

Politics and power in the babycare business: Structural aspects of childcare provision ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

Full text via Academia ^[2]

Access abstract online ^[3]

Excerpted from abstract and introduction

Abstract

Who cares for babies is an emotive topic that has challenged philanthropists, parents, policymakers, practitioners and researchers for decades. But as very young children's care outside the family home becomes increasingly commodified and marketised in many countries of the world, moral arguments are often supplanted by others grounded in micro and macro-economic reasoning, using scientific evidence as justification. Attention then turns to a neoliberal preoccupation with affordability, accessibility and the structural dimensions of quality in provision for parents. Babies and their carers are positioned as service users and providers and the latter feel themselves to be subject to the impact of market forces and those for whom these provide the authority to dictate its conditions: politicians, regulators, employers and consumers (parents). This chapter considers how perceptions of power can influence the nature of relationships between babies and their carers. It is based on research carried out in private and state-maintained day nurseries in southeast England since 2008.

Introduction: "On the agenda" – the context of childcare in England

The care of young children is no longer the exclusive preserve of families in England. Since the early 1990s, with political encouragement and financial incentives, childcare has become a growing commodity in a mixed economy that encompasses "state" run provision alongside services established by private and voluntary sector organizations. In the late 20th century, the British Government began to develop policies concerned with childcare, which have arguably conflated a service for parents (predominantly one that is intended to enable mothers to go out to work during their child's early years) with an educational intervention for young children. In addition to the supposed economic benefits to families and the more recently claimed developmental benefits to children, particularly those from socioeconomically disadvantaged households, the national economy profits from a childcare sector that was growing faster than the country's economy as a whole in 2011 and was expected to be worth £7.2 billion (approximately 9.4 billion Euros) in 2015 (Key Note 2011).

Region: Europe ^[4]

Tags: care work ^[5]

nurseries ^[6]

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