changing from a universalistic model towards targeted, means-tested state interventions, Brazil wrote a new democratic Constitution which also created the Unified Health System (SUS). Its creation led to the adoption of the universal right to health for the first time. This historical paradox is explained, according to the author, because of the role played by the Sanitaristas, an expert community who successfully seized the opportunity opened by the transition, colonized a niche of the state apparatus, and forced the expansion of citizenship by including the SUS in the new Brazilian Constitution.

Written by Brazilian scholars working in the country’s most prestigious higher education institutions, the book fills a gap in the specialized literature published in English about policy analysis in Brazil. Students, scholars and policymakers will find in this book a wealth of information, analysis and sources; all critical material to study the field of public policy in contemporary Brazil.

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An Equal Start? Providing Quality Early Education and Care for Disadvantaged Children
Edited by Ludovica Gambaro, Kitty Stewart and Jane Waldfogel

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) has gained increasing policy attention in developed countries since the 1960s. Most Western countries have increased spending on child care and early education for young children, albeit at different times and in different ways. In particular, recent ECEC policy reforms have been promoted by various government objectives, including women’s labour force participation, gender equality, children’s development, child poverty and low fertility rates. These reasons are acknowledged by the editors, who illustrate that, regardless of policy intention, almost all developed countries are faced with common policy challenges that relate to the availability, affordability and quality of ECEC services. This book contributes a new perspective to a rich body of research on comparative ECEC policies across industrialized countries. The approach taken by the editors is distinct to other comparative works, as the chapter authors were all asked to address one specific question, ‘How does your country ensure access to high-quality early childhood education and care for disadvantaged children?’ (p. 3). It should be noted that ‘disadvantage’ is not defined in the same way by all the authors. This is acknowledged in the Introduction as a product of the different demographic and cultural contexts of the countries. Eight developed countries were selected, based on their common ‘mixed economy’ of services. The book presents an in-depth, yet streamlined, comparison of the complex problems and policy approaches related to increasing access to high quality ECEC for children from disadvantaged families.

The book is organized by the eight countries, plus an Introduction and a Conclusion chapter. The countries covered are the UK, France, Norway,
the Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand, Australia and the USA. Each chapter offers a rich account of the current ECEC policy landscape in their respective countries, yet the chapters are strengthened by the fact that the same question is addressed by all of the authors. Most of the chapters addressed the research question using a broadly consistent approach. This included an overview of the ECEC policy structure in their country, including government’s (at different levels) involvement in direct provision, funding through subsidies and tax measures, and regulation. Each chapter presents the usage patterns of ECEC, by demographic characteristics and also by type of service. In addition, through various approaches and methods, the authors attempt to illustrate how policy initiatives ensure access for low-income families.

Despite some common themes and issues, one of the most striking reflections from this book is the variety in approaches and methods used by these authors. It appears these differences are reflective of various disciplinary backgrounds of the authors and also the different data sets used. Most authors used administrative data (e.g. Ofsted in England), and data about the qualification levels of staff (Norway, France, Germany) to illustrate varying levels of access to high quality ECEC by income level and other disadvantaged groups. Ethnicity and immigrant status, and also mothers’ education levels, were identified in most countries as having lower levels of access to ECEC or, if access rates are similar, it was found that disadvantaged children tend to access lower quality services. In New Zealand and Australia, Indigenous background is also identified as a predictor of lower levels of access to high-quality ECEC.

Overall, the chapters contribute new perspectives about the ‘childcare triangle’ (p. 193) of access, quality and affordability. Each country is grappling with distinct challenges that relate to the level of public investment, structural features, employer involvement, and demographic characteristics, among others. There are common issues and themes that reappear for each country, which allow for cumulative and iterative reflection by the reader. These themes, identified by the editors in the Introduction and Conclusion, include complexity of multi-level governance structures for funding and regulating ECEC; the distinction between ECEC services for younger (0 to two year olds) and older (three to five year olds) children in almost all countries (Norway is the exception); tiered systems based on various demographic and funding features; and different types of provision (i.e. state, private, employment, parent). As the editors conclude from the chapters, there is no simple or ‘cookie cutter’ approach to addressing this complex policy problem. Free, part-time, ECEC for three to five year olds is increasingly adopted across developed countries, however a more effective approach appears to be the establishment of ‘entitlements’ to ECEC, that extend to children aged under three. Direct provision, or subsidies, should offer generous support for the most disadvantaged families. In order to ensure all children access high quality care, the authors conclude there must also be greater investment to address the tensions between availability, affordability and quality for all families.

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