

Resisting the dictatorship of no alternative – super-markets or democratic spaces ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full article PDF ^[2]

INTRODUCTION

England has a rather unique system of early childhood education and care (ECEC). It is a split system: despite administrative unification within the education ministry, the country continues to have two quite distinct sectors - 'childcare' and 'early education', with differing access, funding, workforces and, to a large extent, types of provision. Nothing strange there, most countries have such systems. But then add in other ingredients: marketisation of both sectors, with providers competing for the business of parent-consumers; privatisation, especially in the 'childcare' sector where most services are provided as for-profit businesses (a recent report estimated that more than three-quarters of places in nurseries were supplied by the for-profit sector); and last but not least, centralisation, with strong regulation by the nation state through a prescriptive national curriculum, a national regulatory agency and other means. All this adds up to a system that might be typified as a centrally governed market, a form of 'quasi-market' in which the state looks to the market and private business to deliver services, yet places strong constraints on how services actually operate.

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Tags: framework ^[4]

early childhood education and care ^[5]

neo-liberalism ^[6]

democracy ^[7]

discourse of early childhood ^[8]

capitalism ^[9]

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[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/research-policy-practice/17/03/resisting-dictatorship-no-alternative-%E2%80%93-super-markets-or> [2]

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/314864653_Supermarket_childcare [3] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [4]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/framework> [5] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/early-childhood-education-and-care> [6]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/neo-liberalism> [7] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/democracy> [8]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/discourse-early-childhood> [9] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/capitalism>