

Paper presented at the Wellchi Network Conference 1  
**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACED BY EUROPEAN WELFARE  
STATES: THE CHANGING CONTEXT FOR CHILD WELFARE**

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## **Getting beyond Childcare and the Barcelona Targets**

Peter Moss. Thomas Coram Research Unit. Institute of Education. University of  
London

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### ***Abstract***

In many countries and international organisations, there is currently a strong public policy discourse about the need for more 'childcare', often led by political and economic interests focused on questions of employment. Typically, the protagonists of 'childcare' take a highly instrumental and narrow approach. They see 'childcare' as a technical question, a means to their particular ends: they look to experts on quality to provide technical fixes on content (laying down 'what works'), to avoid having to engage with profound issues about practice and the complexities of multiple perspectives on issues such as childhood, care and learning. To the extent they acknowledge disciplinary perspectives and knowledges, they confine themselves to one discipline - child development. They seek certainty in a research literature from this quintessentially modernist discipline and mainly drawn from one society – the United States – which has a poor record in providing for its children and a system of early childhood services that has been widely criticised (both from within and without).

The paper will argue that:

- 'Childcare' is one possibility for thinking and talking about services for children
- Other possibilities exist, each of which is value-laden
- Societies and organisations therefore are confronted by ethical and political choices in how they understand and structure services for young children

It will end by asking specifically what responsibility the EU has for children – now and in the future. How adequate are the Barcelona 'childcare targets' in a Europe where children are recognised as active subjects and citizens?

The paper explores the 19<sup>th</sup> century roots of early childhood services: crèches for poor working class families and kindergartens for middle class families. This led to a phenomenon found in most industrialised countries: a split system of early childhood systems ('childcare' and 'early education'). The continuing focus on 'childcare' today supports the continuation of split systems and reproduces outdated understandings of services, staff who work in them and children (NB. The EU's use of the term 'dependents' when talking about 'childcare'). But such outdated understandings are

increasingly questioned, e.g. services are seen as complementing rather than substituting for the home; staff are researching and reflective practitioners rather than substitute mothers; children are competent, born with a hundred languages, citizens with rights.

There is therefore a need to get beyond 'childcare' to a discourse of holistic services for children, families and communities: holistic because they address the whole child, all families in the whole community (not just children with working parents) and serve many purposes and create many possibilities. These holistic approaches regard 'care' as an inseparable part of a broader approach to working with children, captured in the pedagogical concept of 'upbringing'. But the 'ethic of care' provides another way of conceptualising the pervasive but inseparable place of care in holistic services.

Europe has strong traditions that can provide the basis for a holistic approach, for example: the theory and practice of pedagogy; the concept of education in its broadest sense; an understanding of early childhood services (and other institutions for children) as 'children's spaces'. Europe also has important experiences of developing holistic services, for example the Swedish preschool, the English Children's Centre, the 'municipal schools' in Reggio Emilia.


In addition to being understood or socially constructed in a particular way, holistic early childhood services for all families require certain structural conditions, including: one department responsible for all services (education or welfare), strong tax-based public funding and a well-educated core profession (early childhood teachers or pedagogues).

I shall conclude this part of my presentation by contrasting two countries which occupy opposite ends of the continuum which stretches from split to integrated systems, the one working explicitly with a discourse of 'childcare', the other with an integrative pedagogical concept: the Netherlands and Sweden.

The EU itself also adopts the childcare discourse. For many years it has argued the need for more 'childcare' as part of policies focused on employment and gender equality. Children themselves have been invisible because the EU has claimed it has no 'competence' for children, despite the fact that its policies have major implications for this large segment of the population. Its position has in effect treated children as dependents who are obstacles to the functioning of the labour market. This is epitomised by the 2002 Barcelona Targets which simply set targets for 'childcare places' for children under and over 3 without any reference to what these places might be.

It will be argued that the EU does have a responsibility for children morally – and, if and when the new Constitution is adopted, legally. It needs, therefore, to pay more attention to what places are provided and in what services. Here, there are good foundations on which to build, in particular work done in the early and mid-1990s including the Council of Ministers Recommendation on Childcare and the proposals for 'Quality Targets in Services for Young Children' produced by the EC Childcare Network through a process of democratic debate and negotiation. A 'quality targets' directive is not proposed, but rather restarting the 'quality targets' process by creating a European Social Space where member states and citizens can discuss and negotiate common understandings, principles and objectives based on shared values – as well as sustaining diversity by an acknowledged right to 'agree to disagree'. Last but not least, the EU should support the strong European tradition of experimentation by actively encouraging more 'local cultural projects of childhood'.


Slide 1



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## Getting beyond childcare....and the Barcelona targets

Peter Moss  
Thomas Coram Research Unit  
Institute of Education University of London



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Slide 2




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## ‘Childcare’: strong public policy discourse

- Focus on employment (‘maternal’)
- Highly instrumental and narrow
- ‘Childcare’ as a technical question, with experts on quality providing technical answers
- Informed by ‘paradigmatically modern discipline’ of developmental psychology’
- Research base: liberal welfare regime of US




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**‘Childcare’: strong public policy discourse**

- UK - ‘Ten Year Strategy for Childcare’
- EU – Barcelona Targets

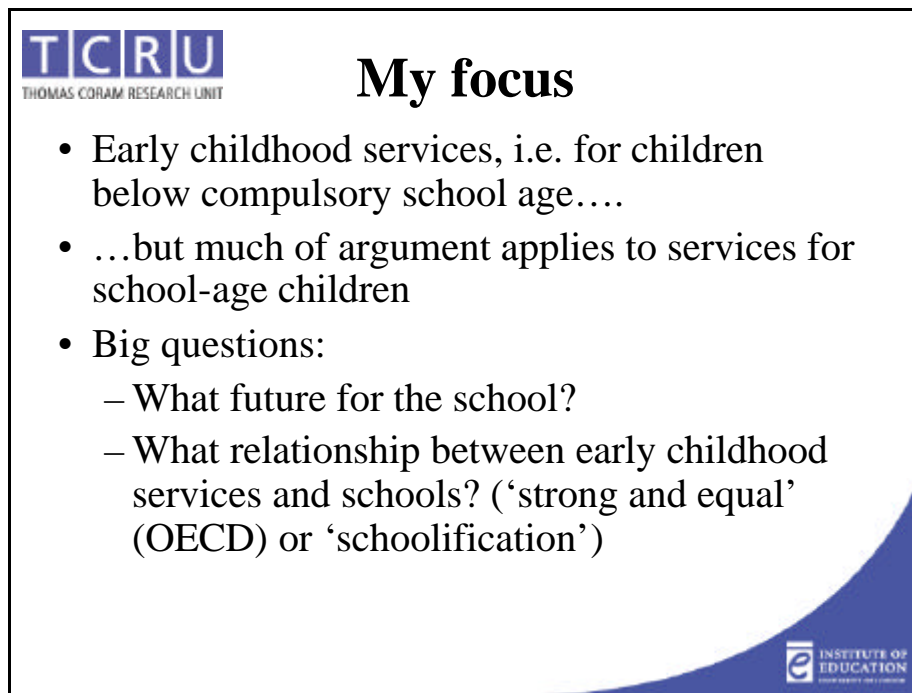
‘Member States [should strive] to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age’ (Presidency Conclusions, Barcelona, March 2002)



**Challenge for European welfare states**

- The ‘childcare’ discourse is one *possibility* for thinking and talking about services for children...
- ...there are *other possibilities* available
- Each possibility is value-laden so...
- ...we have *political and ethical choices* to make
- What is the *responsibility of the EU* for its children? Do the Barcelona targets go far enough?




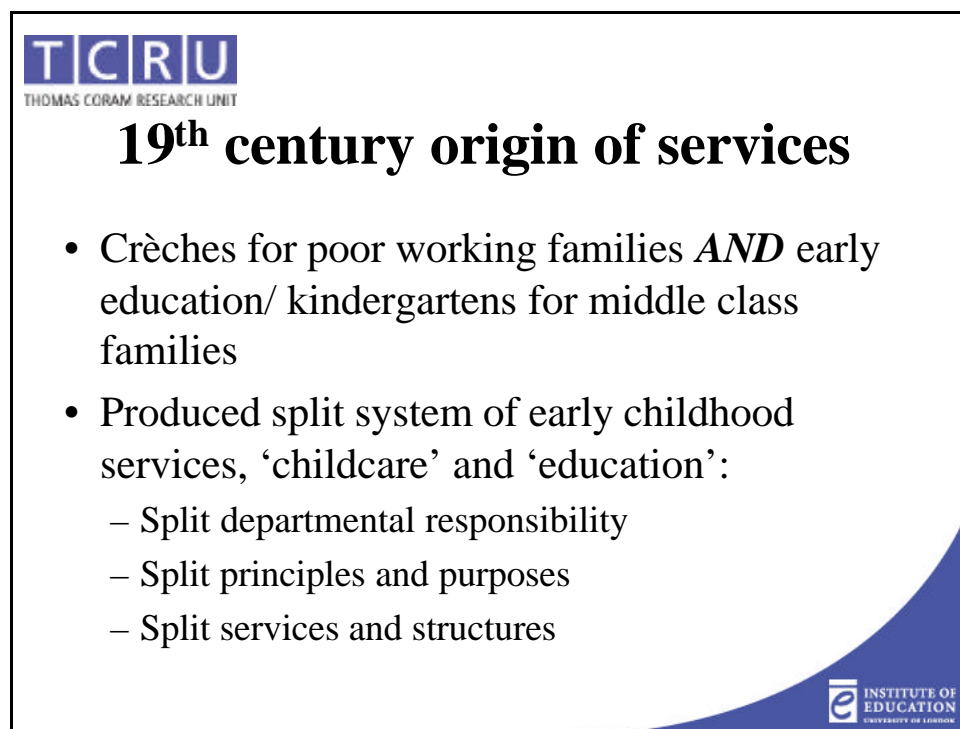


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## My focus

- Early childhood services, i.e. for children below compulsory school age....
- ...but much of argument applies to services for school-age children
- Big questions:
  - What future for the school?
  - What relationship between early childhood services and schools? (‘strong and equal’ (OECD) or ‘schoolification’)


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## 19<sup>th</sup> century origin of services


- Crèches for poor working families **AND** early education/ kindergartens for middle class families
- Produced split system of early childhood services, ‘childcare’ and ‘education’:
  - Split departmental responsibility
  - Split principles and purposes
  - Split services and structures

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‘Childcare’ discourse

- supports continuation of split system
- reproduces particular understandings:
  - *of services* as (?second-best) substitutes for home needed by some (working) families; with one purpose and for some families
  - *of staff* as substitute mothers (gendering of workforce)
  - *of children* as passive ‘dependents’ (NB. EU uses term ‘dependents’)




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## Opportunities for European welfare states

Multiple disciplinary perspectives and changing understandings



- *of services* as complement to home not substitute (offer qualitatively different experience); ‘multi-purpose’ for all children and families
- *of staff* as reflective and researching practitioners
- *of children*: active subject, citizen with rights...connected to adults and other children...the ‘rich child’, born with a hundred languages





## The rich child


“[The children in Reggio] understood sooner than expected that their adventures in life could flow between two places. [In the nurseries] they could express their previously overlooked desire to be with their peers and find in them points of reference, understanding, surprises, affective ties and merriment that could dispel shadows and uneasiness” (Malaguzzi, 1993)




## **Beyond childcare to...holistic services for children, families and communities**

Holistic because services:

- for the whole child
- for the whole community
- for many policies, purposes, possibilities (care needs of working parents *and also* gender equality, learning, family support, production of culture and values, social cohesion and solidarity....)







**Europe has concepts for holistic services**

*Concept of pedagogy*

- theory, practice and profession
- care+education+'upbringing' (*erziehung*)

“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 psychotherapeutical approach, nor only of the body, the medical approach, nor only of the mind, the traditional teaching approach” (Moss and Petrie, 2002)




**European has concepts for holistic services**

*Concept of 'education in its broadest sense'*

*Concept of 'children's spaces'*


- public spaces or forums where children and adults meet, with many possibilities (social, cultural, economic, political, ethical.....)
- public spaces for children to live their childhoods alongside private domain of home
- physical, social, cultural, discursive spaces



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## Europe has examples of holistic services

- Swedish preschool: universal entitlement to *all* children from 12 months (cut link with parental employment)
- English Children's Centres
- 'Municipal schools' of Reggio Emilia for children from birth to 6
- Many more




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## Swedish preschool

“Enrolling children from age 1 in full-day pre-schools has become generally acceptable. What was once viewed as either a privilege of the wealthy for a few hours a day or an institution for needy children has become, after 70 years of political vision and policy making, *an unquestionable right* of children and families. Parents now expect a *holistic pedagogy* that includes health care, nurturing and education for their pre-schoolers”

Lenz Taguchi and Munkhammar (2003)






## English Children's Centres


“The basic form of service [for children and their families] should be through multi-purpose children's centres offering part and full-time care with medical and other services to a very local catchment area”  
(Tizard, Moss and Perry, 1976)


3500 Children's Centres by 2010 providing range of services including: early education and childcare; family support; health services; employment advice; and support for other nearby services



## Municipal schools of Reggio Emilia

- 33 centres for children from 0 to 6
- World famous pedagogical theories, methods and practices
- Important social, cultural and political role in city of Reggio...
- ...but opening hours to meet needs of working parents







## Beyond childcare to holistic services

Holistic services for all young children and families need supportive structures, including:


- One department responsible (education or welfare) – 10 EU/EEA countries
- Public funding (low or no parental fees; not employer funded)
- Well educated ‘core’ professional working with children from 0 to 6 (early childhood teacher; pedagogue)



## Two examples of possibilities and choices

**Netherlands:** Split 0-5 system; three departments responsible; ‘childcare’ as service for working parents and private commodity, mostly funded by parents and employers; playgroups & early schooling as two other separate services; three workforces

**Sweden:** Integrated 0-6 system; one department (education) responsible; holistic services with universal entitlement; services viewed as public goods, mostly publicly funded (1.9% GDP); workforce based on pre-school teacher





## Beyond the Barcelona targets

The story so far:


- EU focus on gender equality and employment ('childcare' supports 'reconciliation of employment and family responsibilities')
- EU argues has no 'competence' for children  
? narrow 'childcare' focus, children as dependents and obstacles to labour market participation



## Beyond the Barcelona targets


- Can the EU get beyond 'childcare'?
- Can the EU get beyond 'quantity' to common principles based on shared values?
- Good foundations:
  - 1992: Council Recommendation agreed by member state governments
  - 1986-96: European Commission Childcare Network





“The Network takes the view that from a service perspective it is neither necessary or desirable to treat (children with employed parents) separately from other children. The development of services for young children should be based on a policy that takes account of *all* children and carers and *all* their needs”


EC Childcare Network (1996)



**“Quality Targets in Services for Young Children”**



- Aim: to **implement political principles and objectives** of Council Recommendation on Childcare
- Method: *discussion and negotiation* by European group, incl. agree to disagree
- Focus: defining **conditions to support development** of holistic services and pedagogical work – enabling not prescriptive





**“Quality Targets in Services for Young Children”**

- 40 targets in 9 blocks: policy; finance; level and types of services; education; ratios; staff employment and education; environment and health; parents and community; performance
- Inter-dependent – cannot choose some but not others
- Achievable over 10 years
- Provisional - Not the final word



**Some examples**


Target 2: one department take responsibility for implementing 0-6 policy

Target 7: public expenditure on services for young children (0-6) not less than 1% of GDP

Target 26: at least 60% staff have basic training of at least 3 years at post-18 level (paid at teacher level)

Target 29: 20% of staff should be men

*[for full list see ‘Children in Europe’, Issue 7]*





## Beyond the Barcelona targets?

Proposed Constitution recognises children

- Part 1: protecting *rights* of children
- Part 2 (Charter of Fundamental Rights)
  - Right to maintain personal relationship and contact with both parents
  - Right of children to protection, care and expressing views. Views to be taken into consideration
  - In all actions, child's *best interests* must be primary consideration



## Challenges and opportunities for the European welfare state

Not a 'quality targets' directive...but *re-start 'quality targets' process* to get beyond Barcelona targets

Create a space where member states and citizens can discuss and negotiate common understandings, principles and objectives based on shared values – *but also 'agree to disagree'*


Support *exchange and experimentation* – more 'local cultural projects of childhood'



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## Beyond the Barcelona targets

- What responsibility does Europe have for its children and for services for young children?
- Can and should these services share some common European principles and values?
- Can the EU get beyond childcare to a broader vision of services for young children and their families?



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