Sharing the caring responsibility between the private and the public: childcare, parental choice and inequality

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Introduction: childcare matters

Children are increasingly cared for by people other than their parents. Across European countries, the numbers of children under three being full-time enrolled in formal childcare services rose almost continuously since the turn of the century. Many countries report pre-school participation rates of almost 100 percent of children between three and five years old. This has changed the nature of parenthood and parenting, and according to a substantial body of research, to the betterment of children (Engle et al., 2011).

There is now a robust body of evidence on the benefits of participating in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for children's cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. The attention for the educational potential of ECEC originated with three famous U.S. based longitudinal studies on poor children attending high quality ECEC, as these studies for the first time showed that not only these children fared better in school, but also that the effects are still noticeable in their adult lives. This knowledge laid out the scientific foundation for the importance of public investment in the early years (e.g. Barnett, 2011). Today there is also robust evidence from diverse European longitudinal studies on the impact of high quality ECEC on children's cognitive and socio-emotional development as well as on their school readiness, learning outcomes and later-life educational and labour market achievement (see Vandenbroeck, Lenaerts & Beblavy, 2018 for an overview). It has now been generally accepted in academia as well as in European policy that early childhood care and education can contribute to equalizing opportunities for children, can alleviate poverty for parents and can foster social cohesion in local communities (European Commission, 2018; OECD 2015). However, one should be cautious in assuming that ECEC is like a magic wand that will save the world one child at a time. Morabito, Roose and Vandenbroeck (2013) argued that the equalizing potential of ECEC is all too often based on studies that compare poor children who attended ECEC with equally poor children who did not attend. As a result, based on these studies one could draw conclusions on the beneficial impact of ECEC for this particular group of children, but not about the equalizing impact vis-à-vis middle class or rich children. In addition, Morabito et al. (2018) found that comprehensive policies combining high quality ECEC with a home visiting program may also yield paradoxical effects, serving middle class families better than poor families. These cautions should not lead us astray from the fact that high-quality ECEC is good for children. It should however help us understand that ECEC will not necessarily reduce inequalities between children, and that the benefits of ECEC are conditional on specific quality and accessibility criteria. These conditions are far from being met by childcare systems all across Europe (Vandenbroeck & Lazzari, 2014). The problem is this: In Europe (as well as in other OECD countries), poor families tend to have less access to ECEC services than higher-income families. Moreover, if they do have access, children from poor families are more often enrolled in ECEC of poorer quality compared with their better-off peers. If children coming from disadvantaged background are less likely to participate in high-quality ECEC, the benefits are reaped by children who were already advantaged in the first place. The phenomenon that better-of families tend to benefit more from government investment than disadvantaged families is referred to as a Matthew Effect, a term coined by the sociologist Robert K. Merton (1968). In popular discourse, this is often succinctly summarized as the rich get richer, the poor stay poor. The observation that a Matthew Effect prevails in ECEC provision is bad news. Not only does it mean that caring responsibilities are not shared by the private and the public domain for all families alike, it also means that social inequalities in access to quality nonparental care are likely to exacerbate inequalities in childhood, which would jeopardize the objective of public investments in ECEC.

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In this chapter, we first document the problem of accessibility by focusing on the enrolment gap by socio-economic status of the family. Secondly, we look at explanations for these gaps, discussing the role of parental choice and preferences as well as structural barriers. Third, we briefly consider the issue of quality with a focus on the ECEC workforce. The findings we present here, seem to point in the direction of ECEC as a public service, sharing the care responsibilities between the private and the public domains, if one wishes to attribute an equality of opportunities mission to ECEC.

Unequal take-up

Many recent studies have documented persistent inequality in the take-up or use of formal ECEC services in the majority of European countries (Pavolini & Van Lancker, 2018; Van Lancker & Ghysels, 2016; Van Lancker, 2013). In split systems, where childcare for the youngest children is separated from preschool for the older children, this gap is wider in childcare than in preschool (Vandenbroeck, 2019). Consequently, we will primarily focus on childcare in this chapter. Parents from a low socio-economic status, measured by educational attainment, social class, or family income, tend to have less access to formal childcare services for under threes compared with higher status families. In 2015, the European Commission launched a feasibility study for a Child Guarantee and in that framework the inequalities in access for children from poor families, single parent families, Roma families and for children with special educational needs were documented in the then 28 Member States (Vandenbroeck, 2019; Frazer, Guio & Marlier, 2020). All EU Member States face lower enrolment rates for children from ethnic minorities, refugee children, children with special needs and children from poor families, compared to the general population (a notable exception is Malta). Inequality in enrolment is also observed in countries with generous welfare systems and high overall enrolment rates such as Denmark (78% of children from ethnic minorities compared to 95% of the majority population), albeit to a lesser extent than in many other countries. For children from single parent families, the picture is slightly different: several countries do not have specific data (e.g. Estonia); in many Member States, single parents encounter difficulties to use ECEC (e.g. Belgium) while in others their enrolment rate exceeds that of dual parent families (e.g. Austria). Although inequalities in enrolment by socio-economic status are an almost universal phenomenon, the extent of the gap differs across countries. Van Lancker & Ghysels (2016) examined the difference in formal childcare use for under threes by educational attainment of their mother in Europe, the US and Australia. They observe an inverse relationship between average enrolment rates and inequality in enrolment. In general, countries with the highest levels of enrolment (Denmark, Iceland, Sweden) report relatively low levels of inequality in enrolment by educational level of the mother. In contrast, countries with low levels of enrolment (the Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, the UK) generally report high levels of inequality. There are however notable exceptions to this rule. Countries such as France, the Netherlands, or Belgium combine relatively high enrolment rates with wide socio-economic gaps in enrolment. The results indicate that when demand exceeds supply and there is a shortage in the number of available places, securing a slot in childcare for the youngest children becomes more difficult for disadvantaged families. Some examples that may illustrate the gap: in Austria, the average enrolment rate for 0-4 years is 47%, yet in households at risk of poverty it is only 32%; in Spain, 56% of children in 5th quintile between 4 and 6 years attend ECEC, compared to 31% in the 1st quintile; in Croatia, only one out of four children from households that are recipients of social assistance attend Kindergarten; in Portugal, just over one child out of three in the bottom third incomes is enrolled in preschool, compared to 94% of the general population (Vandenbroeck, 2018). Moreover, children from a disadvantaged background may be more often enrolled in childcare settings from poorer quality than their more affluent peers (Dowsett et al., 2008; Gambaro et al., 2015 Stahl et al., 2018).

A matter of choice?

Historically, scholars have long been concerned with parental preferences and choice mechanisms to explain socio-economic differences in the use of quality ECEC. Several well-cited studies in late 20th and early 21st century framed inequalities observed as being the result of cultural differences in parenting practices or family characteristics. Examples are the assumption that immigrant mothers have a cultural preference for home care, that poor families have less knowledge about quality criteria, or that families living in precarious conditions attach more importance to practical criteria (opening hours, distance) while middle-class families were believed to attach more importance to quality issues (Himmelweit & Sigala, 2004; Kim & Fram, 2009; Shlay, Tran, Weinraub & Harmon, 2005; Sylva, Stein, Leach, Barnes & Malmberg, 2007). As Meyers and Jordan (2006) state, childcare choices can be understood as accommodations – "to family and employment demands, social and cultural expectations, available information, and financial, social and other resources" (p. 64) – that often reproduce other forms of economic and social stratification. It is for instance assumed that migrant groups do not enrol their child for cultural reasons and that this may explain differences between as well as within countries. Pavolini and Van Lancker (2018) examined the question to what extent 'cultural' (demand-side) or 'structural' (supply-side) factors were best able to explain inequality in childcare enrolment amongst families with a youngest child under six. Culture was measured as the share of the population adhering to traditional norms on motherhood. The analyses showed that in countries with more traditional norms on motherhood, overall childcare use was lower for all families. In contrast, in countries with structural constraints in the availability or affordability of childcare places children growing up in disadvantaged families were affected most. This basically means that cultural norms, and parental preferences as well, are important to take into consideration when examining overall childcare use. But the explanatory power of cultural factors for explaining *inequities* in access is low; problems in terms of childcare provision such as a shortage in the number of places or parental fees are much better suited. A more detailed study in Flanders showed that the unmet needs of childcare are twice as high among families with a migration history than among natives, and higher amongst poor families compared to non-poor families (Teppers, Schepers & Van Regenmortel, 2019).

Today, childcare is increasingly seen as a commodity and - as a result - countries across the globe have again stressed parental choice and parental responsibilities in relation to ECEC. Parents are considered as consumers, who are expected to critically compare the childcare services on offer, and to duly consider quality, price and practicalities. From 2005, the Dutch Childcare Act profoundly reorganized Dutch childcare: funding shifted from supply-side funding through the local authorities to demand-side funding through employers and tax reductions, resulting in a substantial increase in market approaches and the advent of corporate business (Akgunduz & Plantenga, 2014). Between 2003 and

2010 the share of non-profit providers in the Netherlands diminished from 60% to 30% and has continued to decrease since (Van der Werf, Slot, Kenis & Leseman, 2020). In 2006, , the British Child Care Act made local authorities the ‘last resort’ in organizing childcare, to be turned to only when private providers do not deliver (Penn, 2013). Since the enforcement of the Act on Service Vouchers in Social Welfare and Health (569/2009) in 2009, many Finnish municipalities have begun to provide ECEC vouchers for families. As a result, the private ECEC sector has expanded especially during the past decade, and now accounts for 17% of all ECEC provision (Ruutiainen, Alasuutari & Karila, 2019). In France, between 2013 and 2017, 25% (2013) to half (2017) of the growth in childcare places was due to “micro-crèches”, which are almost all private initiatives. In 2016, 58% of all newly created childcare places in France belonged to private for-profit organisations, financed through demand-side funding (called *CMG de la Paje*) rather than the traditional supply-side funding (called *Prestation de Service Unique*) (Haut Conseil de la famille, de l’enfance et de l’âge, 2018). Today two French private for-profit providers (People&Baby and Babilou) own respectively 550 and 700 childcare centres. In all of these cases, the shift from public to private responsibilities is legitimized by a discourse on parental choice and the belief that the market is inherently fair. It is argued that parents will make rational choices based on preferences, price and quality and that the supply will follow the demand.

However, that is not what empirical studies show. Already in the late 1980s and early 1990s, US-based studies showed that the market of childcare is an imperfect market, since the necessary conditions can never be ensured, the lack of perfect information being the most striking difference between a child care market and the idealised perfect market (Walker, 1991) and these were later corroborated by European studies (Plantenga, 2013). In addition, given that the costs of childcare are primarily staff costs, defined amongst others by staff qualifications and adult-child ratio’s, the possibilities of enhancing profit and productivity without jeopardizing quality are extremely limited (Gallagher, 2018; Lloyd, 2013). One of the main reasons why parents cannot be assumed to be critical “choosers” of child care is that they cannot rate the quality of the service when it is most critical, namely when parents are absent and staff is caring for the children. It should therefore not come as a surprise that the appreciation of ECEC quality by parents differs substantially from the appreciation of trained observers (Cryer & Burchinal, 1997). Information asymmetry explains adverse selection and low average childcare quality. Childcare markets fail to perform like perfect markets, first because of a public interest in child care: childcare is indeed of public interest as it is invested both by needs of parents and by different policy domains (employment, equal opportunities, education) and can thus not be left to be defined by the market. Second, they fail to perform as markets for the inability of parents to make judgements about quality. Janssen, Spruyt & Vandenbroeck (forthcoming) concur for the Dutch-speaking community of Belgium: childcare quality and parent satisfaction are hardly related to each other.

The context of Flanders (the Dutch speaking community of Belgium) offers an interesting site to study such assumptions, as it is a region with high overall enrolment of children (55% of all children below the age of three regularly attend child care), and the vast majority of places using means-tested parental fees (Kind en Gezin, 2019). In that context, a unique study closely monitored the process quality in a stratified random sample of 400 childcare groups (200 centre based and 200 home based). The study looked at process quality, using CLASS Infant (Hamre, La Paro, Pianta, & LoCasale-Crouch, 2014) and CLASS Toddler (La Paro, Hamre, & Pianta, 2012) observation schemes by trained observers. It simultaneously did a survey of all parents attending these groups, resulting in data on the search process and appreciation of 3172 parents, meaning a response rate of 64,8% (see Janssen, Spruyt & Vandenbroeck, forthcoming; Janssen, Spruyt, Van Droogenbroeck & Vandenbroeck, forthcoming; Vandenbroeck et al., 2016 for details about the study). Questionnaires gathered insights in parents' childcare decision-making and their experiences while searching for a childcare place. The questionnaires allowed to distinguish demographic groups based on home language, family composition, country of birth and employment status. Finally, parents' overall satisfaction and their satisfaction with the communication process were assessed. The study showed that parents make childcare arrangements because of practical circumstances (work or vocational activities) as well as for educational reasons, such as the socialization of children, a smooth transition to preschool and support for children's intellectual development. When "choosing" a particular child care place, both practical convenience and quality concerns mattered, such as impressions of child care staff, and well-being of other children in the setting. Interestingly, the importance of practical versus educational concerns was hardly associated with family demographic characteristics (one exception is that home language is associated with the importance of childcare costs). While the study found that children from multilingual parents attend childcare of lower quality, remarkably, these parents engaged most in educational reasoning. Compared to others, they motivated childcare enrolment significantly more in terms of children's intellectual and behavioural development and (pre)school readiness. The study shows that the unequal take-up is not the only problem. It shows that investing in additional childcare places without ensuring equal quality, constructs an new inequality problem in trying to solve the previous one, related to unequal choice options. Indeed, language barriers were associated with significantly more difficulties in locating formal childcare resources. Monolingual Dutch-speaking families have 2.17 greater chance of experiencing childcare options than foreign-speaking families and 1.54 greater odds of choice than multilingual Dutch-speaking families. The same pattern of disadvantage reoccurred once other variables were controlled for. In addition, we found no significant differences for different groups of parents in the criteria used for "choosing" a particular place, except that financial constraints are more important for families with migrant backgrounds. In general, parents were quite satisfied with their 'chosen' childcare and multilevel regression models showed that differences in satisfaction – insofar that they exist – are related to variables on the personal level (e.g. choice options) as well as on the level of childcare settings (e.g. childcare type). Childcare characteristics have less explanatory power than personal characteristics and childcare quality in particular explains only a very small margin of the variance in parental satisfaction (Janssen, Spruyt, Van Droognbroeck & Vandenbroeck, forthcoming). In sum, there is no empirical reason to assume that parents choose child care for its quality nor that "choice" is a concept that can be assumed to be "fair". And it is also abundantly clear that in this study parental satisfaction could not be regarded as a quality criterion. Hence, the market of childcare is not a perfect market, and a turn towards marketization may affect first and foremost the most disadvantaged families.

Structural barriers

Erica Burman (1997) noted a few decades ago that the language of ‘choice’ implies an equality of access to the market that denies actual structural positions of disadvantage. In the Child Guarantee feasibility study, it was revealed that one of the most salient structural positions of disadvantage is a structural lack in number of childcare places and an unequal geographical distribution of the places that are available (Vandenbroeck, 2019). In several European Member States where the responsibility of ECEC was devolved regionally, it is usually the case that poorer regions have less ECEC places available. Geographical disparities may be very significant in some countries, such as Croatia, due to municipalities setting different priorities and standards. In Croatia, the poorest counties have the lowest enrolment rates. This is also the case for the different Austrian Bundesländer. In Italy, enrolment for the children below three years of age is a mere 1.2% in Calabria, compared to 25.6% in Emilia Romagna. In Spain, there are significant disparities across the Autonomous Communities. In the Netherlands, it was documented that the privatization of childcare increased the number of places in affluent urban neighbourhoods, while it decreased in lower income neighbourhoods and rural areas (Noailly, Visser & Grout, 2007). In Flanders, Van Lancker and Vandenbroeck (2019) found that higher average incomes in a municipality are associated with more available childcare places and that this is not only the case when comparing all municipalities, but often also when comparing neighbourhoods within cities. The lack of available places entails waiting lists (e.g. in metropolitan areas in the Netherlands, Belgium or Latvia) that affect especially those who have more difficulty in subscribing a long time before their actual child care needs. This is the case for parents with precarious employments, as well as for migrant parents, who are not always able to navigate red tape and often complex admission procedures. In sum, inequalities in enrolment are to a very large extent due to inequalities in availability.

In addition to availability issues, affordability is an important explanatory factor as well. According to Eurostat data, 50% of the non-users of childcare in the European Union mention costs as the main reason not to enrol their child. According to comparative data drawn from the OECD Library (2020), parental fees often vary widely by socio-economic status of the household. In Cyprus for instance, the cost of ECEC represents on average 15% of net family income, but for poor and single parent families this is

61.5% and 67.7% respectively. In Spain, ECEC represents 5.6% of the disposable income for dual earner families, but 15.1% for single-parent families. In Croatia, parent fees may vary between 8% and 16% of net income, according to varying municipal standards. In Estonia, a shortage of municipal centres is countered by private provision, yet parental fees are significantly higher in these private ECEC centres. In England, parents of children with special needs risk being charged three to four times the hourly rates for non-disabled children. In the Czech Republic, the growing "childminding groups" are becoming the main response to the lack of available places and they have high parental fees as well as poorer educational and hygienic quality standards. As a result, some countries have considered to offer a limited number of days (or hours) of free ECEC to all children of a specific age group, a typical example being England. It needs to be noted that the introduction of the entitlement for free years of preschool in England was not accompanied by sufficient subsidies, resulting in an increase of parental fees above wages and inflation as well as an increased closure of nurseries and childcare providers. Moreover, the English policy of offering a free year of ECEC has mainly reduced income for ECEC provision, yet failed in attracting a more precarious population (Campbell, Gambaro & Stewart, 2019). There are also interesting exceptions, In Luxemburg, Iceland and the Scandinavian countries for instance, there is hardly a difference in the burden of childcare on the household budget according to income and some countries (e.g Malta, Slovenia, Latvia). offer free ECEC from a relatively early age. It needs to be noticed, however, that free ECEC does not necessarily mean that there are no costs that withhold families in poverty to enrol their child, considering costs for clothing, transportation, school canteens or educational materials and in some countries, the entitlement is not available for refugee children.

Other structural barriers include priorities that are set by the provision. Typically, in split systems, the ECEC for the youngest children is considered as "child care" and intended to be for women at work. It is part of a labour and gender policy, rather than conceptualised as an educational environment in its own right. As a result, ECEC for the youngest children is more scarce than preschool places and priorities are set, favouring employment (e.g. in Germany, Romania, Spain and the UK). All too often, the staff in these services lack the expertise to work with families in poverty, with Roma families or with children with additional educational needs. A notable exception is Slovenia that has introduced a rather comprehensive system of trained Roma assistants (Samardzic-Markovic, 2014).

In contrast, structural barriers to childcare enrolment are less important in countries with a legal entitlement to a place in childcare (which is the case in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Germany, Estonia, Latvia, and Slovenia), a high share of publicly organized or subsidized facilities, and importantly, in which accompanying policies such as parental leave entitlements are in synch with the usual admission age to childcare (Van Lancker & Ghysels, 2016; Pavolini & Van Lancker, 2018). This also means that in order to keep inequality at bay, governments need to devote sufficient resources to childcare (Van Lancker, 2018).

Sharing the caring responsibilities

While availability and affordability are essential conditions for ECEC in general and childcare in particular to realise its potential towards children, parents and societies, they are not sufficient conditions. Quality is a crucial pillar of proper childcare policies because only above-average quality can yield the expected results in terms of child development (Morabito et al., 2018; Slot, Lerkkanen & Leseman, 2016). In contrast, we know that poor quality childcare may even be harmful for children (e.g. Gunnar, Van Rysin & Phillips, 2010). Most important in this regard is so-called process quality, defined as the quality of the interactions between adults and children and among children that are significant for the impact on children’s development. It is generally assumed that it consists of two broad dimensions. The first is emotional quality and it is about building secure relations, trust, and a feeling of safety, thanks to the sensitivity and responsivity of the adult. The second is the educational support and that concerns the facilitation of exploration of the child (i.e. scaffolding), or the language support, the quality of feedback given to the child. It is regrettable to notice that most studies using in-depth observations of this process quality find that while emotional quality is average to good, the educational quality is significantly lower and often below what is needed to expect beneficial impact (Cadima et al., 2016; Hamre et al., 2014; Jamison et al., 2014; La Paro et al., 2014; Slot et al., 2016).

The European Commission (2018) adopted a comprehensive framework, based on an extensive literature review, defining five quality dimensions: accessibility, workforce, curriculum, monitoring and governance. The bulk of the recommendations (eight out of 22) are about the workforce (pre-service training, in-service training and working conditions), indicating its significance. As several studies (e.g. Eurofound, 2015; Urban et al., 2012) have shown, higher qualifications are associated with better quality and improved child outcomes. Studies have also indicated that a lack of pre-service training may be compensated by training and sustained professional development (Fukkink & Lont, 2007; Peleman et al., 2018). However, according to an OECD report (2019), status, remuneration, qualifications, in-service training and working conditions are all below what is needed to safeguard the necessary quality in many of the OECD countries. As a result, most OECD countries face a shortage of staff, while needing to expand their childcare offer. This may lead to a downwards quality trend. Indeed, as countries wish to expand the number of childcare places and increase accessibility but cannot - or do not wish to - foresee the necessary budget, they may find it hard to engage the necessary staff. As a result, they may be inclined to lower (rather than raise) the expectations for childcare staff, hoping to engage less qualified personnel. A typical example of this policy is to be found in France (yet not only there). The "micro-crèches" (small, mostly private, child care centers) have fewer quality regulations, lower expected staff qualifications and lower wages, yet in 2016, 58% of all newly created childcare places in France belonged to such private for-profit organisations, (Haut Conseil de la famille, de l'enfance et de l'âge, 2018). It has been documented (e.g. Lloyd, 2013; Van der Werf, 2020) that countries who expanded their childcare provision through privatization have also lowered the qualification of the workforce, their working conditions. Inadequate working conditions tend to lead to higher turn-over (especially for the better qualified staff members) and that is detrimental for the quality on offer (e.g. Early et al., 2007).

Obviously, there are also countries that have a standing tradition in providing fair access to high quality ECEC for all children. Sweden, Malta and Slovenia are among the many examples of systemic approaches that succeed in combining quality and quantity. It is probably not a coincidence that these are examples in which the public function of

ECEC is stressed and where approximately 1% of GDP is spent in ECEC (OECD, 2020) and where ECEC in general and childcare in particular are considered as a public good and framed as an entitlement, either for the general population (e.g. in Sweden and Slovenia) or for specific vulnerable target groups (e.g. in Malta). The Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2019) is quite explicit about what this means. It starts by claiming that the preschool is part of the school system and rests on the basis of democracy. It argues that education needs to be "equivalent", meaning that education should take into account the different conditions and needs of children and be adapted to all children in the preschool. This means that education cannot be structured in the same way everywhere and that the resources of the preschool should not be distributed equally. Common to these countries is the idea that ECEC is an entitlement and that pubic authorities (be it national or local) are responsible to enable families to make use of that entitlement.

Discussion

We now know that ECEC in general and childcare for the youngest children in particular have beneficial effects on the development of children and that these effects may last way beyond primary and secondary school. Therefore, ECEC is increasingly framed as one of the means to realise equal opportunities and create more fair and inclusive societies. It is therefore worrying to notice that children from poor families are less often enrolled in childcare and when they are, they are more often to be found in childcare from lower quality than their more affluent peers.

There is an increasing awareness that availability, affordability and quality of early childhood education in general and childcare in particular are cornerstones of family policies. They are essential conditions for family policies that are beneficial for all children and for children in difficult situations in particular. This vision is backed by robust evidence and acknowledged by international NGO's (see also the Sustainable Development Goal 4) and policy levels, such as the European Commission.

However, it is to be noticed that the reality of the childcare landscape somewhat differs from this vision. European countries highly differ in the extent to which they see childcare as a private affair, favoring concepts of parental choice, and seeing childcare as a commodity on the one side and as a public responsibility and an entitlement for families on the other side. These fundamental options (and hybrid variations in between) mark the financing system, the options families have, but also the degrees of inequality in enrollment. As a result, childcare risks to reinforce the existing gap, and the expected benefits of childcare investment for disadvantaged children may fail to materialize.

In addition, important differences in process quality remain and the educational quality of many childcare places does not always match the required standards to expect the beneficial effects on children's development. For children who live in a stimulating and nurturing home environment, this means a loss of opportunities, yet not necessarily a dramatic impact on their later academic achievement. For children living in more deprived home environments, this may mean that they miss an essential opportunity to catch up. In that sense, the educational gap risks to be structurally organized before the compulsory education begins.

The recent stream of privatization and commodification of childcare (and its shift from supply-side to demand-side funding) may hinder the public responsibility over quality issues (such as the workforce) and risks to put more emphasis on parental "choice", masking the structural inequalities where "choice" in reality only exists for some.

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