

**Emeritus Professor Peter Moss, Institute of Education, University College
London**

**Response to paper for UEL International Centre for the Study of the Mixed
Economy of Childcare (ICMEC) seminar 12 December 2016 by Dr Nina
Hogrebe, Muenster University: *The right to a place in German early childhood
provision – Are choice, quality and equity being realised?***

It is a great pleasure to have this opportunity to respond to Nina's very interesting, informative and, as I shall discuss, provocative paper. It has been of particular interest to me to hear more about developments in Germany over the last decade or so, covering the period since I was part of the team that reviewed EC policies in Germany [in 2004] as part of the OECD *Starting Strong* project.

I want to make two initial observations about EC policies in Germany, before devoting most of my time to what I think is a central issue raised by Nina, as relevant in England as in Germany, if not more so.

My first observation concerns the major changes in early childhood policy in Germany over the last decade. First, Germany's parental leave was radically reformed in 2007 from a long period of low paid leave to a shorter 12 month period of well paid leave, with an incentive for leave to be shared between women and men. Thus if parents share some of the initial 12 months of leave, they gain a bonus of two additional months. As a result, the proportion of fathers taking some leave increased from 3.5% to 32% in seven years, between 2006 and 2013 – although mothers continue to take by far the greater part of leave.

Then, as we heard from Nina, there has been an expansion of early childhood services culminating in 2013 in a universal entitlement from 12 months of age.

So unlike England, Germany has managed to integrate its policies on parental leave and early childhood services, leaving no gap between entitlements to well-paid leave

and to early childhood services. Germany, too, has turned away from an overtly maternalistic approach to early childhood policy, unlike England where policy is dominated by an excessively long, 12 month Maternity leave and no universal entitlement to early childhood services until 3 years of age. Perhaps we can say, too, that the former West Germany has now, some years after unification, come round to adopt the policies that were well-established before unification in the former East Germany. Either way, recent German developments should give those of us in England pause for thought.

My second observation is that Germany now falls into that group of countries that has a fully integrated system of EC services, integrated both structurally and conceptually, meeting the criteria for integration that John Bennett, Yoshie Kaga and I set out in our 2010 report for UNESCO, 'Caring and learning Together'. The conceptual part is particularly important, and is based in Germany's case on social pedagogy – the nearest equivalent in English being 'education-in-its-broadest-sense'. This is how social pedagogy was discussed in the 2004 OECD country note for Germany:

Originating in 19th century Germany, *Sozialpädagogik* (social pedagogy) is a theory, practice and profession for working with children (but also often young people and adults). It has become established in many Continental European countries, though varying somewhat in form and role from country to country. The social approach is inherently holistic. The pedagogue sets out to address the whole child, the child with body, mind, emotions, creativity, history and social identity. This is not the child only of emotions - the psycho-therapeutical approach; nor only of the body - the medical or health approach; nor only of the mind - the traditional teaching approach. For the pedagogue, working with the whole child, learning, care and, more generally, upbringing (the elements of the original German concept of pedagogy: *Bildung*, *Erziehung* and *Betreuung*) are closely-related - indeed inseparable activities at the level of daily work. These are not separate fields needing to be joined up, but inter-connected parts of the child's life.

Over recent years, social pedagogy has gained a foothold and a growing following in England, not least because of the work of my colleagues at TCRU, Pat Petrie and Claire Cameron. Currently, national occupational standards are being established, qualifications at levels 3 and 5 are in development, a professional association is being formed, and social pedagogues are to be found at work. But social pedagogy is mainly finding traction in the field of social care rather than early childhood. England, for the moment, remains steadfastly resistant to full integration of its early childhood system, remaining structurally split and lacking an integrative concept. Indeed with the retreat into the impoverished language and policy of 'child care', we are going backwards. Here again, Germany should provoke us to think. Sadly, I fear nothing of the kind will happen.

I want to turn now to what I take as **the central issue** from Nina's presentation: the consequences of an EC system built on a combination of a market orientation, parental choice, and a diversity of competing providers, most of whom are private (albeit, not for profit). In this respect, the Germany situation resonates in England, even though early childhood services in England are more marketized and far more reliant on for-profit providers. Nina paints a picture of a German system that fosters inequality and segregation, fuelled by a middle class able to exercise informed choice and desperate to reproduce inequality; and a system where parental choice of provider can all too easily become provider choice of parents.

Of course, we could spend our time discussing how market systems in Germany and England could be tweaked to make them work a bit better, at least in terms of equality and inclusiveness. But in my view, such tinkering leads us on a wild goose chase, being pointless because unachievable; the whole point of markets is to differentiate, segregate and exclude. We need instead to confront head on whether a marketized system of early childhood should be, as a senior English civil servant said at an earlier ICMEC seminar, 'the only show in town' – or whether we should be moving to a democratic politics of early childhood in which conflicting alternatives can be and are openly proposed and discussed.

[As an aside, I recall that when the Labour government came to power in 1997 Helen Penn and I wrote to the responsible minister suggesting that a 6 month period of

review and reflection might be a good idea before launching its new early childhood policy. Naïve in retrospect, and ineffectual too. I don't recall any analysis or deliberation about policy options, then or subsequently. What we got instead was simply more of the same, with pre-existing trends towards marketisation and privatisation accentuated over the next 20 years – though at no stage has any government sought to explain and justify this policy direction].

To return to today. I have made my own position clear on markets in early childhood. After reviewing the extensive international evidence on how these markets work in practice, and Nina's paper is a most useful addition to that evidence, I came to the following conclusion in the 2014 book 'Transformative Change and Real Utopias in Early Childhood Education'

I respond to the story [of markets] with incredulity, doubting the claims it makes. [In other words, there is no convincing evidence that they work even in their own terms – they don't do what they claim]. And I respond to it with distaste, for the bad politics it represents. Markets and their attendant values and relationships may have their place in some areas of economic life - but not I contend in areas that are predominantly political, social, cultural and ethical, areas that require 'public and collective choices' and have a major bearing on the 'common good', areas such as early childhood education.

What is the alternative? Well first of all; we need to break the hold of the dictatorship of no alternative, that hubristic argument that markets are the only show in town, the only possibility – that there is no alternative. For there are alternatives. For example, in a book that I wrote with Michael Fielding, called 'Radical Education and the Common School: a Democratic Alternative', we explored the possibility of an education system from birth to 18 years based on common, shared values, understandings, structures and practices, with the 'common school' at its heart

a school for all children in its local catchment area, age-integrated, human scale, focused on depth of learning and based on team work. A school understood as a public space for all citizens, a collective workshop of many

purposes and possibilities, and a person-centred learning community, working closely with other schools and with local authorities.

We envisaged a school for children from 0 to 18. But we also acknowledged that schools could be divided between younger and older children. We offered the model of the Children's Centre as a 'common school' for younger children.

What about diversity of providers? As Nina's work suggests, unrestrained diversity of providers is problematic, especially when combined with marketisation. The shortage of public providers in Germany – and their virtual absence in England – compounds the resulting differentiation, segregation and inequality.

I would envisage a mix of public and non-profit private providers of common schools or Children's Centres, each school or centre serving all children and families in its designated catchment area. To re-iterate, each school or centre, irrespective of the provider, taking all children and families in its catchment area, as a public institution for local citizens. Each school or centre signed up to common, democratically agreed images, values and goals. And each operating a simple admissions policy of taking all children in its catchment area. No selection, no segregation, no exclusions; and absolutely no faith schools or centres, those most divisive of institutions.

There would still be an important element of parental choice, but understood as **collective** choice exercised by citizens through democratic participation and practice, not **individual** choice exercised by consumers through shopping around. Last but not least, all publicly-funded services would work alongside each other, in a collaborative network of common schools or centres, co-operation supplanting competition as a fundamental value.

That this may seem improbable, impossible even, is a measure of how far the early childhood system in England, and indeed our whole education system, has become permeated and contaminated by neoliberal thinking, with the value it attaches to competition, calculation and choice, and its translation of citizens with some sense of the common good into self-interested consumers. And I do not deny that replacing markets and competition with a system of democratic public institutions based on

cooperation between services will be an uphill and lengthy process. It will face many obstacles, not least that posed by the determination of what Nina describes as 'privileged families try[ing] to find new ways to reproduce their social advantage' – or whom we might alternatively characterise as middle-class parents terrified of their children falling into the abyss that awaits losers in the rat race of a hyper-competitive market.

Nothing lasts for ever. The dire consequences of the neoliberal hegemony are all around us, its failure ever more apparent as it moves into its prolonged endgame. We have to start thinking now about what we want to follow. If we are to stand any chance of creating more equal, more democratic, more cohesive and more sustainable societies, then we have to envision what Erik Olin Wright terms real utopias, utopias that are not only desirable but viable and achievable. Real utopias in which a renewed public education for all ages has a vital role to play.