

Lloyd, Eva

Reshaping and reimagining marketised early childhood education and care systems. Challenges and possibilities

Exklusive Bildung und neue Ungleichheit. Ergebnisse der DFG-Forschergruppe "Mechanismen der Elitebildung im deutschen Bildungssystem". Weinheim; Basel : Beltz Juventa 2019, S. 89-106. - (Zeitschrift für Pädagogik, Beiheft; 65)



Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Lloyd, Eva: Reshaping and reimagining marketised early childhood education and care systems. Challenges and possibilities - In: Exklusive Bildung und neue Ungleichheit. Ergebnisse der DFG-Forschergruppe "Mechanismen der Elitebildung im deutschen Bildungssystem". Weinheim; Basel : Beltz Juventa 2019, S. 89-106 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-241718 - DOI: 10.25656/01:24171

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-241718>

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:24171>

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ZEITSCHRIFT FÜR PÄDAGOGIK

**Exklusive Bildung und neue Ungleichheit.
Ergebnisse der DFG-Forscher-
gruppe „Mechanismen der Elitebildung
im deutschen Bildungssystem“**

Zeitschrift für Pädagogik · 65. Beiheft

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Exklusive Bildung und neue Ungleichheit

**Ergebnisse der DFG-Forschergruppe
„Mechanismen der Elitebildung
im deutschen Bildungssystem“**

Herausgegeben von
Werner Helsper, Heinz-Hermann Krüger
und Jasmin Lüdemann

BELTZ JUVENTA

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ISSN: 0514-2717

ISBN 978-3-7799-3531-5 Print

ISBN 978-3-7799-3532-2 E-Book (PDF)

Bestellnummer: 443531

1. Auflage 2019

© 2019 Beltz Juventa

in der Verlagsgruppe Beltz · Weinheim Basel

Werderstraße 10, 69469 Weinheim

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Herstellung: Hannelore Molitor

Satz: text plus form, Dresden

Druck und Bindung: Beltz Grafische Betriebe, Bad Langensalza

Printed in Germany

Weitere Informationen zu unseren Autoren und Titeln finden Sie unter: www.beltz.de

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Eva Lloyd

Reshaping and Reimagining Marketised Early Childhood Education and Care Systems

Challenges and possibilities

Abstract: Marketised and privatised early childhood education and care systems are associated with increasing social stratification and elite formation affecting provision. Evidence from several EU and OECD member states illustrates public policies and strategies aimed at mitigating these dynamics. Practical solutions to such risks appear founded in transparent values and principles, agreed in national debates involving a wide range of stakeholders. Such a foundation can be found in alternative conceptual frameworks developed by Moss (2014) and Tronto (2013) which reimagine more equitable early childhood systems. Emerging evidence suggests that certain childcare business governance structures reflecting clearly articulated values and principles may also mitigate childcare market risks. Achieving transformative system change nevertheless remains challenging within rapidly changing policy environments.

Keywords: Early Childhood Systems, Childcare Markets, Social Stratification and Elite Formation, Childcare Policy Interventions, Early Childhood Governance Structures

1. Introduction

Value may be added to any discussion of new stratifications in early childhood education and care provision by a careful consideration of the relationship between increasing social stratification and elite formation and the early childhood system model in which they are most apparent. Evidence is strong for a substantive association between such dynamics and marketised and privatised early childhood systems, often referred to as childcare markets (Lloyd & Penn, 2012). When access to early childhood provision depends on children's socio-economic background or (dis)abilities, this is defined as social stratification within the system. This may lead to a restricted service choice in disadvantaged areas, as is the case in England (Gambaro, Stewart & Waldfogel, 2014), and often affects service quality. Elite formation in education refers to the more deliberate tendency to restrict access and create service exclusivity (Maxwell, Deppe, Krüger & Helsper, 2018).

This paper approaches the issues from a multi-disciplinary perspective, encompassing social policy, political science, sociology and educational research. Relying largely on documentary analysis and published quantitative and qualitative research, this paper first describes the characteristics of a variety of marketised and privatised early childhood systems in EU (European Commission, 2016) and OECD member states (Bonoli & Reber, 2010). Next, it outlines risks associated with these systems. There follows a dis-

discussion of research on policies and strategies adopted by some OECD member states in order to mitigate these risks with the aim of creating more equitable access to a sustainable system delivering quality services for all young children.

Developing an early childhood system that works not only for young children, but also for their families, the early childhood workforce, policymakers, politicians and other stakeholders, would appear to require general agreement about underpinning values and principles. Such a foundation can be found in alternative conceptual frameworks developed by Moss (2014) and Tronto (2013) which reimagine more equitable early childhood systems.

This paper proceeds to explore these alternative conceptual frameworks. Moss developed a theory concerning the democratic politics of early childhood education, while Tronto proposed the concept of the caring democracy, which aims at reconciling a range of care markets, including childcare markets, with equality and justice. Emerging evidence suggests that certain governance structures reflecting clearly articulated values and principles may also mitigate childcare market risks.

Mitigating policies, concepts and governance models as discussed here must be translated into a programme of action to achieve transformative change of whole early childhood systems. Finally, this paper considers some of the challenges that politics and rapidly changing policy environments may pose to achieving this.

1.1 Marketised Early Childhood Education and Care Systems

Across OECD members states, many early childhood systems continue to be split functionally between early education and childcare services, and between services for children aged zero to three and those aged three to school starting age, usually at six. Responsibilities for different parts of the system may moreover be assigned to different departments at local and central government levels (Kaga, Bennett & Moss, 2010). There are many hybrid arrangements for organizing early childhood systems.

In most European and OECD members states, early childhood education and care systems now also tend to form part of a mixed economy in which the state, private-for-profit and private-not-for-profit providers may all partner in the provision and funding of services (European Commission, 2016; OECD, 2006). According to Penn and Lloyd (2014, p. 28) “The ‘childcare market’ or ‘mixed economy of childcare’ is a blanket description for a variety of childcare and pre-primary and nursery education arrangements for children and their families.” Parents, as proxy service consumers on behalf of their children, may be offered choice and diversity in childcare markets (Lloyd & Penn, 2012).

Where childcare systems feature a market model, this reflects the predominantly neo-liberal view that market operations are more efficient and more effective than public bodies in securing the distribution and funding of early childhood provision (Woodrow & Press, 2017). The promotion of market operations expresses the expectation that the market will create better incentives for providers to offer consumers more choice and competitive pricing, leading to a better balance between supply and demand (Plan-

tenga & Remery, 2009). Globally, the growth of the private-for-profit sector within such markets has been extremely rapid, becoming the default option in most of low- and middle-income countries (Penn & Lloyd, 2014).

Among the private-for-profit childcare providers that operate in childcare markets may be corporate businesses, whose primary commercial interest is getting shareholders a good return on capital invested (Moss, 2014; Penn, 2013a). The term privatisation tends to refer to private sector participation in largely publicly funded and delivered services, but may not coincide with marketisation, which can be defined as private providers operating within a competitive environment (Whitfield, 2006). Private and public early childhood provision may also run in parallel within some mixed economies (Lloyd & Penn, 2012). Fully state-funded and delivered integrated early childhood education and care provision may be available alongside publicly subsidised private provision, as happens in the Norwegian (Haug, 2014) and Finnish (Lundkvist, Nyby, Autto & Nygård, 2017) childcare markets.

Early education provision may or may not form part of such a market, as it is often treated differently from childcare in public policy. In England, for example, it is delivered both in state schools and in the private sector, where it is integrated with care for children of employed parents (Lloyd, 2017). In contrast, the Netherlands provide early education in primary – basis – schools, while childcare for children aged under four is delivered within a largely for-profit private market (Noailly & Visser, 2009).

The French early childhood system is horizontally split. A childcare market operates where state and publicly subsidised private providers deliver provision for under threes; family daycare is a prominent part of this market (Fagnani, 2014). Children aged three to six are entitled to publicly funded and full-time early education, which is due to become compulsory from September 2019 (West, 2016). In contrast, Germany features an integrated early childhood education and care system which offers a right to a place for children aged one to six, delivered almost exclusively by private-not-for-profit providers (Bauernschuster & Schlotter, 2015; Klinkhammer & Riedel, 2017).

Where provision has traditionally been more childcare-led and more fragmented, the for-profit sector has been able to establish more inroads over recent years, although the extent of this crucially depends on how funding is offered and how regulations are applied (European Commission, 2011). There is considerable variation in the level of public support for early childhood provision and how it is delivered, notably in Europe (Van Lancker, 2017). Such variation is best explained with reference to these European systems' differing historical, cultural and institutional context (Scheiwe & Willekens, 2009).

If a childcare market is supported by public funding in the form of vouchers, tax credits or other types of parent (demand side) subsidies, this is expected to boost the growth and sustainability of provision, and in effect, of the private sector. Supply-side funding in childcare markets, that is direct public funding of childcare providers, including for-profit businesses, may occur alongside demand-side funding. For instance, in England the government provides 15 hours free childcare/early education for all three and four-year olds and some two-year olds, as well as an extra 15 hours, making a total

of 30 free hours, for children whose parents meet certain employment criteria. At the same time, it offers a tax rebate for employed parents who incur additional childcare costs (Lloyd, 2017).

Contrary to neoliberal predictions, marketisation and privatisation, including corporatisation, risk deepening, consolidating or widening inequalities of access to early childhood provision (Gambaro et al., 2014; Lloyd & Penn, 2014).

1.2 *Social Stratification within Childcare Markets*

Evidence from European Union and OECD member states, as well as from other parts of the world (Lloyd & Penn, 2012), starkly illustrates increasing social stratification and elite formation within early childhood education and care provision in marketised early childhood systems. Substantial class differentials in childcare used across 27 European Union countries were highlighted by Pavolini and Van Lancker (2018). Childcare markets may encourage deregulation, drive up costs, and promote qualitative differences between provider types, while offering parents neither increased choice nor competitive pricing. Private-for-profit provision in particular poses risks to accessibility, affordability and service quality (Penn, 2013b).

Nations affected include Australia (Woodrow & Press, 2017), Canada (Cleveland, Forer, Hyatt, Japel & Krashinsky, 2007), the Netherlands (Akgunduz & Plantenga, 2014), New Zealand (Mitchell, 2012), the UK (Mathers, Sylva & Joshi 2007; Blanden, Del Bono, McNally & Rabe, 2016) and the US (Sosinsky, 2012). Even in the German childcare market dominated by not-for-profits, social stratification and elite formation are emerging, as documented in studies by Mierendorff, Ernst, Krüger and Roch (2015) and Becker and Schober (2017). Parent-run establishments appear most likely to display social stratification (Hogrebe, 2017).

Rapid early childhood service expansion aimed at promoting economic wellbeing almost always relies on increased participation of the private-for-profit sector. This has been shown to pose risks to quality even if accessibility and affordability improve, as exemplified by developments in the Netherlands (Akgunduz & Plantenga, 2014) and of Canada's province of Quebec (Levebvre, Merrigan & Verstraete, 2009). Serious concerns arose in both places about concurrent and demonstrably worsening childcare quality, particularly for the poorest children. A 2011 report for the European Commission (European Commission, 2011) reflected emerging European Union concern at the growing privatisation and marketisation of a range of state social services, including early childhood provision within member states. This concern stemmed from the fact that "[...] if access to welfare services is determined by ability to pay, or some other limitation of access, such provision may undermine the social equity or solidarity, which is also a goal of the EU" (Penn, 2013a, p. 1).

Different funding models tend to primarily affect access and affordability for disadvantaged children and the quality of the services they use. The next section of this paper discusses the effect on public funding of a decade of economic austerity.

1.3 *Economic Austerity and Childcare Markets*

Equity risks associated with childcare markets may be exacerbated by conditions of economic austerity, particularly those characterising the last decade in Europe (Lloyd & Penn, 2014). Such risks particularly affect centre-based childcare provision, as illustrated by the case of England (Lloyd, 2017). The small business model of family day-care has also been affected, though perhaps not to the same extent (Bauters & Vandebroek, 2017).

Paradoxically, governments' varied policy responses to austerity's economic effects on childcare markets may increase social stratification within provision or affect disadvantaged children and communities disproportionately. Governments may reduce the level of parent childcare subsidies, as happened in the Netherlands (Akgunduz & Plantenga, 2014) and in England (Lloyd, 2015), or may propose alternative measures addressing threatened market failure. Alternative measures may aim to simplify the regulatory environment in which childcare businesses operate. This is assumed to safeguard childcare business sustainability. Deregulation may affect the 'iron triangle' of structural factors underpinning childcare quality: high staff child ratios, small group sizes and good staff training and qualifications (Dalli et al., 2011). Another area where regulations may be relaxed is indoor space requirements or the provision of outdoor play space (Lloyd, 2014). Considering these factors' demonstrated relationship with early childhood service quality, and hence their likely impact on developmental outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged children (Bennett, 2012), such deregulation can have long-term adverse consequences. The phenomena of growing stratification and elite formation in childcare markets are associated with long-standing debates among neoclassical market theorists about the need for state intervention to ensure equity and ward off social polarisation (Room, 2011, p. 63), particularly within educational and social welfare services.

Having reviewed some evidence of negative state interventions in childcare markets, the question now arises whether governments can introduce policies and strategies which capitalise on the strengths of the private childcare market, mitigate its worst effects and enable it to work more effectively.

2. **Intervening in Marketised Early Childhood Systems**

Within childcare markets the quality, accessibility and affordability of private-for-profit provision tend to be worse than that in public and not-for-profit services not only at the micro-level of provision. Quality failings may also be present at the macro-level of the infrastructure required to ensure quality at the micro-level, for example in respect of staff employment conditions, regulation, standards and financial structures, curriculum, monitoring, data collection and research and involvement of parents (Penn, 2013b). Both OECD (2006, 2012) and the European Commission (Lindeboom & Duiskoel, 2013) identified policy levers to promote equitable early childhood systems. Sev-

eral OECD members have intervened in childcare markets at either the micro- or macro-level, employing such levers to offset equity failings. Their use is illustrated in three case studies below.

2.1 *Specific Interventions in Three Childcare Markets*

Three country examples, Australia, France and Norway, illustrate how policies and strategies were employed to intervene in childcare markets in order to mitigate social stratification and elite formation risks. Whereas Australia and France primarily focussed on the childcare system infrastructure, Norway's approach may be better characterised as whole system reform.

Australia

The focus of Australia's childcare market intervention was at the macro-level. Australia had experienced a large and rapid increase of privatisation and corporatisation within its mixed childcare market since the 1980s. This culminated in the dramatic collapse of its leading for-profit childcare corporation ABC Learning in 2008 (Brennan & Fenech, 2014). The federal government had to step in as a result to secure the future of a substantial proportion of existing provision. Subsequently, the Council of Australian Governments initiated a national childcare development strategy involving a wide-ranging programme of reform with a focus on macro-level quality to secure better early childhood provision and a renewed role for the private-not-for-profit sector (Sumsion, 2012).

A National Quality Agenda emerged and the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACEQA) was established to oversee the national regulatory system (Sumsion et al., 2009). The new standards framework demanded that early education should only be delivered by qualified teachers, but their hours of employment were linked to the size of the institution. For a while, the developmental aspects of early childhood provision were at the heart of the national debate and ensuing policy measures. In recent years, however, there has been a switch away from quality concerns back to a neoliberal emphasis on labour market productivity and deregulation within the market to promote quantity potentially at the expense of quality (Woodrow & Press, 2017). Prior to corporate childcare chain ABC Learning's collapse Sumsion (2012) undertook an ethical audit of the operations of Australia's then leading for-profit childcare chain. She considered this radical approach was needed

[t]o contribute to efforts to force a policy debate about whether the corporatisation of ECEC [early childhood education and care], that is a growing concentration of ECEC provision by listed companies with legal responsibilities to maximise shareholder profits, was in the public interest [...]. (Sumsion, 2012, p. 212)

Sumsion has since promoted ethical audits as a form of assisting childcare market operations anywhere, adopting an approach first promoted by Cribb and Ball (2005). In

her view, ethical audits presuppose that the public interest is considered from an ethical perspective which aims to balance interests, perspectives and aims that may be in competition. The focus should never be primarily on economic considerations (Sumsion, 2012, p. 213).

France

In France the emphasis has for quite some time been on regulation and public funding to guarantee universality and equity within its mixed childcare market for children aged up to three. This market is made up of a variety of centre-based services, mostly run by not-for-profit providers. Family daycare settings care for almost one third of French children aged under three; the workers' pay and employment conditions are nationally regulated to guarantee a minimum income level (Fagnani, 2014). Since 2003, for-profit centre-based childcare businesses can enter this market, provided they meet quality criteria and charge income-related parental fees. While this remains the subject of public debate, their market share is growing (Malécot, 2015).

State funded nursery education for children aged three and over aims to promote equity and social cohesion (West, 2016). Principles regarding gender equality in employment and family wellbeing enshrined in the 1946 French Constitution lie at the heart of these policies and the entire early childhood system. Funding structures remain complex, but generous, and their levels have been protected from austerity measures. To prevent childcare fee inflation, parents pay income related fees and neither public nor private settings can charge top-up fees if they are to qualify for public subsidies. The level of public funding is determined anew every four years in a national concordat between the government and the CNAF – the Caisse Nationale d'Allocation Familiales. Mandatory employer contributions account for up to 60% of this national family allowances fund. So far, though, universal access for under three year olds has not yet been fully realised (Fagnani, 2014).

Norway

Norway's reforms focused on adequate financial resources (Jacobsen & Vollset, 2012). Since 2009 all Norwegian children aged one to six, the school starting age, have a legal right to a full-time place in kindergarten, while the first year of life is covered by parental leave policies (Naumann, McLean, Koslowski, Tisdall & Lloyd, 2013). Generous funding for both state and private provision in the mixed market economy is tied in with strong regulation. In 2004 the small proportion of private kindergartens that operated alongside this system charging high parental fees, became entitled to public subsidies, provided they met the same regulatory conditions. A growing mixed market economy has resulted. Since the mid-1970s, the balance between public and private, mostly not-for-profit, provision has been about fifty-fifty, while a debate continues about the role of for-profit childcare businesses.

Local government plays a key role in both the distribution of direct grants to providers and provider regulation, including control over entry and exit from the market. Income related parental fees are pegged at around 15% of household income and to this

end, a cap on fees is operated. The exact fee level is determined annually in the national budget when this is debated in the Norwegian parliament. The combination of tight regulation, parental fee capping and the equivalent subsidies available to all types of kindergarten makes for a homogeneous, integrated and universal market system. Although low-income parents appear to benefit less from fee reductions than higher-income ones, their children's participation in childcare provision has increased sharply compared to that in other European countries (Ellingsaeter, 2014). The reforms in Norway reflect privatisation perhaps more than marketisation:

The story in Norway is of a strong state allowing private ECEC providers to contribute, providing they meet the already well-established norms of the state sector. It is not an attempt to control or arbitrate in an already burgeoning private sector. Therefore, its transferability as a model may be limited. (Penn & Lloyd, 2014, p. 34)

2.3 *Reshaping Childcare Markets*

The Norwegian and Australian case studies in the previous section were included in a review by Penn and Lloyd (2014), which also covered positive market management strategies employed by New Zealand, the Netherlands and the UK. This review's authors concluded that variable quality and inequitable access would persist unless strong regulations were enforced, including planning controls for entry to and exit from local markets (Penn & Lloyd, 2014, p. 13). To improve quality, access and affordability would require substantial public funding. Supply-side rather than demand-side funding, coupled with regulations such as fee-capping, would avoid the equity impact of greater public funding being undermined by price inflation. Generous funding was also needed for infrastructure elements such as improving the early childhood workforce's initial and continuous professional training and employment conditions. Increasing local accountability and improving monitoring, research and policy evaluation systems were additional recommendations.

This set of recommendations echoed conclusions of earlier EU (Lindeboom & Duis-kool, 2013) and OECD (2006) reports and reflect evidence that even where the amount of public funding invested in the system is comparable, the way it is distributed may generate social stratification. This effect was well demonstrated in a comparison of the social distribution of publicly funded childcare in Sweden and Flemish Belgium (Van Lancker & Ghysels, 2011). Despite identical per capita expenditure, Sweden, which does not employ a childcare market, had a more equal social distribution of early childhood provision than Flemish Belgium, which does feature a marketised system involving demand-side funding

The measures identified by Penn and Lloyd (2014) can play a part in containing the growth of the private-for-profit market share in favour of not-for-profit and state provision in the pursuit of a more equitable system. Section 4 below describes the existing and emerging types of not-for-profits in OECD member states. Each measure also ad-

dresses the tendency, well documented among European nations, for a lower take-up of early childhood education and care provision among disadvantaged children than among their better off peers (Pavolini & Van Lancker, 2018). The review's primary recommendation, though, was the need to clarify and develop the early childhood system's national goals and objectives within a coordinated policy framework that includes central and local government levels and a collaborative and participatory reform process. What would be an appropriate process for mobilizing all stakeholders for this?

A common feature in the three empirical cases discussed above is the role played by national debates in reshaping aspects of the early childhood system with the aim of making it more equitable. Such debates acknowledged equity principles and notions of the common good. In all three countries debates at the highest levels of government reflected collective concerns and aspirations among early childhood stakeholder groups. These groups included practitioners and teachers, childcare business leaders, early childhood representative organisations, parents, academics and policymakers.

Arguably, the successful reshaping of any early childhood system demands reconciliation between the positions of a wide range of early childhood stakeholders. Consensus regarding practical solutions to issues such as social stratification and elite formation should also extend to principles and values to inspire and underpin such systems. Having briefly examined policy interventions in childcare markets, the issue of systemic change now also deserves consideration from a theoretical perspective.

3. Reimagining Marketised Early Childhood Systems

In an application of systems theory to early childhood systems, Kagan and her colleagues proposed that: "The way in which a country regards its obligation to young children is embedded in its socio-cultural history, defining not only what services should be delivered, but also how and to whom they are delivered" (Kagan, Araujo, Jaimovich & Cruz Aguayo, 2016, p. 170).

Marketised early childhood systems reflect not only such influences, but also political choices that can and should be put up for democratic debate (Moss, 2014). Two scholars writing in the English language provided blueprints for the potential contents and focus of such national discussions, while at the same time delivering a searing critique of the market from a philosophical perspective. Moss (2014) has published widely on the democratic politics of early childhood education, while Tronto (2013) proposed the notion of the 'caring democracy'. She reimagined a system that reconciles care – including childcare markets – with equality and justice.

3.1 Moss and the Reimagining of Early Childhood Systems

Moss (2014) first of all defined the concept of education in relation to very young children. For him, education "in the widest sense [is] [...] a process of upbringing and in-

creasing participation in the wider society with the goal that both the individual and society flourish” (Moss, 2014, p. 92). Within this process, care and nurturance are intrinsic and therefore inseparable parts of education as a relational and ethical practice

For education to achieve this goal, argued Moss (2014, p. 109), it needs a value base that includes three fundamental values originally posited by the sociologist Olin Wright (2012): equality, sustainability and democracy. To these Moss added six further values that should characterise education, including early childhood education and care, if it is to be capable of being truly transformative: solidarity, diversity, uncertainty, subjectivity, surprise and experimentation. Leaving aside these additional values and their precise meaning, even the three fundamental values articulated by Wright may be difficult to achieve within marketised early childhood, educational and social welfare systems. These values are almost in complete opposition to the basic tenets of such markets.

Moss (2014, p. 206) acknowledged the challenges inherent in any attempt to realise such a transformative system. According to him, this process should take the form of a journey. He viewed some contemporary educational practices as ‘pre-figurative’ practices that served as ‘waymarks’ on this journey towards building a participatory democracy. Such participatory democracy might eventually lead to transformative change in early childhood systems and should be widely studied and debated. Examples of ‘pre-figurative’ practices include Reggio Emilia’s ‘pedagogy of listening’ and Swedish preschool approaches (Moss, 2014, p. 207).

3.2 *Tronto’s Theory of a Caring Democracy*

In contrast with Moss, who does not generalise from the care and nurturance aspects of early childhood education and care to the wider range of social welfare services, Joan Tronto did approach educational issues from this wider care perspective. She identified a care deficit corresponding to a democratic deficit in nations like the USA.

Market democracies now appeared unable to either promote the democratic goals of greater freedom, equality and justice, or to ensure that both care-giving and care-receiving have their proper place in a democratically inclusive society (Tronto, 2013, p. 139). For care-giving and care-receiving to do so required moving away from the dominant value of economic gain to a more trusting and less competitive society (Tronto, 2013, p. 146). Care practices are characterised by unequal distributions of power and these needed addressing in truly democratic caring practices (Tronto, 2013, p. 148). In her view vicious circles of privatised caring needed dismantling, as markets per definition cannot be caring.

Tronto put forward essentially the same arguments for societal change as Moss, while arguably adding value to these by her emphasis on the centrality of caring. Her theory aimed to demonstrate that interdependence and human relationships are the dominant influences on the quality of our lives within societies. By the same token they are key to a beneficial and equitable economic system (Tronto, 2013, p. 182).

3.3 *From Theory to Reality*

In outlining a route from theory to reality, each author proposed a profoundly different pathway towards a reimagined early childhood system. In doing so Moss (2014) restricted his blueprint to transformative change within early childhood education systems, his preferred description. For Tronto (2013) these systems formed part of a much wider complex of care services in need of transformation. Moss offered ‘pre-figurative’ practice examples as pointed towards the ‘participatory democracy’ required to generate such change. In her final chapter Tronto, on the other hand, homed in on practical examples of policy change. These bore a resemblance to actual policy interventions discussed in section 2 above. Her reimagined ‘caring democracy’ similarly amounted to a participatory democracy’ as it “[...] would also need to create mechanisms whereby citizens without personal interests in the regulation of markets would become involved in such regulation” (Tronto, 2013, p. 177).

The national debates concerning equitable early childhood systems that played a prominent role in the three country case studies presented above also featured within these theoretical approaches. Both scholars made a strong case for the values and principles that should be up for general debate. Both also reflected a positive attitude towards the possibility of transformative change in markets, through a stepwise process of shifting attitudes, represented by evolving practices in the case of Moss and practices and policies in the case of Tronto. Tronto’s position on marketisation of a wide range of care services as a factor in growing inequality chimes with the work of other scholars whose empirical studies evidenced this dynamic in several countries (Brennan, Cass, Himmelweit & Szbehely, 2012). Neither author, however, considered in any depth the barriers that politics and politically engendered rapid policy change might put in the way of the realisation of their reimagined systems. This paper examines this issue in section 5. Nor did they distinguish between the potential of different types of private enterprises to help reshape childcare markets.

4. **New Possibilities for Meeting the Social Stratification Challenge**

Arguably, a link exists between value-based theoretical arguments and the practical policy recommendations for a more equitable early childhood system espoused by the European Commission (Bennett, 2012; Lindeboom & Duiskool, 2013) and explored by others (Penn & Lloyd, 2014; Pavolini & Van Lancker, 2018). Countering social stratification and elite formation in early childhood provision through policy change tends to be informed by a social justice rationale rather than a purely pragmatic one, as Penn (2011) argues and as this paper’s three country examples demonstrate.

It is not only at the policy level, but also within the childcare market itself that underlying values like equality and democracy may manifest themselves. At the level of childcare business, certain values and principles may be harnessed to mitigate childcare market risks via the medium of governance structures. Governance structures informed

by different sets of principles are emerging that reflect a commitment to the public good, even within marketised educational, including early childhood and care, systems (Boyask, 2018, p. 1).

4.1 *New governance structures within marketised early childhood systems*

Apart from established not-for-profit business formats such as charitable foundations and co-operatives, other structures based on clearly articulated values and principles include charitable incorporated organisations and social enterprises. Charitable incorporated organisations are governed by both charitable and company regulations and are established for public good rather than profit-making purposes. Social enterprises employ a governance structure that allows them to reinvest their surplus or donate it to social goals (Boyask, 2018). Each of these governance types can be found within OECD member states' early childhood education and care sector, including in England (O'Sullivan, 2017), where interest in them is growing.

Drawing on public sphere theory (Fraser, 1992), Boyask (2018) mapped legal structures and governance forms that have historically served the public good within privatized systems, that is while being separate from state institutions. Boyask (2018, p. 3) chose the term 'conditionally public' to characterize such entities. She concluded that the growing impact of economic values within social institutions had encouraged the growth of this type of enterprise. On the other hand, their sustainability might be at risk due to the competitive environment in which they operated. Their social goals might fail to mitigate this risk (Boyask, 2018, p. 13).

Yet within childcare markets, such problems are not unique to not-for-profits, but equally affect commercial childcare businesses, including corporate childcare chains. Growing consolidation and foreign investment within for instance the English childcare market, testifies to that (Penn, 2007; Morton, 2018). Although social entrepreneurs may see themselves as promoting transformative system change "from the margins, with little power to drive political change [...]" (O'Sullivan, 2017, p. 335), their presence within childcare markets may well exert leverage over the system (Becker & Schober, 2017).

As equity problems within childcare markets steadily increase, a growing body of social enterprises within such markets may contribute to a transition from a neoliberal to a social childcare market model.

4.2 *Towards Social Markets in Early Childhood Education and Care*

The social market model was mooted in the OECD (2006) review of 20 early childhood systems. This recommended research into the creation of effective 'social markets', defined as mixed economies of provision, including private not-for-profit and for-profit childcare businesses, possibly operating alongside public provision, which allowed for

choice and innovation “while maintaining a sense of national and community responsibility for services” (OECD, 2006, p. 119).

The primary rationale for a social rather than a neoliberal childcare market model is meeting the needs of families and children, of the early childhood workforce as well as those of the economy in a balanced manner which reflects shared values and principles within society. Rather than being relatively free, state intervention in such markets is welcomed to guarantee equity.

Such a market model is likely characterized by the six policy measures discussed above (Penn & Lloyd, 2014). It is also likely to encompass a range of not-for-profit, ‘conditionally public,’ childcare business types. The early childhood education and care systems reimagined by Moss and Tronto may become attainable in this way. Social markets may mean a new beginning for many countries where childcare markets prevail.

Social markets will not prevent social stratification and elite formation unless they are not only tightly regulated, but also generously supported with public funds. The Norwegian childcare system embodies a well-functioning social market model, whereas the predominantly social market in Germany illustrates the potentially adverse impact of parental choice in the absence of targeted regulation to ensure equity (Hogrebe, 2017). Among the factors enabling societies and their governments to effect childcare market transformations, the influence of politics is pervasive and well evidenced.

5. Conclusion: challenges and possibilities

Ultimately, the early childhood policies, strategies and structures discussed in this paper, let alone the enabling national debates, depend for their realization on the political environment in which they are proposed or operate, as do other policy changes (Room, 2011; Pierson, 2004). Even when there has been a consensual approach to early childhood policy development involving a wide range of stakeholders, political influence may occasion swift and dramatic changes to policy direction. Recent policy developments in England (Lloyd, 2014; 2015) and in Australia (Woodrow & Press, 2017) bear witness to this.

The history of nations where equitable early childhood systems appear firmly embedded, illustrates step-wise developments and ongoing debates informed by shared principles and values at different levels of society (Scheiwe & Willekens, 2009; Jacobsen & Vollsett, 2012; Fagnani, 2014). It also highlights the importance of relative political stability leading to consistent policy development and implementation (Cohen, Moss, Petrie & Wallace, 2018). An exploration of the potential negative impact of rapidly changing policy developments on efforts to reshape childcare markets falls outside this paper’s remit. However, it is important to acknowledge this factor in the present context.

Evidence is mounting that both promising policies and strategies and certain childcare business governance structures can promote transformative change in essentially neoliberal childcare markets. Working towards social markets in early childhood educa-

tion and care may be part of the solution in a situation where young children's development and their families' wellbeing are jeopardized by what have been referred to as the moral limits of markets (Sandel, 2012).

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Zusammenfassung: Die Vermarktlichung und Privatisierung der Frühpädagogik und frühkindlicher Betreuungssysteme stehen in Verbindung mit einer steigenden sozialen Stratifizierung und Elitebildung, welche die Bereitstellung und Versorgung beeinträchtigt. Belege aus verschiedenen EU- und OECD-Mitgliedsstaaten (Lloyd & Penn, 2014; Penn & Lloyd, 2014) zeigen Politiken und Strategien auf, welche solchen Dynamiken entgegenwirken sollen. Praktische Lösungen solcher Risiken scheinen in transparenten Werten und Prinzipien gegründet, welche in nationalen Debatten von einem breiten Spektrum an Interessenvertretern abgestimmt werden. Solch eine Grundlage lässt sich beispielsweise in den von Moss (2014) und Tronto (2013) entwickelten alternativen Rahmenkonzepten zur Neukonzipierung gerechterer frühkindlicher Systeme finden. Sich abzeichnende Belege deuten darauf hin, dass bestimmte geschäftliche Leitungsstrukturen der Kinderbetreuung, welche klar formulierte Werte und Prinzipien aufnehmen, gleichzeitig Marktrisiken im Sektor Kinderbetreuung minimieren können. Die Etablierung einer substantiellen Systemumgestaltung bleibt dennoch eine Herausforderung innerhalb sich rasch verändernder politischer Umgebungen.

Schlagnorte: Frühe Kindheit, Kinderbetreuungseinrichtungen, Soziale Stratifizierung und Elitenbildung, Kinderschutzmaßnahmen, Governance-Strukturen und frühe Kindheit

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