One of the issues is the increase in temporary positions mostly filled by women. Women are not working full time full year any more (Townson, 2009) and they are more likely to be in positions where they are temporary employees (Fuller & Vosko, 2008). Fuller & Vosko (2008) claim that the increases in these precarious forms of employment

are an outcome of the economic restructuring that took place during the 1990's. "Almost four in ten jobs are now precarious — contract employment; on call, casual and seasonal work; work through temporary agencies" (Block, 2010, p. 19). Women's social location also increases the likelihood of a women's involvement in these forms of employment. "White women, immigrants, migrants and people of colour by contrast engaged disproportionately in part-time, seasonal, or other relatively insecure forms of employment" (Fuller & Vosko, 2008, p.33).

Low wage jobs without benefits that lack job security are also an issue for women who participate in the paid labour market. Although more women participate in paid labour they do not receive the same wages as men (Townson, 2009). In fact "20% of women, compared with just 10% of men who have full-time jobs, are employed in low-wage occupations. (Low wage is defined as earning less than two-thirds of the economy-wide median wage)" (Townson, 2009, p.6). Women account for two-thirds of person in Canada who earn minimum wage (Block, 2010). Townson (2010) points out that these forms of employment do not provide adequate pay and the likelihood of job security or a pension is scarce. If women are faced with job loss the likelihood that they qualify for unemployment insurance is not high, with only 39% of women without a job receiving this benefit (Townson, 2009).

It is clear that there is a need to increase the level of supports available to parents in our society, most importantly in the area of providing "affordable, accessible, reliable and high-quality day care" (Weiger, 2002, p.40). Considering the lack of support and this additional responsibility of care, combined with the challenges associated with

employment, it becomes evident the women are placed at a disadvantage compared to men. That is why it is important to develop policies to address the high rates of poverty among women, to create a more inclusive environment for all.

Ignoring Oppression and Marginalization

Throughout my discussion regarding the weakness of addressing poverty through child poverty reduction it has become evident that this policy approach impacts women, racialized and disabled individuals in several ways. Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) found that advocating in the name of the child and crafting social policies which focus on them has “closed the door to certain groups” (p.172). “Children and youth can serve as a focal point in the new social inclusion discourse without even having to mention sexism, racism and other forms of oppression” (Dobrowolsky, 2002, p.51).

One way is that this approach often ignores how oppression operates and allows the state to ignore oppression in our society. It is interesting that *the poor child* who is the recipient of these poverty reduction efforts is race, gender, and ability neutral (McKeen, 2007; Dobrowolsky and Jenson; Larner, 2000). The Roundtable, similarly to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy and the larger National Children’s Agenda, fails to advocate for or devise policies that attend specifically to the needs of marginalized groups. Although the Roundtable, through the poverty matrix, identified poverty as concentrated among specific groups, many of their documents do not appear to be specific to the needs of marginalized groups. One participant explained:

There are two groups that I do not know... we did enough around. The whole racialization of poverty; I think it has a huge impact on this community, um, just, given the diversity, and then um, first nations people. Because, also we, we have a

fairly large urban aboriginal population and I do not know that we ever, we ever a, really got into those issues (Roundtable Member).

Abu-Laban & Gabriel (2008) find that “since the 1990s...the commitment to enhance gender equality, ethnic and racial equality, and class equality has been watered down in the last decade” (p.48). Dobrowolsky (2002) says under the third way, children are a homogenous group and do not belong to a gender, race or class and the women who “provided their care (as well as care for others)” are rendered “invisible” as are “class, gender, and other structures of inequality among adults” (Dobrowolsky & Jenson, 2004, p.155). Women are impacted by this policy shift, as poor children live in poor families. The majority of poor children have a mother, and many poor lone parent families are led by women (Weiger, 2002). Yet, is it not just women who are neutral entities whom are not impacted by oppression, but children too. While conducting this study with the HRPR I noted a similar tendency to lump children into an essentialized category (Dobrowlosky, 2002) with little regard for their social locations.

McKeen (2007) points out that Early Childhood Development and at-risk programming operates “from a gender-blind standpoint... however, most of its clients (and most of the clients of programs of this type) are female, and they are predominantly mothers” (McKeen, 2007, 164). Children who are at risk live with women, who may experience multifaceted forms of oppression, yet this structural analysis is missing when gender neutral approaches are taken by policy makers. Leah Vosko highlighted gender bias in the Ontario Early Learning Centres, as there was an assumption that “children live in two-parent families in which there is one parent in paid employment and a second at home caring for the children, and the latter parent is assumed to be responsible for early

childhood development” (cited in McKeen, 2007, p. 166). McKeen (2007) uses Nova Scotia’s healthy Beginnings Program as a case study for this larger trend, as it is similar to other provincial early childhood development programs. The research and programs

prescribe, a set of norms and ideals that reflect specific cultural norms, namely mainstream, white, middle-class views and aspirations with respect to family and parenting. When applied to individual cases, poor and racial or ethnic minority families are disproportionately identified as the problem, and described in program materials as the hard to reach or as facing challenges, with the possible implication that they are seen as bad parents (McKeen, 2007, p. 163).

McKeen (2009) finds that the focus on at-risk families through the National Children’s Agenda is problematic for those who are marginalized. The tools used to identify risk “invariably identify...at risk the groups that least fit into standard, white, middle-class norms of family...and who are most disadvantaged under the existing social structures. As such, these programs effectively intervene in ways that are highly classed, gendered, and raced-targeting the poor, lone-mother families, families of racially marginalized communities” (McKeen, 2009 p.82). Therefore, instead of devising social policies to address these inequities, the social locations which push some citizens to the margins are ignored, and the very programs which are designed to help families continue to further marginalize them.

Saloojee (2003) contends that the “struggle against class exploitation is not coterminous with the struggles against racial oppression and racial discrimination” (Saloojee, 2003, p. 3). Racism then becomes less prevalent in these discussions and the form of exploitation racial minorities experience in the labour market is left out. When social policies address poverty only through child poverty reduction, other socio economic disadvantages people may face are absent (McKeen, 2007; Dobrowolsky and

Jenson, 2004). Saloojee (2003) makes the case that in Canadian social policy realms it is imperative that diversity is considered and accounted for. This perspective allows a policy maker to see that race is a factor and can determine how a social policy can either enhance or inhibit ones social position.

In order for society to be socially inclusive a structural analysis of the historical and current process which maintains “oppression, discrimination and exclusion” is needed (p. 1). Saloojee (2003) states that when approaching social inclusion one should be “concerned with rights, citizenship and restructured relations between racialized communities and the institutions of the dominant society”(p.1). Canadian social policy now focuses on reducing child poverty without addressing the structural factors that contribute to women’s poverty or poverty among other marginalized groups or individuals in society (Weiger, 2002).

In summary, when examining former and current approaches of addressing poverty through child poverty reduction efforts the short comings of this policy response becomes evident. Many of the Roundtable participants interviewed identified that limiting your focus on children does not fully meet the needs of those who live in poverty. One participant explained that:

I think when you look at it from a municipal policy perspective, a provincial policy perspective or a federal policy perspective. That is where you would have to be very careful. A, what we are not doing is a, leaving large portions of our population out in favour of a narrow focus of, of policy. So there is a very strong difference of getting people engaged in poverty reduction through a particular focus and setting our public policy only to deal with one piece of the puzzle (Roundtable Member).

Three weaknesses of this approach have been identified: the inadequacies of the current popular social policy approach in addressing inequality, secondly, those who do not fit within the child and family poverty context do not have their needs met, and thirdly, oppression and marginalized is ignored. In particular the issues of diversity were looked at in relation to child poverty reduction social policies. These elements exemplified the weaknesses of poverty reduction efforts which place children at the centre.

CHAPTER SIX: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK

Throughout the span of their careers many social workers will work with clients who have daily lived experiences of poverty. Early on Schorr (1992) “observed at the beginning of the 1990s, the ‘most striking characteristics that clients of social services have in common are poverty and deprivation’” (cited in Garret, 2003, p. 193). Garret (2002) explains that social workers “engage with people excluded from the labour market because of ill health, disability, caring responsibilities or discriminatory employment practices” (p. 198). As many of our service users are currently dealing with complex social structures that continue to perpetuate inequality, now more than ever social workers should become involved in advocacy efforts to improve these conditions for all.

Social workers must also commit due diligence when analyzing and reframing poverty reduction advocacy efforts. As this thesis has clearly outlined, the way that poverty is framed shapes the level of state responsibility and response.

In the advocacy approach of the Hamilton Roundtable and the policies of The Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, the systemic racism, gender oppression, and ableism that some members in society face is not attended to. They have failed to include diversity and difference in their understanding of poverty (Garret, 2002).

Weiger (2002) states that to address poverty the systemic causes and consequences of adult poverty must be acknowledged and rectified. More attention must be paid to inequality and structural factors that contribute to the impoverished situations

parents are faced with. Poverty needs to be examined in more general terms, not just applying narrow focus of child poverty (Weiger, 2002). By focusing on the structural issues and applying a social justice perspective the blame would be taken off of the individual while at the same time addressing issues related to other forms of inequality such as race, class, sexism, and ableism (Weiger, 2002). Policies that are implemented with less of a focus on individual failure to thrive in the free market are less stigmatizing and would not reinforce stereotypes of poor persons.

A more redistributive approach to social policy would enhance the lives of all citizens and provide a society safety net that once existed in Canada. Persons relying on social supports could live with more dignity and an environment where citizens are concerned with well-being of others would develop through an increased sense of solidarity (Weiger, 2002). Consideration should be given for those who are from more disadvantaged backgrounds when developing social policies to alleviate poverty, groups such as persons with disabilities, First Nations persons, visible minorities, and recent immigrants (Townson, 2009).

Social assistance rates are too low and many persons live in poverty due to this. Increasing social assistance would be a way to enhance the lives of both children and parents, as well no longer clawing back federal benefits from parents on social assistance (Weiger, 2002). Social assistance rates must be reviewed and Townson (2009) recommends bringing the rates up to the Low Income Cut Off. Redistributive policies that focus on providing universal daycare would improve both the lives of parents and their children (McKeem, 2009). To establish a program of this nature the funding

agreement could be restored between the federal and provincial governments in order to provide a national system of early learning/child care (Townson, 2009). The creation of more child care spaces along with increasing parental leave pay would also benefit parents and children and reduce the likelihood of poverty (Dobrowolsky, 2002).

In terms of the development of equitable employment policies, many areas could be addressed. McKeen (2009) stresses job creation and an increase to the minimum wage. Citizens need to have opportunity in terms of meaningful employment with decent wages (McKeen, 2007). Townson (2009) also advocates for an increase in minimum wages. Many women are employed in minimum wage positions and this would help to enhance their economic situation as well as their children's. Townson (2009) states that measures need to be implemented to address the issues related to non-standard forms of employment such as the regulation of temporary employment agencies. Townson (2009) states that changes need to be made to employment insurance programs to make sure it is more accessible especially for women who are not employed full time all year. By making these changes the structural issues that perpetuate poverty and inequality through employment would be addressed. A focus on social justice would prevail and all citizens' rights would be enhanced.

In the social services sector women are most likely to be both the providers and users of services (Callahan, 2010). Given the dual nature of women's role in terms of social programs it is more important now than ever for social workers to strive to advance the interests of women's equality. Social workers must remain cognizant that the fight for gender equality is not over. Callahan (2010) attributes a lack of gender equality advocacy

to the increase of oppression theories, specifically related to race. It is important for social workers to advocate for social justice of all groups, including women.

Social workers must never lose sight that our direct practice is inextricability linked to social policy. Social workers should “make” their practice “concerns public” and “share” their “concerns with others” (Callahan, 2010, p. 175). The individual problems that our clients cope with in their daily lives are exacerbated when there is a lack of supportive social policy. Social workers must connect the two in their work with service users. A social worker may perceive government action on child poverty to be a progressive move and may not consider the negative implications for others. That is why it is important for social workers to consider how an issue is framed when advocating for social policies.

In conclusion it is important for social workers to be aware to how policy issues are framed by advocates, and how that framing can impact those whose interests are advanced and whose are left out. Without critically analyzing the tenets of a reductive focus on child poverty, the consequences on women and marginalized groups may never have been made visible.

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