

Creating a City for Workers: Union Strategies on Child Care in NYC

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Presented at Work and Family Research Network Conference, New York City, June 21, 2014

Forthcoming chapter in *Placing Labour in the New Urban Economy*, ed. by Ian T. MacDonald, Cornell University ILR Press, Ithaca, NY

In devising new labor strategies unions have to strike a balance between reaching out to broader community partners and meeting the core needs of their current and future membership base. This chapter examines two NYC case studies in the child care sector to illustrate how unions formed strategic coalitions to expand access to child care, broaden subsidies and child care benefits to workers generally, and upgrade working conditions for the most marginalized home based child care workers. The cases we present in this chapter also reflect on some of the tensions that emerge as unions formulate new labor strategy and create critical links to politics and policy making at the city level.

Child care and work life balance are workplace and public policy issues that have seen a lot of policy movement in the US over the last 30 years. In New York City, beginning in the 1980s, private sector employers began to give attention to work life balance needs of their employees. The Center for Children's Initiatives (CCI), New York City's child care advocacy group, launched a strategy with private sector employers to extend new benefits such as maternity leave and child care to high end employees. At the same time a health care union, with a predominately female workforce, worked with a NYC private sector

hospital employer to make child care an essential component of a collective bargaining agreement. This led to the emergence of a union coalition to support child care as an essential feature of collective bargaining and a standard workplace benefit.

The late 1990s and early 2000s also witnessed a major shift in US public policy regarding child care. The welfare reform of 1997, with its directive to move recipients from welfare to work, dramatically expanded child care subsidies for low-income workers (Mezey et al 2002). New federal grants for child care became available to cities and states. These subsidies made the challenge of ensuring a sufficient supply of high quality child care a more salient policy issue for city officials and economic developers and led to new coalitions to address child care in cities all across the US (Warner and Prentice 2013, Warner 2006). In New York City unions took the lead in collaborating with child care advocates to pursue shared interests at the state and city levels to address child care access and quality. At the same time, the precariousness of working conditions in the child care sector and incipient national level organizing efforts provided unions the necessary space to move into organizing home-based child care workers in the City. These dynamics shaped the strategies employed by unions in our two cases.

In the first case, unions and their coalition partners focused their attention on working parents, including the unions' membership base. A union coalition representing low wage workers partnered with child care advocacy organizations to expand access to affordable and stable child care to improve worker job security and to achieve better work-family balance. Inspired by a health care union's (SEIU 1199) successful collective bargaining strategy with the Catholic hospitals to incorporate child care benefits in the

collective-bargaining framework, a group of union leaders, with the support of city and state labor federations, created a cross-union collaboration and organized a coalition to address work and family issues. The goal was to link individual union efforts to a broader city and statewide agenda on child care.

In the second case, union organizers focused on improving working conditions for marginalized home based child care providers to expand unionization in the sector and more fully incorporate a dispersed work force into the child care system. By improving quality among these “alternative teachers,” the unions also sought to achieve the public good of closing the achievement gap for low-income children. In this case, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) entered into a community organizing partnership with ACORN to organize highly isolated home based child care providers with the stated aim of both improving the lives of a severely marginalized workforce and the quality of care and education children receive in New York City before their first entrance into the public school system.

The case studies examine the strategic evolution behind the different unions’ framework for a child care agenda and discuss the uniqueness of each approach. The two cases showcase strategies where unions and their allies were able to forge common ground to (a) put forth an overall child care/work family agenda and exact child care benefits for working families and (b) to reframe the role and gain recognition for the largely invisible, informal child care providers in the system. In examining these strategies, we point to the innovation and entrepreneurialism unions have successfully harnessed in a shifting policy and fiscal environment. We also highlight the divergent interests of different unions and advocates and how this informs their strategy choices.

Methodology

We conducted a series of seven in depth interviews with union leaders and child care advocates over the 2012-2013 year to form the basis for our analysis. We also reviewed policy and program documents, union newsletters, public testimonies and related textual materials, and engaged in interactive discussions with many of the players. The interviews explored the transformation of the child care sector, employer and union recognition of work-family balance conflicts, changes in child care policy, strategies pursued by the various unions and their partners, and the conflicts, tensions and successes in these collaborations. Our study concludes with a discussion of what these new labor strategies mean for unions and their ability to meet broader public policy objectives regarding improving access and quality as well as wages and working conditions in the child care sector.

Case #1 Workers as Parents – the Union Child Care Coalition

Our first case focuses on broad coalition building as a strategy to shape the citywide child care agenda. The strategy moves from the establishment of the 1199 Child Care Fund, to the creation of a multi-union coalition around the issue of child care, validating child care as a standard benefit and promoting broader access to public child care subsidies through a collaborative facilitated enrollment model. In addition, two workplace-based studies were launched to measure both the social and economic benefits of providing child care benefits to low wage workers. The aim was to leverage labor/management workplace

cooperation to build institutional partnerships to sustain long-term workplace cultural change recognizing child care as a key employment benefit.

This case illustrates how the new labor strategy of sector-based coalition building reframed child care in three important ways: 1) it legitimized child care as a standard benefit in contract negotiations, 2) it established child care as a crucial service to enhance work/life balance, and 3) it provided evidence to document the return on investment in child care for workers, unions and employers. Child care has, consequently, moved from the margins of the policy agenda to the center of the unions' policy work. The NYC unions involved in these efforts had by the 1980s incorporated women in key leadership positions, and they helped place child care squarely on the agenda at an opportune moment.

a) Negotiating Child Care as a Standard Contract Benefit with Private Employers

The story begins in the 1980s. Strikes in 1984 and 1989 among workers in the hospital sector yielded a change both in union leadership and in the awareness of a religiously affiliated hospital employer. In 1999, the main union involved in these strikes, was highly feminized in both its membership and leadership, which led to a clear articulation of a gendered awareness of what their membership needed to achieve a better life: greater attention focused on work/family balance and access to a safe place for worker's children. Women union leaders of 1999, with the support of their male union president, were keenly aware that child care had to be reframed as a standard benefit for working families. In the late 1980s, 1999 union leaders found an ally among the Catholic hospitals, a former nun in charge of the hospitals, who became a key broker in the negotiations to have the women workers' demands met. At the same time, Cardinal John O'Connor, Archbishop of New York,

saw these negotiations as a way to improve the working conditions of a largely female workforce and to engage the larger Latino community, a crucial constituency for Catholic parishes in NYC. Consequently, in 1989, 1199's contract with the Catholic hospitals included a child care benefit for workers. Unions recognized the 1199 child care benefit was vulnerable if it remained an isolated case, so they made the Catholic hospitals' contract a model for the League of Voluntary Hospitals and four (arduous) years later the 1199 Child Care Fund¹ became available to union members of working families in those hospitals as well.

The long-term goal of some of the visionary leaders involved in these efforts was to move child care from the margin to the center as a standard benefit that should be included in collective bargaining. The strikes provided a crucial opportunity to insert child care as part of the bargaining agenda with the Catholic Hospitals. This portion of the case highlights how the 1199 union was able to set a new standard for workers in the hospital sector through targeted negotiations with an employer who controlled a substantial portion of the sector.

b) Broadening Access to Public Child Care Subsidies: Eligibility and Facilitated Enrollment

In 1994, inspired by the creation of the 1199 Child Care Fund, the New York Union Child Care Coalition (NYUCCC) was formed as a coalition of ten unions committed to a child care/work and family agenda; it now includes twenty-five unions with official recognition from the New York City Labor Council and the New York State AFL-CIO.² Its three-pronged, broad-based approach included expanded access for low and moderate income working families for child care assistance; wage supplements for child care workers, recruitment

and retention of a qualified workforce; and increasing quality child care programs through capital construction and renovation funding (NYUCCC 1998, 2002).

We focus here on one illustrative component of the agenda: the broader coalition building around public child care subsidies. The unions' goal was to expand eligibility for the public subsidy and reshape the public service delivery system through a community-based facilitated enrollment process. The aim was to broaden access to the public subsidy to include not only welfare leavers, but also the working poor who were also union members (NYUCCC 2002). The key challenge was to reframe child care in the eyes of policy makers and employers. Child care subsidies at this time were embedded in the welfare system and carried many of its trappings – stigma, difficult paperwork and complex bureaucratic procedures (Warner et al 2003). The union coalition's goal was to shift the subsidy program from a "poverty program" to a "worker-friendly system"; this involved reframing child care access as a broader working parents' issue.

The coalition included a broad set of players. Unions (1199, DC 37, UFT, 237 (Teamsters) and 1707), who had already used their political leverage to fight for a general increase in child care subsidies during budget negotiations, sought to expand access to child care benefits for their members and realized they needed to advocate for the working poor more broadly (NYUCCC 2002). Child care advocates, such as the Center for Children's Initiatives - NYC's Child Care Resource and Referral agency (previously Child Care Inc.) saw this as a way to improve access to quality child care for all workers. Employers (hospitals) saw expanded child care as a means to reduce absenteeism and increase productivity. Agencies within the city government came aboard as they saw how the coalition was able to create a more streamlined process for eligible families to secure benefits. Finally,

university researchers were recruited to provide careful study of program impacts to document the value added for all stakeholders.

Through political work at the city and state levels, the coalition was successful in institutionalizing important changes in the public child care subsidy program. They mobilized enough support (through postcard campaigns, educational lobby days and awareness events) to persuade New York State legislators in 2000 and 2001, to make a change in the subsidy eligibility requirements, increasing income eligibility caps from 200 percent up to 275 percent of poverty. The Coalition also fought for additional subsidy dollars.³ The change would allow subsidies to flow to a broader sector of low and moderate income working parents.

The coalition, aware of the broader benefit for all working families, began to advocate for a multi-million dollar facilitated enrollment pilot project in fall 2000 to enhance broader worker access to the child care subsidies. The coalition recognized that in addition to supporting the multi-stakeholder legislative agenda of the statewide Child Care That Works Campaign, addressing the child care needs of working families would mean concrete gains for union members as well. This placed the labor movement front and center in the fight for quality, affordable child care. In order to maintain a broad coalition for the effort, the facilitated enrollment project strategically hosted facilitated enrollment at community-based sites, such as schools and fairs. This pilot of the facilitated enrollment program was so successful, the city Administration of Children's Services changed its procedures and introduced a user-friendly application and enrollment process where the coalition served as an agent to sign up workers for the child care benefit at work.

Facilitated enrollment helped shift child care subsidies from a welfare frame to a frame which recognized working families also need child care support to maintain their economic security. The coalition's work was instrumental in helping mainstream child care as a crucial worker benefit good for both employees and the broader local economy. Unions consciously employed the language of "constituency" and "citizenship" to signal their willingness to employ their substantial resources and political capital to secure benefits for working parents beyond their own membership. This shifts the focus from the poorest welfare leavers to working parents more broadly. While this raises questions about who gets priority access given the limited pool of child care subsidy dollars, the expansion of child care as a worker right (not just a welfare right) was part of the broader coalition strategy and in the long-term may incorporate more "benefit constituents" to lobby for more funding for child care. There is a precedent for this, since unions had already successfully lobbied for more funding in the 1990s. Continued work in this direction by union-advocate coalitions at multiple levels could further institutionalize child care funding at the state and city level.

c) Research: Making the Case for Productivity Enhancement

In order to legitimize child care as a standard workplace benefit, the coalition also used research to demonstrate that stable access to child care benefits both workers and employers. The coalition, with the unions at the forefront, garnered funding to launch two initiatives. The *Working Parents for a Working New York (WPWNY)* project demonstrated that access to reliable child care can lessen work/family conflict and enhance worker productivity (WPWNF 2010a). The second study, *Excellent Health Workers/Excellent*

Parents: A Labor/Health Industry Consortia to Address Work/Family Conflict (EHWEP), focused on the health care sector and highlighted low-cost labor-management strategies to improve relationships between employees and employers through facilitated dialogues and workshops around work/family issues. We focus on the first study because it directly linked child care provision to productivity.

The WPWNY study evaluated the effects of subsidy receipt on low income worker productivity in the hospital, home health care and school crossing guards sectors - sectors where scheduling and absenteeism were problems. The unions helped raise a total of \$1.525 million from the New York City Council during the 2007-2008 and 2008 - 2009 fiscal years for the WPWNY Initiative.

The study chose specific worksites based on cooperative labor/management relationships and the number of union members who were income eligible for child care subsidies at those sites. Child care subsidies were provided to a randomly selected group of income eligible employees (both employees of the City and of subcontracted agencies), and a control group which did not receive these benefits.⁴ The research project relied on gaining access to existing employer data on employee productivity indicators and on qualitative data collected through in person interviews. Given the vulnerability workers might feel in having their employers consciously monitor their performance, union leaders framed the study in terms of the broader common good results could create for child care benefits to convince employees to participate.

The findings of the study indicate that access to child care subsidies had a positive impact on worker performance and reduced both absenteeism and “presenteeism”

(WPWNY 2010a, 2010b).⁵ Additionally, the study showed conversations about work/life balance in the workplace improved both perceptions of the work environment and employee productivity (WPWNY 2010c, 2010d).

These research studies would not have been possible without the coalition. Advocates could not have conducted either study because they did not have the constituency of parents as an organized group, a database of workers, or relationships at workplaces to connect to income eligible working parents and engage management's cooperation. Advocates are nonprofit organizations that depend on public funding for their child care resource and referral work. They cannot engage in direct lobbying. Unions, by contrast, are independent political organizations with strategists, funding and an organizational mechanism that can mobilize constituents and, ultimately, voters. While advocates try to effect change through broad improvements to policy, unions are on the ground person-to-person, worker-to-worker organizations willing to use their political power to extract resources, and leverage the support of labor management committees. As one child care advocate leader said, "I think that if you're being a wise strategist and advocate, and live in NYC, you need to figure out the ways that you work with the unions and try and find as much common ground as you can." In the end, the common framing, the imperative to show policy makers and employers the impact of access to child care on both working families and work performance, resonated among all the different stakeholders.

Case #2: Organizing Child Care Providers – United Teachers Federation (UFT)

The union strategy in this case focused on improving working conditions for marginalized home-based child care providers through a direct worker organizing strategy.

We tell the story of the United Teachers Federation (UFT) organizing efforts to link improvements in education readiness of young children with improvements in the remuneration and status of home-based, informal (legally exempt) child care providers. The case highlights an innovation in organizing, with the attendant challenges that emerge when a union expands its tent to include informal child care providers, now defined as “alternative teachers”. It also shows the potential for divergent strategic foci among unions given the different interests they represent in the child care sector.

The UFT strategy focused on membership expansion to informal child care providers, who, like the paraprofessionals organized by the UFT in the mid-sixties, are seen as part of a broad public education mission, creating linkages between community-based providers with cultural expertise and the education bureaucracy (Juravich 2012, Amlung 2010). By ameliorating working conditions for marginalized home-based providers, the UFT also consciously framed the organizing effort around the notion of a continuum of “educational readiness” using higher quality child care to bridge the achievement gap of low income children. The UFT sought to empower an otherwise invisible group of workers as it tried to respond to restructuring of the field of early education (e.g. privatization, voucherization). By doing so, the UFT also sought to improve the quality of care, particularly, for low-income children who are over represented in informal child care settings. The UFT’s strategy articulated explicit linkages between the interests of home-based child care providers and teachers in the formal public school system. By focusing on increasing reimbursement and training to improve quality, the UFT reasoned children would be better prepared to enter the formal school setting. This case highlights a

community-based organizing strategy in an increasingly difficult political and fiscal environment.

a) Background on NYC Child Care Structure

The New York City child care system is characterized by a mix of a few public centers (with unionized workers) within a primarily private, market based child care system of centers and home-based family providers. The City has increasingly shifted its focus away from centers and toward vouchers. In addition, the city's publicly subsidized centers have been tasked with caring for younger children to increase access for this age group while older children were moved to school-based afterschool programs. This complicates life for parents who have to pick up children at multiple sites when school-aged and younger children used to be served at one location. It also negatively affected the financial viability of the centers. The staff ratio is higher for younger children, so the loss of after school children undermined the financial model for centers. Centers had to hire additional staff to care for infants and toddlers, increasing costs significantly. In addition centers faced capital investment to renovate classrooms to make them appropriate for infants and toddlers. These complicated requirements and the corresponding cost structure, made the centers more expensive.

The City proceeded to push toward a voucher system, which parents could use with home based providers or informal providers in their neighborhoods. For the union that represents center-based child care workers (District Council 1707), the move towards voucher-based care poses a threat as it has the potential of decimating their membership. Consequently, District Council 1707 has focused on defending the publicly funded child

care centers, Mayor Lindsey administration's legacy, and the high quality child care these centers provide. The UFT, as the case below outlines, followed a different strategy.

Recognizing the Federal focus on "parental choice" and the City's focus on voucherization, the UFT's organizing strategy worked within these parameters to carve out a space that sought to improve conditions for marginalized providers and provide better quality care for low-income parents trying to balance family responsibilities with demanding, precarious jobs.

b) UFT/ACORN's Community Organizing Model

In 2005, the UFT entered into a community organizing partnership with ACORN to organize isolated, informal child care providers in New York City. Organizing drives had led to executive orders facilitating the unionization of child care workers in several states, such as Illinois, Oregon, and New Jersey, by 2005 (Gregory 2008). The UFT/ACORN partnership leveraged national level organizing experiences in the child care sector to develop their strategy.

In New York, there were approximately 28,000 home-based child care providers, of which about 20,000 were legally exempt from regulation (meaning they care for just two children beyond their own). During spring 2006 ACORN began its canvassing efforts and by the summer hundreds of providers attended a meeting to discuss unionization. By the fall, over 1,300 providers, with support of clergy and legislators, rallied to lay out the issues faced by family-based providers. That same fall, grassroots joint unionization efforts by the UFT and ACORN ("massive door-knocking and canvassing") began in New York City to convince providers to sign authorization cards. By May 16, 2007, according to the UFT,

12,000 providers signed authorization cards to allow the UFT to represent them in bargaining negotiations, and by May 24th, then Governor Spitzer signed the executive order officially legitimizing these unionization processes.⁶

Informal home-based child care providers have made some important gains as a result of the UFT's unionization efforts. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in public subsidy reimbursement that the ACS owed providers were recovered. Providers can now count on a negotiated market rate, which locks in higher pay rates. Providers who commit to a certain number of hours of professional development are eligible for enhanced reimbursement. Providers have also gained access to a health insurance program. Irregular payments from ACS, which was one of the key challenges child care providers faced in managing their operations and ensuring their survival, were finally rectified. Finally, the unions' efforts resulted in improved interface with regulatory agencies, which alleviated some "unnecessary" regulatory burdens, such as license renewal every two years, which was extended to four years with two-year inspection periods, and the discontinuation of posting minor infractions for public view on public websites.

The UFT is representing an isolated workforce composed of largely immigrant women of color who themselves are parents trying to make ends meet while providing a crucial community service. Low-income and minority families rely heavily on this type of home-based child care because these providers are more responsive to these families' needs - accommodating non-traditional hours and providing a continuum of care from infancy to school age in family homes located in convenient, neighborhood locations.

UFT representatives emphasized that these unionization efforts have given providers, who were largely invisible to the public, a platform to speak out, and more

importantly, to speak with one another, share their concerns and think about solutions collectively. The key is both to support these workers in securing their own livelihood through negotiated contracts and to provide professional development to improve the quality of care the children receive. The UFT characterizes its organizing efforts as “bottom up listening and a constituency-driven agenda and strategy building” wherein the UFT serves a bridging function, connecting the livelihood needs of isolated community-based workers and politicians to build agreement. Union meetings and activities were confidence-building and empowering as they created places where women could meet, break out of their isolation, and talk to other adults.

The UFT framed its organizing around the needs of low-income families who often need care for multiple children of different ages. The UFT’s rhetoric focused on “closing the achievement gap” through the redefinition of early child care providers as education “practitioners.” By focusing on raising the quality of care through training and material support for these home-based providers, the UFT also framed its strategy as serving long-term educational policy goals. The UFT had both the capacity and the will to create economies of scale in providing professional development training for home-based providers. The UFT made this training available both to UFT members as well as other non-UFT home-based providers who accept non-subsidy children. In this way, the UFT links its early child care efforts to its base-membership – teachers in the public school system – who are now held accountable for bridging the achievement gaps.

c) Defining the Political Space for Strategic Action

The UFT/ ACORN partnership, building on preexisting personal relationships across the two organizations, forged a powerful organizing alliance in New York City to rally support among child care providers, local officials and community leaders. At the same time, UFT developed an effective relationship with CSEA to build a downstate/upstate coalition for political lobbying work at the state level (Gregory 2008). Each partner leveraged its political capital to lobby legislators and two successive governor's offices to bring informal child care providers into the union's fold. The policy strategy the partners deployed initially focused on passing legislation to inscribe the right to representation and bargaining in law. Cognizant of complications that had arisen in other states, the legislation that was moved forward did not classify child care workers as public employees for the purposes of pensions or health care, but did allow child care providers to vote on formal representation for contract negotiations (Gregory 2008).

While the coalition was surprisingly successful in garnering support for the legislation both in the state assembly and the Republican controlled senate (which was willing to override Republican Governor Pataki's initial veto of the legislation), the timing of the gubernatorial elections blocked this effort. Ironically, it was Democratic gubernatorial candidate Spitzer who scuttled the legislative strategy, promising to pass an executive order instead. Even though the UFT/ACORN partnership and the coalition with CSEA formed a powerful political alignment, their strategic focus changed in response to Governor Spitzer's election. Political opportunity structures, such as the elections and union successes in other states, condition the space in which unions can maneuver. While legislation may have been preferable, the executive order allowed unionization of the sector to move forward.

d) Emerging Tensions: Are We Formalizing the Informal?

The UFT has worked consciously to frame their organizing as a “big tent education union approach” (Amlung 2010). In the case of the home-based child care providers, the UFT has been a game changer, bringing power and savvy to administrative and policy negotiations with the city and the state regarding the benefits, reimbursement and oversight of this large group of informal home-based child care providers. However, incorporating informal child care providers raises a question regarding the formality and professionalism of the early education sector overall. UFT must balance the interests of members who are teachers in the public system with those of informal care providers. UFT’s “big tent educational union approach” goes back to the union’s history of organizing paraprofessionals in the 1960’s. In the case of paraprofessionals and school aides, the union was able to bridge these apparent internal contradictions by framing paraprofessionals as pedagogical assistants, who could effectively bridge the community-bureaucracy gap (Juravich 2012). Similarly the UFT’s framing of home-based child care providers as “alternative teachers,” crucial to closing the achievement gap for low-income children, integrates these care givers into the UFT’s broader educational mission. As with its 1960s strategy, the UFT has expanded professional development opportunities for these informal child care providers leading both to skills upgrading and better reimbursement rates (Amlung 2010, Juravich 2012).

The question of formalizing the informal may have long-term implications for the field of early childhood education. Child care advocates in the city, as well as statewide, expressed concern that the legitimization of the informal sector of the industry might

undermine support for the expansion of universal pre-kindergarten with formally credential teachers at centers and in the public schools. The UFT's efforts to unionize a largely informal workforce, illustrates the tensions between quality and access and highlights the differing interests among the different unions and the advocates.

Discussion

The two cases present two different sets of strategies – coalition building versus direct labor organizing. The different organizing histories of the unions, their social capital, and their relative strength and capacity were key factors in explaining the unions' particular choice of strategies. In the first case, unions engaged in coalition building in which their political clout and their resources were key to the coalition's success. The second case presents a Saul Alinsky-style, community-organizing model in which unions bring crucial resources to organize informal workers in low-income urban communities. In evaluating the effectiveness of these two models, it becomes clear that unions are searching for strategies to revitalize their presence in the social policy arena both to stem the erosion of social benefits and to reframe social benefits as worker benefits and thus broaden their appeal among politicians, employers and low income workers across the city.

In case one, the coalition was able to shift the standard of what unions bargain for and place child care squarely on the agenda, moving child care from a peripheral benefit to one that is now a legitimate subject for collective bargaining. The coalition also focused on involving employers in order to convince them of the importance of stable child care for workers. In reframing child care as an employee benefit, policy initiatives may have more sticking power. The research study focused on demonstrating the impact of child care on

worker productivity. The public policy effect was significant; not only did the coalition manage to change subsidy eligibility requirements for the Facilitated Enrollment Project, it moved city agencies to change their procedures for enrollment. These changes are indicative of a change in how child care subsidies are viewed. The facilitated enrollment pilot shifted public subsidies from a punitive welfare frame to an economic productivity frame that treated subsidy recipients as deserving workers.

The coalition achieved many gains for all partners in the streamlined subsidy enrollment process - more access for working families, and additional money targeted to child care.¹ However, given a limited pool of subsidy dollars, the coalition struggled with the trade off between expanding child care access for all workers, or meeting the needs of the poorest families.

Overall the work of the Coalition created a win-win-win for unions, advocates and politicians. Unions targeted programs in certain legislative districts and sought to match high-need, low-income districts with supportive legislators to move policy agendas. The unions understood their membership represents a potential constituency for local politicians, who want to build a broad base of electoral support. The inter-union coalition expanded the coalition's political reach since different union leaders have relationships with different politicians. Thus, the coalition, as a strategic urban actor, understood and leveraged its political relationships with legislators at both the city and state levels to promote funding for specific programs and policy change. Structuring the program to expand worker access to the child care subsidy was a useful organizing strategy as

¹ "Since 1999, the Coalition helped to win \$282 million in additional child care subsidies...as well as \$40 million for a wage supplement for child care workers..." (King and DuCotè 2001, pg. 3)

subsidies were available both to union members and non union workers. These synergies placed unions in a constructive role with advocates who acknowledged the benefit of partnering with unions in their quest to shape child care policy. However, in leveraging their political clout, unions have the potential to use their power to sideline the interests of child care advocates as well as potentially weaker unions. These tensions come out more clearly in case two.

In case two, the union strategy focused specifically on child care workers. It centered its activities on incorporating a new population into their ranks – largely informal, home-based child care providers who in New York City are primarily poor women of color. The UFT's considerable resource base and partnership with ACORN allowed it to engage in an aggressive organizing campaign. UFT may have crowded out weaker unions that are not as politically connected or as resource rich (Gregory 2008). In so doing, it moved in on what some considered another union's territory.² Instead of fighting the restructuring of the sector, the UFT focused on organizing to bring informal providers into the union's folds. In improving reimbursement conditions, raising regulatory respect for providers and implementing a skills upgrading strategy the union attempted to elevate the status and quality of informal home-based providers. While UFT's effort to organize informal providers has met with great success, the lack of a broader inter-union/advocate coalition strategy meant that the UFT did not initially join the broader coalition pushing for the expansion of professional universal preschool (UPK). However, since the election of Mayor Bill de Blasio in November 2013 and his push for UPK right after his inauguration, new

² DC 1707 brought a claim against UFT but the AFL-CIO determined organizing informal child care providers was within UFT's jurisdictional right.

opportunities to strengthen the coalition while pushing universal preschool for NYC children seem to have emerged. This initiative garnered strong support from both advocates and unions, including an official UFT endorsement of the Mayor's plan, indicating a coalescing of interests of the coalition and the UFT around this issue. Nonetheless, Mayor De Blasio, who proposed to cover costs for a New York City UPK program through a tax increase on NYC earners making over \$500,000/year, has so far been unable to convince the governor or the legislature at the state level to support his proposal.³

Conclusion

Any effort at coalition building or of community organizing requires a balancing act. As such, the union strategies discussed here illustrate the challenges that emerge as diverse stakeholders, different unions, child care advocates, parents and workers as well as public officials and administrators, engage in the arduous process of shaping child care policy in a city characterized by an increasingly fragmented service delivery system.

It is critically important to assess the potential of new labor strategies contextually to understand the trade off unions have to accept in terms of achieving benefits for union members or promoting broader social benefit given limited public budgets and political opportunity structures (MacDonald 2010). This tension is particularly salient in the child care sector where the three goals of access for parents, quality for children and better wages and working conditions for child care providers all compete for the same limited pool of public dollars. While under the new labor strategy unions are pushing for broader

³ For proposal from de Blasio, see <http://files.uft.org/parents/DeBlasioEducationInvestmentFactSheet.pdf>. For a New York State wide proposal initiative see Center for Children's Initiatives (www.centerforchildrensinitiative.org). See January 6, 2014 news reports: <http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2014/01/06/unions-on-board-with-mayor-de-blasios-universal-pre-k-plan/> and <http://www.crainsnewyork.com/article/20140106/BLOGS04/140109942> (both accessed January 7, 2014). For UFT statement see : <http://www.uft.org/news-stories/labor-unites-behind-de-blasio-s-pre-k-plan>.

working class family supports, they also are seeking to organize a sector where wages and working conditions are quite poor. Unions thus face a challenge, with limited resources and policy clout, of whether to extend benefits to all working class families, increase support for the poorest families, or secure benefits targeted to child care workers themselves. When pressed, unions do their best to advance a broader social agenda while attending to the particular needs of their membership. Thus union strategies are necessarily narrowed to focus on union member benefits, but this can improve the conditions of low-income workers who need this type of advocacy. This shows both the limits and the importance of new labor strategies in the context of austerity politics and policies where basic social safety net services such as child care are being restructured.

Both the coalition building and community organizing models discussed here created significant synergies, promoted policy change in the child care arena and established a broader constituency base for worker organizing. The new labor strategies we highlight here reaped important gains in the social policy arena. They began to institutionalize the right to a minimum of work-life balance for working parents by direct workplace bargaining, promoted research showing the benefits of child care to both workers and employers and policy change broadening working class access to public subsidies. They also empowered and improved the working conditions of an isolated home-based child care work force. It is not fair to expect new labor strategies to address the broad economic dislocation that economic restructuring and neoliberal policies have visited on many urban communities. The strength of unions as urban actors may reside in their willingness to explore some of the overlapping interests they share with other urban actors, be they child care advocates or the working poor in strategic sectors. New labor

strategies thus focus where worker interests overlap with those of strategic partners to benefit society more broadly.

Multiple points of strategic focus are crucial in effecting change. The coalition's work to move child care to center stage, legitimizing it in the eyes of public officials and agencies as well as employers, helped shift societal perceptions regarding child care access and work life balance. At the same time, organizing low-wage child care providers, who work at the fringes of an increasingly fragmented industry, may be a forward-looking strategy preempting the decimation of the sector as it continues to be privatized and fragmented through the voucherization of care.

Neither case has been effective in stemming the neoliberal shift toward privatization and voucherization of the child care system. In 2010 the Bloomberg Administration introduced the Early Learn program, which blends federal, state and city funding streams. The justification for the program is framed as a response to fiscal crisis and continuing retrenchment in education and child care funding at the state and federal level, leaving the city to find innovative ways to continue the provision of childcare, especially to the most vulnerable populations (Rosenberg 2012). Yet, instability and uneven distribution of funding across the city, as well as the confusing eligibility requirements under the Early Learn program continue to impede the provision of affordable, quality childcare across the city (Rosenberg 2012). The city is retooling the funding allocation mechanism and introduced an RFP process that has led to increased contracting out of child care provision to nonprofit and for profit providers. The city also has introduced a new reimbursement system for centers based on enrollment (rather than capacity) and targeting by zip code which creates budget uncertainty for publicly funded centers. This effort to further

privatize the sector stands in great contrast to the publicly funded center-based and professional care, for which unions, especially District Council 1707 in New York City, had successfully organized in the 1960s.

As these cases illustrate, unions have become critical urban actors. Labor-community coalitions are key to union revitalization and policy change. Differences in style, approach and strategy choice reflect the power and focus of the different unions and which part of the child care sector they are organizing. The raw political power of the unions, and their willingness to exercise it, also creates a new dynamic for child care advocates that is more expressly political. This leads to more aggressive policy pushes, which can result in new funding and programs. But as we have demonstrated, strategy choices sometimes create conflicts among members of the coalitions. Some of the tensions and challenges that are so salient in the NYC case, are less so in Toronto because unions in the city's child care sector are central members of a long standing a coalition whose primary goal is the establishment of a comprehensive, high quality, universally accessible, non-profit, publicly funded child care system with a unionized workforce. While this vision is far from Toronto's reality, in the more privatized and increasingly informal child care system in NYC, new labor strategies, by necessity, are more differentiated.

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Notes:

¹ The 1199 Child Care Fund is a Taft Hartley Fund, comprised of union and employer contributions.

² New York Union Child Care Coalition (NYUCCC); A Committee of the New York City Central Labor Council & New York State AFL-CIO. District Council 37, AFSCME; Local 237 Teamsters; Local 1199, SEIU; Transit Workers Union, Local 100, United Federation of Teachers; UNITE/HERE; RWDSU; Local 153 OPEIU; CWA Local 1180, District 1 and Local 1105; District Council 1707, AFSCME; CSEA; NYSNA; CSA; Amalgamated Transit Union

³ “Additionally, the NYUCCC supported the Child Care That Works Campaign (with a group of child care advocates, providers, community organizations and resource and referral agencies) helped to win \$282 million in child care subsidies, \$40 million for a wage supplement for child care workers, benefiting over 35,000 workers, most of whom are women, \$30 million for construction and renovation projects and increase in the child care and independent care credit.” (King and du Cote. 2001, pg. 3).

⁴The three labor management partnerships that comprised the study were DC37/NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC); 1199SEIU/NYC Homecare Subcontractors; Local 237 IBT/NYC Police Department School and the three institutional partners were Cornell ILR, which directed the team doing the case study research; the Consortium for Worker Education that administered the child care subsidies, and Child Care Inc. (now the Center the Children’s Initiatives) that provided information in workshop and phone formats.

⁵ This refers to workers coming into work sick due to lack of adequate sick-leave days; some workers may use up the sick leave they do have to bridge child care gaps.

⁶ See Providers' Timeline in the Pursuit of Justice, Respect & Fair Wages, Unionization & A Contract. Provided by Tammie Miller, Chapter Chair, Family Child Care Providers.