

Transforming The Childcare Sector: A Case For Multiculturalising The State

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Executive Summary

- *Transforming the Childcare Sector* draws on evidence of significant early failure by the government's National Childcare Strategy to reach diverse communities. Research carried out by the government, the Daycare Trust and FIRST suggests that these failures revolve principally around an issue of trust in the state. Parents fail to use childcare because they do not think that central government understands their local context; they think this because childcare services do not reflect their cultural needs and priorities.
 - The government has responded to these failures through a number of relatively minor refinements to its initial policy, underpinned by a policy of cultural assimilation. These refinements do not resolve the issue of trust. The paper argues that the solution lies in a far more radical transformation of childcare policy and delivery itself.
 - The challenge is to develop genuinely multicultural forms of childcare. The paper argues that only by allowing *all* communities the opportunity to develop their own local childcare strategies can this be achieved. If this approach is followed, parents will build trust in childcare services because they have been developed by them, and for them.
 - To achieve this, we argue for legislative powers and childcare revenues to be given over to local democratic childcare organisations. These organisations must be drawn from local communities and consist of (where relevant multi-ethnic) parents, councillors, childcare staff, teachers and religious leaders.
 - Such organisations would essentially be "Integrated Childcare Active Partnerships" (ICAPs) aiming to encourage greater participation in childcare, and spreading the benefits of childcare to all sections of the population. However we believe there is no single "correct" model of childcare and therefore no single best approach towards realising the benefits of childcare. ICAPs would work with local communities to turn cultural models of childcare into practical programmes.
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Introduction

Over the past decade new thinking has pushed childcare to the frontier of the 21st century welfare state, both in the UK and across Europe.¹ For the UK Labour government, this new thinking has been enshrined in policy since 1998 with the development of its National Childcare Strategy (NCS).² Based on research published by the Daycare Trust, the government and FIRST³ this paper will argue that the approach to childcare developed in this policy is based on narrow assumptions about what childcare is and what it is good for, limiting the extent to which parents are choosing to use childcare and therefore it should be abandoned. This is particularly the case amongst black and minority ethnic communities who feel their needs and priorities are not reflected in the current policy, but it is also a problem common to white working-class communities.

To resolve this problem, the paper argues for the

development of a network of reflexive local childcare strategies, or what we propose to call “Integrated Childcare Active Partnerships” (ICAPs). ICAPs will transcend the narrow assumptions enshrined in the governments’ vision of childcare and facilitate the development of childcare strategies that reflect instead the assumptions of diverse communities about what childcare is and what it is good for. This would in turn stimulate new interest and growth in the childcare market, making it both more economically viable and more likely to achieve its aims. It is not the purpose of this paper, therefore, to spell out what reflexive childcare should look like; communities and families must decide this for themselves. Our goal is to spell out what is required to help parents make those decisions and then turn them into practical solutions for their childcare needs.

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- 1 Esping-Andersen, G. 2002. ‘A Child-Centred Social Investment Strategy,’ In: G. Esping-Andersen et al, *Why We Need a New Welfare State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
 - 2 DfES. 1998. *Meeting the Childcare Challenge. A Policy and Consultation Document* London: Stationary Office
 - 3 See Appendix for details of research carried out by FIRST

National Childcare Strategy: Strengths and Weaknesses

Maintained childcare: investments and aims

In the last few years, following the launch of Labour's National Childcare Strategy, we have witnessed something of a "childcare boom" in the UK. The sector has been the subject of a keynote in every Budget speech since then, and the Chancellor's most recent Spending Review⁴ re-emphasised this commitment. Total spending on the DfES is set to rise 5.7% yearly from £27.6bn now to £35.2bn by 2008.⁵ Spending in the Sure Start Unit alone will grow from £179m in 1998 to a projected £1,158m by 2006.⁶ Support for children, young people and families, via the Children's Fund and Educational Maintenance Allowances, will rise from £1,066m to £1,428m over the same period.⁷

Substantial increases in public spending, accompanied by well-publicised targets for reducing child poverty, have often pushed childcare to the top of the news agenda. The Strategy is seen as representing an important shift in the relationship between the state and the family.⁸ Taking on a more structured responsibility for the early year's education, health and social well-being of under-5's than any other administration since the second world-war, in 1998 the government linked tax credits worth £300m to package of measures aimed at delivering up to one million new childcare places by March 2004.⁹

The core of Labour's approach is centred on four key assumptions. These suggest that good quality, affordable childcare can have a number of important effects on local and national social and economic development, particularly in terms of:

1. Reducing child poverty;
2. Increasing children's academic potential;
3. Reducing lone parent and female unemployment;
4. Helping tackle crime and demand on welfare services in later life.

Together, such benefits are believed to promote social inclusion and community development. As such, the NCS aims to:

1. Reduce child poverty 75% by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020.
2. Improve children's learning and social development to increase academic achievement during primary and secondary years, with the aim of increasing tertiary and university enrolment.
3. Support parental education and employment opportunities and reduce unemployment amongst lone parents by 70%.
4. Lower potential involvement in crime and demand on welfare services in later life.¹⁰

4 HM Treasury. 2004. Stability, security and opportunity for all: Investing in Britain's long-term future, London: HMSO

5 HM Treasury. 2004. "Overview: stability, security and opportunity for all," *ibid.*

6 DfES. 2004. "Section B. Expenditure and Investment," Departmental Report, London: HMSO

7 *Ibid.*

8 We recognize the diversity of families in the UK - two-parent, single-parent, extended, reconstituted, lesbian - and the diversity of primary caregivers in such families - biological, adopted, fostered, sibling and so on. For clarity, we use the terms "family" and "parent" whenever we relate to the primary care-giving environment within which children live but must always recognize we mean to imply the diversity just mentioned.

9 DfES. 2002. Inter-departmental childcare review: Delivering for children and families London: Stationary Office

10 DfES. 1998. Meeting the childcare challenge: a framework and consultation document London: Stationary Office

11 News Centre, DfES. "More Childcare, Early Education and Family Support: Charles Clarke," 8 September 2004

It is potential benefits such as these that have influenced senior politicians to take an interest in childcare as the “new frontier of the welfare state”.

Flagship programmes

On the ground, these investments and aims have translated into two flagship programmes, one of which is universal and the other targeted. The universal programme, free part-time “educare” - integrated education and childcare - is aimed at all three and four year-olds. Educare is worth up to 12.5 hours per week, and must be claimed for a minimum of 33 weeks per year.¹¹ Through it, the cognitive and educational benefits of early year’s learning and childcare will, it is hoped, be equally available to all. Furthermore, parents that are already in work can save money on their existing childcare costs while parents out of work or in part-time work can either enter employment or go full-time. In turn children living on or near the poverty line are therefore more likely to be lifted out of poverty.

The targeted programme attempts to address the inability of the poorest families to pay for any forms of childcare at all. Across the 20% most disadvantaged wards a network of local Sure Start programmes and Children’s Centres have therefore been established. In 1998, 500 local Sure Start’s were set up around the country, all with the aim of improving the health and well-being of one third of all families and children living in disadvantaged areas.¹² Meanwhile, 67 Children’s Centres, integrating five key services (including childcare, early year’s education, family support and health services) were also established.¹³

Benefits of educare and targeted provision

Early indications suggest that these investments and pro-

grammes have begun to pay off. The number of children living in poverty¹⁴ has fallen from 4.2m in 1998-99 to 3.6m in 2004-05.¹⁵ Additional expected returns can be inferred from successful childcare sectors run over a longer period in other countries.¹⁶ Research from the USA and Sweden, for instance, reveals how the educational, health and social development of children has been significantly improved¹⁷ and how their parents, through training and entering (more meaningful) employment, have been able to build enhanced economic and social well-being.¹⁸

From these studies, there are perhaps two arguments that we can make with regard to why subsidised childcare has been good for the UK. The first argument, based on its economic potential, is often the most widely heard. The second, based on its social potential, is a little less well known. However, it is the case that the economic potential of childcare rests fundamentally on the success of its social potential, so therefore it is in this second argument that we propose to take the most interest.

The economic argument suggests that small levels of investment in a child’s life now can more than break-even later on. Much of the evidence in support of this proposition comes from longitudinal assessments of the “Head Start” programme in the United States, which has been in operation since the 1960s. A great many studies have shown that for every \$1 spent on a child before its third birthday, \$7 are saved later through reduced levels of welfare spending and crime prevention.¹⁹ In the UK, PricewaterhouseCoopers²⁰ have recently completed a cost-benefit study of likely returns if universal childcare subsidization was guaranteed over a 65-year period. Their study makes a convincing argument that greater spending on childcare does indeed eventually more than pay

12 The author had the opportunity to work in a Sure Start nursery bus in St. Leonard’s-on-Sea in 2001 (thanks to VSO, the Princes’ Trust and the Millennium Commission) and witnessed first-hand how the service was able to reach out to marginalised sections of the community by travelling to them.

13 HM Treasury. 2004. Stability, security and opportunity for all: Investing in Britain’s long-term future, London: HMSO

14 Measured as number of children living in households with a combined income of 60% lower than the contemporary median income, after housing costs.

15 HM Treasury. 2004. Child Poverty Review, London: HMSO

16 George, V. & Taylor-Gooby, P. 1996. European Welfare Policy: Squaring the Welfare Circle, St. Martin’s: New York; DfES. 2003. Early Years and Childcare International Evidence Project, London: HMSO; Pedwell, C. 2004. Developing Diverse, Sustainable Approaches to Childcare: Multi-ethnic pre-school lessons from Sweden London: Social Enterprise London

17 Research from the US since the 1960s also clearly demonstrates the benefit of day care. See: National Audit Office. 2004. Early Years. Progress in developing high quality childcare and early years education accessible to all London: HMSO

18 Kamerman, S. B. 1991. “Child care policies and programs: an international overview,” *Journal of Social Issues* 47: 179-196; Ronsen, M. & Sundstrom, M. 2002. “Family Policy and After-Birth Employment Among New Mothers - A Comparison of Finland, Norway and Sweden,” *European Journal of Population* 18: 121-152

19 Barnett, W. S. 1996. Lives in the Balance: Age 27 benefit-cost analysis of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Program. Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation No. 11

20 PricewaterhouseCoopers. 2003. Universal childcare provision in the UK - towards a cost-benefit analysis

for itself. Within 20 years universal affordable childcare for all families would break even. After 65 years it would yield £40bn annually through increased levels of women in employment, less welfare dependency, and more academically successful children taking up more productive jobs.

The mathematics behind the economic argument is based on the idea that pre-emptive welfare expenditure is cheaper than curative welfare expenditure. Simply put, it rests on the case for prevention rather than cure with regard to the causes of social problems. In relation to childcare, we think that the case is a good one. Because it at once offers multiple benefits for children, parents and communities, childcare becomes a “one-stop shop” in the battle against the causes of poverty, social exclusion and crime.²¹

Policy reviews

Despite increased levels of investment and some early successes, a number of problems have arisen in how the initial policy was framed and how it has been implemented. For instance, the mix of universal and targeted childcare has only gone so far in reducing the “childcare gap” in the UK. In 1997, there was one maintained registered childcare place for every nine children under the age of eight. By 2001 the childcare gap had closed to one place for every seven children. According to OfSTED,²² from March 2003 there was one registered childcare place for every five children under the age of eight.

When Labour came to office in 1997, around 90% of childcare was offered by private nurseries charging market rates. This situation has not reversed, and a report by Laing and Buisson²³ suggests that the growth of the private sector has in fact accelerated. The Daycare Trust²⁴ also tells us that despite an increase in childcare provision, demand continues to outstrip supply and childcare costs continue to rise at a rate well above inflation. This makes the private market more expensive for parents. A survey of childcare costs carried out in 2003 revealed that prices had risen 6.7% since

2002, while a survey of annual summer holiday costs showed that families also faced a 16% rise in the cost of summer holiday childcare.²⁵

A study published by the Equal Opportunities Commission²⁶ suggested that 38% of mothers and 11% of fathers have been forced to leave their job or been unable to take up a job because of parenting responsibilities. The problem is even more acute in poor areas. The government’s commitment to the 20% most deprived areas has not improved the childcare choices for the majority of very low-income families. Selected areas are chosen using a set of indicators drawn from the Index of Deprivation, and includes measures of poor health, housing, lack of security and dereliction, poor education, low income and unemployment. Yet only 46% of children living in poverty can be found in wards that do badly on the Index; the remainder live in neighbourhoods within more affluent wards.²⁷ And even for those families living in the targeted areas, there are only 800,000 Sure Start childcare places - one for every 11th child - currently available.²⁸ It remains the case that many parents, from low to middle income bands, still cannot find suitable childcare services in their areas.²⁹

According to the Daycare Trust,³⁰ problems with the tax credit system and parent’s ability to pay more generally is also having a serious impact upon provider sustainability.³¹ Again this tends to be in the poorest areas where childcare can have the most significant impact. Different funding streams within the tax credit system cater for different ages and they are often short term. Many providers find the application procedures complex and time consuming. Providers cannot rely on demand-side funding and tax credits alone, as Kid’s Club Network³² research into sustainability of out of school clubs has shown. Two-thirds of “out of school clubs” said that their funding was not sustainable even for the coming year, and nearly a quarter of these also said that if things did not improve they would have to close. Small and community-based providers are forced to operate with no margin

21 Esping-Andersen, G. 2002. “A Child-Centred Social Investment Strategy,” in G. Esping-Andersen, D. Gaillie, A. Hanton & J. Myles (Eds.) *Why We Need a New Welfare State*, p.26-67, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 29-30

22 OfSTED. 2003. *Registered Childcare Providers and Places in England*, 31st March 2003 London: Stationary Office

23 Cited in Daycare Trust. 2003. *Facing the Childcare Challenge*

24 Daycare Trust. 2003. *Annual Costs of Childcare Survey 2003* London: Daycare Trust

25 Daycare Trust. 2003. *Annual Costs of Summer Holiday Care Survey 2003* London: Daycare Trust

26 EOC. 2004. *OE Annual Report 2003-04*, London: OEC

27 Work and Pensions Select Committee, *Childcare for Working Parents*. Fifth Report of Session 2002-03. 2003

28 Polly Toynbee, “What the party faithful really want is a better Blair,” *The Guardian*, Wednesday 1 October 2003

29 Ibid

30 Daycare Trust. 2003. *Towards Universal Childcare. Analysing childcare in 2003*

31 Daycare Trust. 2003. *Facing the Childcare Challenge*

32 Kid’s Club Network, *Childcare (Out of School) Industry Statistics Report*. 2003

or spare capacity to meet local needs (i.e. to provide their own subsidised places for children from low-income families).³³ This, of course, reduces staff morale and the sector demonstrates a high staff turn-over rate. Some have gone so far as to identify it as the “greatest risk” facing the success of the childcare strategy.³⁴

But issues of cost, opportunity and staff morale are also aggravated by inflexibilities in delivery. Parents engage in all kinds of work and work all kinds of hours, yet service operations are often not suited to them or their children’s needs.³⁵ Many simply find that it is impossible to access childcare when and where they want it, and despite repeated calls for integration childcare services for different ages and different programmes are often located far apart.³⁶

Furthermore, it is simply not enough to pour money into the childcare market and hope that service providers and parents will do the rest. Good quality information that gives parents easy understanding of all services on offer to them is crucial to higher rates of take up of services. Despite the provision of Children’s Information Services in every local authority, parents struggle to understand how to find and pay for childcare. Many parents do not know where to start looking for information about childcare and feel there is no central point of contact. Nationally, only 3% of parents have had contact with their local Children’s Information Service,³⁷ and most parents rely on word of mouth.

Government responses

These problems - cost, opportunity, flexibility and knowledge - are practical problems that require practical solutions. As we have already said, the economic potential of childcare (its ability to pay for itself and in time return a profit) depends on more children and parents benefiting from childcare that can, in turn, contribute to sustaining local communities and UK society generally. As such, we can identify three key policy responses, by government, to the practical problems.³⁸

In 2002, the *Interdepartmental Childcare Review*³⁹ set out

plans for further investments linked to reforms. An extra £1.5bn was allocated by 2006 with the aim of encouraging greater take-up of services, recruitment of staff, and sustainability of provision. The Review set out plans to develop a network of 1700 Children’s Centres by 2008, building on existing Sure Start programmes and other programmes (principally the Neighbourhood Nurseries that were forerunners to the Children’s Centres) to offer the five key services to an extra 300,000 children and their families. It also recommended that related childcare initiatives and their funding streams should be brought together at a national level, in an effort to improve joining-up locally. At the national level this was accomplished through the establishment of the Sure Start Unit in the DfES. This Unit holds control over policy development and delivery across the UK for under-fives.⁴⁰ In addition, greater responsibility was sought for childcare services at the local level and as such the Review suggested more powers should be given over to local authority Chief Executives, who in turn should be able to consult local partners through the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs). The national and local streams would be integrated by way of developing clearer targets that would meet the overall central vision of childcare while maintaining a local flavour.

The need for clear lines of responsibility was highlighted by the tragic but preventable death of Victoria Climbié in 2000. In 2003 the Government published its green paper, *Every Child Matters*, with the aim of doing just that.⁴¹ The paper was based on recommendations drawn from Lord Laming’s report that detailed the circumstances surrounding Victoria’s death. Lord Laming found that on no less than 12 occasions within a period of ten months, social services, the police and NHS failed to intervene and protect Victoria when they had a clear opportunity for doing so.⁴² Victoria’s death, and several others like it, suggested that common mistakes were being made by those services that set out to protect her and these had direct and negative

33 Work and Pensions Select Committee. 2003. *Childcare for Working Parents*. Fifth Report of Session 2002-03 London: Stationary Office

34 BBCi. “‘Too few’ early workers,” 7 September 2004.

35 Daycare Trust. 2003. *Facing the Childcare Challenge*

36 Ibid

37 DfES, *Repeat Study of Parents’ Demand for Childcare*. 2002

38 The childcare sector is alive and growing. A search [<http://web.lexis-nexis.com/professional/>] of all UK national newspaper headlines over the past year that include the phrase “childcare” in the title returned 144 hits, and policy directions, reviews and announcements are made almost weekly. As such we can only hope to provide the most cursory discussion of them, and we do not pretend to know them all. Nevertheless, we discuss in this paper the most significant policy documents in the belief that these offer good understanding of how the sector has developed since 1998.

39 Number 10 Strategy Unit. 2002. *Interdepartmental Childcare Review*. Delivering for children and families, London: HMSO

40 Ibid

41 HM Treasury. 2003. *Every Child Matters*, London: HMSO

42 Ibid, pp.5

consequences on the well-being of the child. These were: the poor co-ordination between separate agencies, a failure to share information, the absence of any single individual holding clear responsibility, staff shortages, poor management and a lack of good training.⁴³

The response of the government was to suggest that greater integration of childcare and child protection services might offer an effective remedy. As such, the paper gave exclusive recognition to the role that Children's Centres could play in bringing together these services. At once Centres could help children and families make a good start in life while affording the opportunity to maintain a close watch on individual children. But the paper did not stop here, however, as it also recognised the need for greater integration of services *across* a child's life as well. More opportunities for older children were advocated, and a solution suggested through the promotion of Extended Schools. These would be open beyond normal school hours to provide, first, childcare for under-5s, and second, breakfast clubs and after-school clubs for children aged over five. Moreover health and social services would also be offered, all on a single site. More controversially,⁴⁴ the paper proposed the creation of a Children's Commissioner for England to act as an independent champion for children, particularly those suffering disadvantage. Concerned that the needs of parents were too often and without question being represented as also those of the child, the Commissioner would offer a voice for children who were otherwise denied this.

A key recommendation outlined in *Every Child Matters* is the concept of the Children's Trust. Replacing the existing EYDCPs, these are envisaged as local level, non-statutory organisations that bring together a range of partners, including the voluntary and community sector, to integrate the planning and commissioning of children's services. The principles behind Children's Trusts are:

1. An outcome, child and family focus;
2. Co-location and multi-disciplinary working;
3. Common assessment and information sharing;
4. Integrated planning and commissioning with pooled budgets;
5. Effective partnerships and clear accountabilities.

As such, Trusts will need to:

1. Understand local supply and demand for children's

- services, consulting children, families and the community. They must also strike the "right balance" between charging full price for services and subsidising services;
2. Commission services from the full range of statutory, voluntary, community and private sector partners, and from schools (where they wish to take on the role);
3. Work closely with all schools, helping them to meet the full range of pupil needs and offering them effective support with the most challenging pupils.

Integration - in terms of both service delivery and across childhood - has thus become the key theme in the government's approach to childcare, and it features heavily in Labour's *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*.⁴⁵ The paper sets out the government's agenda for developing a childcare and education strategy that takes seriously the real continuity between family, school and work, childhood, adolescence, youth and adult life. Previously, the paper suggests, these things were demarcated and treated as separate periods of life in their own right. As such, with regard to early years the government envisages:

1. All parents able to get local one-stop support through Children's Centres that will provide childcare, education, health, employment and parenting support.
2. From birth to age two, more opportunities and support for parents to stay at home with their children if they want to.
3. A flexible system of "educare", that joins up education and childcare and provides 12 hours free support per week for three and four year olds before they go to school, with more choice for parents about when they use it.
4. The development of dawn-to-dusk schools, with breakfast childcare and after-school clubs to help parents juggle their busy lives.
5. Children's Trusts bringing together all those who provide services for children and families in each local area, and making sure children at risk get proper care, education and protection.⁴⁶

We have considered the development of Labour's National Childcare Strategy through two of its principal programmes: educare and targeted provision. These have been reviewed and refined following evidence of failures to provide affordable and widespread coverage of childcare, both nationally and in disadvantaged wards. Furthermore, lack of integration and choice in childcare has led staff and parents to call

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Batty, D. & other agencies. "Clarke unveils child protection reforms," *The Guardian*, 4 March 2004

⁴⁵ DfES. 2004. *Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners*, London: HMSO

⁴⁶ Ibid: pp. 5-6

for greater local level responsibility. Yet there remains a significant portion of the UK population whose needs remain unrecognised by these reforms. So far we have not men-

tioned them, but they are black and minority ethnic children and parents and children with special educational needs. We shall now consider their case.

Exclusion from Childcare: Race, Culture and Special Education Needs

Using childcare: unequal benefit rates between white, black and minority ethnic communities

A key objective of the National Childcare Strategy is to develop targeted childcare that can alleviate poverty, social exclusion and crime. Only if this is successful will childcare pay for itself and return a profit. The most at-risk groups from these inequalities are white working-class communities and communities made up of black and minority ethnicities.⁴⁷ Data drawn from the 2001 Census⁴⁸ on economic activity and income indicates that most black and minority ethnic communities had higher unemployment rates than white communities. Within these, unemployment rates amongst black and minority ethnic males were two or three times higher than those of white males. Rates for women were similar. Despite the fact that black women were the most economically active of all women in the population, they were also the most likely to occupy jobs that were poorly paid, had low status and based around unsocial hours. As such, black and minority ethnic communities are more affected overall by poverty than white communities.

In addition to this, black and minority ethnic families tend to be larger than white British families. For example, 43% of Bangladeshi, 33% of Pakistani and 7% of Caribbean families have four or more children.⁴⁹ This compares with just 4% of white British families. It is obvious that a larger family implies more pressure on parenting, household income, and childcare costs. When we add the problem of

higher unemployment, lower wages and unsocial working hours (i.e. hours outside of school hours), the need for childcare becomes clear. It is with black and minority ethnic families, then, that need for childcare is at its greatest.

However, when we consider take-up and satisfaction rates within the black and minority ethnic population, we find that it is precisely those groups that are not using it. According to the Daycare Trust, black and minority families are less likely to make use of childcare services than their white British counterparts.⁵⁰ The DfES⁵¹ has found that 87% of white parents had accessed some form of registered childcare in the previous year. This is compared with 81% of black parents, 70% of Asian parents, and 71% percent of parents from other minority ethnic groups.

Furthermore, in 2001, 50% of all parents surveyed reported that there were not enough pre-school nursery places in their local area. When this figure is broken down by the race and ethnicity of respondents, it reveals that 49% of white parents, 70% of black parents, 51% of Asian parents, and 59% of parents from other minority ethnic groups suggested that they could not access the childcare services they required.⁵² It is also significant that satisfaction with the quality of childcare services is highest amongst white families and lowest amongst black and Asian families. When asked, 50% of white families described childcare as “fairly good” or “very good”, but only 43% of black families and 42% of Asian families describe childcare using the same

47 Daycare Trust. 2003. Facing the Childcare Challenge

48 Census 2001 [www.nationalstatistics.gov.uk]

49 Daycare Trust. 2003. Parents' eye

50 Daycare Trust. 2003. Parents' eye *ibid.* Focus Consultancy LTD. 2002. Look At The Difference You Can Make, unpublished research proposal prepared for the DfES

51 DfES. 2002. Repeat Study of Parents' Demand for Childcare London: Stationary Office

52 *Ibid.*

terms.⁵³ As such, satisfaction with the quality of childcare services is highest amongst white families with 50% describing childcare as “fairly good” or “very good”. Only 43% of black families and 42% of Asian families described childcare using the same terms.⁵⁴

Racism, cultural discrimination and disabilism

The problem of low take-up and poor satisfaction rates amongst black and minority ethnic families has been addressed by research carried out by the Daycare Trust, government, and FIRST. Another form of discrimination - disabilism - has also been addressed in research by the Daycare Trust and FIRST. Research by the Daycare Trust and FIRST particularly demonstrates that black and ethnic minority children and parents, and children with special educational needs, regularly suffer abuse by staff and other parents. Limited evidence was found for direct racism but significant levels of cultural and “faith-based” discrimination were recorded. Similarly, disabilism seems to be common in many settings.

In 2003 the Daycare Trust⁵⁵ carried out what is undoubtedly the most important survey of racism and cultural discrimination in the UK childcare sector to date. A total of 183 parents drawn from six areas of the UK were consulted in the study. These included black African and black Caribbean parents in Croydon, Chinese parents in Doncaster, Travellers in Hull, Kosovar Albanian and Czech Roma parents in Kent, Bangladeshi parents in Oldham, and Pakistani parents in Rochdale. Their responses suggested exclusion from formal childcare services for a number of reasons. Some of these concerned a mix of “practical” issues, for example childcare not fitting working hours or the high cost of childcare. Other reasons spanned both issues of practicality and more problematic areas like cultural communication: for instance the problem of disseminating information about childcare services and options across multilingual communities and via multiple media.

But a third set of problems was also found, and to these there appeared no ready solution. Many parents expressed concerns that childcare offered in their area was not for

them. They remarked that it did not respond to their needs and priorities of what childcare should be for. Furthermore, in relation to this, many parents reported active racial and faith-based forms of discrimination from staff and other parents. For example, one parent in Doncaster reported that “*many members of [the Chinese community] feel reluctant to get help from Western services because of the hostility and racism that has been shown towards them in the past.*”⁵⁶ In Hull, a member of the Traveller community reported not using childcare because of the “*...bad attitudes*” shown towards them.⁵⁷ Refugee and asylum seekers in Kent had been “*...spat at and shouted at when...standing outside the nursery school.*”⁵⁸ The report gives examples of many more such cases.

The Daycare Trust makes it clear that childcare services that fail to include members of diverse communities can quickly lead to a climate of fear and suspicion within them. As one parent said, “*you go there and no-one speaks to you. It’s like they don’t know what to say to you.*”⁵⁹ Research by FIRST found a similar situation with regard to children with special educational needs. In this case, staff exclude such children from their setting because they feel uncomfortable when faced with certain disabilities. Sometimes the reasoning for this stems from a fear that other parents will extract their own children from the setting if a child with special educational needs is admitted to it. According to one parent interviewed by the Daycare Trust, other parents can also feel that children with special educational needs get preferential treatment. “*[T]hey get angry with you...they think that no matter where you live you get everything on a plate just because your child has a disability.*”⁶⁰

The *Parents’ Eye* project also recorded positive experiences as well. It was common for parents to feel happy with a service when it was able to incorporate their own culture and history within the setting. Amongst Pakistani parents in Rochdale, the local Sure Start programme was highly valued because “*the people who work here try really hard to get to know us, they understand about our lives and about our culture.*”⁶¹ But so too was a focus on individual needs appreciated, and one parent from Doncaster suggested: “*the staff are kind and help-*

53 DfES. 2002. Parents’ Demand for Childcare London: HMSO

54 DfES. 2002. Parents’ Demand for Childcare London: Stationary Office

55 Daycare Trust. 2003. Parents’ eye

56 Ibid: p. 11

57 Ibid: p. 13

58 Ibid: p. 15

59 Ibid: p. 20

60 Daycare Trust. 2003. Facing the childcare challenge, pp. 6

61 Daycare Trust. 2003. Parent’s Eye, pp. 18

62 Ibid: pp. 20

*ful and they talk me through her development. I can see her developing and grow".*⁶² Similarly, from Kent: *"he is learning to read and write his name. I am so happy that he is been given the chance to do this at such a young age."*⁶³

In 2002 the Sure Start Unit's Community and Inclusion team commissioned a research project to identify the barriers to black and ethnic minority take up of childcare services.⁶⁴ All local authorities were invited to apply for funding of £40,000 that would fund a 12-month pilot project aimed at increasing take up among these groups. Four successful authorities (Wolverhampton, Kirklees, Nottingham and Telford & Wrekin) were given a purposefully non-restrictive brief and encouraged to develop programmes of work that they believed would address specific issues in their local communities. Each project reported different findings and though these did not include what had failed or was failing in their area, we might infer from the changes implemented the issues that they were attempting to address.

Each project found that communications strategy was of crucial importance in reaching out to all communities. Community media including local radio and visits to major faith groups outside office hours were all seen to be particularly valuable methods by which information about childcare could be disseminated. Parents in Kirklees suggested that communication within settings was a higher priority than the racial or ethnic background of staff. So long as sensitivity to cultural needs appeared to be prevalent, who took care of their children was of lesser importance. In Wolverhampton it was found that trust between provider and parent can more effectively be built through face-to-face consultation. Finally, all projects suggested some form of "connector" or "community ambassador" between black and minority ethnic communities and the local authority

was found to be essential to achieving effective engagement and trust.

Another study has been carried out by the Women and Equality Unit in the Department for Work and Pensions.⁶⁵ The aim of this research, based on twenty-two focus group sessions with minority ethnic and white mothers, was to explore attitudes towards childcare and employment in relation to ethnicity and religion. One key finding of the report highlighted the diversity of opinions between and within black and minority communities, indicating that "no single childcare solution" may be found.

For these mothers, childcare services were not considered to be in tune with changing gender roles and the fact that an increasing number of them were working. They pointed to the lack of appropriate, accessible and affordable childcare as evidence of this, inhibiting women from participating and progressing in the labour market. Working mothers found it difficult to juggle childcare needs and the needs of their employers, and Asian and Muslim mothers expressed the need for culturally and religiously sensitive childcare services. For them this would include employing staff from various ethnic communities, and encouraging minority ethnic mothers to provide childminding services. Significantly, mothers also expressed an interest in services that would offer teaching about cultural beliefs and languages. As such, they also expressed interest and enthusiasm for setting up childminding businesses of their own. However, there was low awareness of how to start a business and concern about the investment required was also a barrier. The Report suggests, in line with this, that more practical support and encouragement is needed to return mothers to work, or develop their own childminding business. Sure Start was felt to be successful in this, and women who used Sure Start generally had very positive experiences.

63 Ibid: pp. 14

64 Sure Start. 2004. 'Inclusion pilot projects,'Partners: the Sure Start newsletter for local authorities, March. London: Sure Start & Daycare Trust

65 WEU. 2004. Diversity and difference: Minority ethnic mothers and childcare London: HMSO

Culture and the New Politics of Exclusion

Childcare: one form or many?

We have seen how positive experiences of childcare revolve around two elements: first, the respect for culture, history and language; and secondly, an active interest in and support of the individual child. Different parents from diverse backgrounds indicate varying levels of concern for both, and none suggest that culture had to come before individual rights or that individual rights were superior to culture. In fact, of course, parents wanted childcare that benefited their child, that was practical for them, and that also respected their diversity. As such, according to the *Parents' Eye* project, parents had many different ideas about what childcare was, and what it was good for.

Nevertheless, within this diversity one common feature is, we think, clear. Amongst Asian and African-Caribbean parents, for example, views of childcare stemmed from child-rearing and childcare practices in their countries of origin.⁶⁶ For them, childcare was a family responsibility, or at most the responsibility of the close community: what is referred to as informal care. This was because real trust could only exist, they suggested, within family and community structures. Similar points of view were expressed by Chinese parents, Traveller parents, Kosovar Albanian and Czech Roma parents, Bangladeshi parents, and Pakistani parents.⁶⁷ Furthermore, a series of interviews carried out by FIRST suggested a very similar attitude amongst white British families.

According to the Daycare Trust, preference for informal

care stemmed mainly from a lack of awareness about what childcare can be. Referring to the Pakistani community, the *Parents' Eye* report suggests that "participants found the concept of [childcare] difficult to grasp...they were unclear on the distinction between formal and informal childcare." To illustrate this point, the report quotes one parent as saying: "*I suppose my mum looking after my children is childcare.*"⁶⁸ The idea that parents who prefer informal care above formal care suffer from a lack of understanding is also shared by the government. Consider the following statement, made in the *Sure Start* magazine *Partners*.⁶⁹ "[T]rust in childcare services is critical, especially for families where childcare is not part of their previous cultural experience." What is striking about this statement, we argue, is that it suggests there are cultures in the world in which childcare is *unknown*: and that therefore the barrier to improving take-up is *culture*. Now, it is very unlikely - indeed it is not possible! - for there to be any culture in the world that does not practice some form or another of childcare. It is also very likely that all of these forms of childcare are as good performing this duty as any other.⁷⁰ Cultural practices that are stable over time are so because they perform a function for a community, and no other duty in any culture is more important than childcare. Most parents must recognise what is best for their children, and this remains the case when parents find themselves in new communities that might not share the same cultural history. There is certainly no reason to suppose that diverse approaches to

65 WEU. 2004. Diversity and difference: Minority ethnic mothers and childcare London: HMSO

66 Daycare Trust. 2003. *Parent's Eye*, pp. 8

67 Ibid: pp. 10-18

68 Ibid: pp. 18

69 *Sure Start*. 2004. "Parents' views on equality and inclusion," *Partners* 34 (March). *Sure Start & Daycare Trust*; my emphasis

70 Voland, E. 1998. "Evolutionary Ecology of Human Reproduction," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27: 347-74

childcare are somehow unsuitable for 21st century Britain. In fact, we suggest, they are crucial for it.

The preference for informal care and belief that it too constitutes childcare is explicitly challenged by both the government and the Daycare Trust. In the face of informal care they advocate a policy of assimilation, and reject the idea that childcare can include informal care too. This is not to down play the important work that the Daycare Trust particularly has carried out in relation to racism and exclusion. We welcome their recommendations in *Parents' Eye* and the accompanying document *Positive practice. Achieving quality in childcare: a guide for practitioners*.⁷¹ We agree with their argument that diversity must be built into all levels of the childcare sector, from involving parents in the day-to-day running of any particular setting, recruiting more staff from black and minority ethnic communities, and diversifying local management, EYDCPs, and the process of policy formulation itself. However we also believe that if this is to be achieved, and if true diversity is to be accomplished, then a far more radical approach to childcare, both in terms of how policy is developed and how services are delivered, must be recommended.

Our reasons for this are three-fold. First, we have already seen how black and minority ethnic parents expressed interest in forms of childcare that fitted around their lives. Daycare is notoriously inflexible because, as its name implies, it operates during normal office hours. We also know that many parents simply cannot afford to use childcare: therefore it is cheaper of course to make use of family and community support networks. The second reason stems from their preference of informal over formal childcare. The roots of this preference lie in the fact that black and minority ethnic parents suffer from regular racial and cultural forms of abuse and discrimination. This problem, which the evidence suggests is widespread, is a serious one, and one that cannot be simply addressed. Unfortunately, often the only recourse to parents on the receiving end of it is to withdraw from the situation where they find it. The third reason relates to the second, and this is because (as the Daycare Trust reported but did not take further), informal forms of childcare are closer to what

many parents understand childcare to be, and what they understand it to be good for. Formal childcare, on the other hand, in fact represents another culture's perception of childcare entirely, and it is one that they do not wish to use. This perception stems from the assumptions about childcare that have been made by policy makers that belong, in the main, to the white British middle-classes. We shall now consider why this is the case.

The myth of rational bureaucracy

There is a tendency in British political thought, and amongst the political and civil service classes, to think of the modern welfare state as a "rational bureaucracy".⁷² This tendency is derived from Max Weber,⁷³ who theorised that the rise of a rational Protestantism in the western European states would lead to a secularisation in both their government and society.⁷⁴ The theory, also to be found in the liberalism of J. S. Mill,⁷⁵ explains that before the state every man (*sic*) was, by natural law, an individual. This fact was also reflected in moral law, in the principle that every man stood before the law with equality. As such, it has become a commonly held belief today that the state does not distinguish between individuals as they might otherwise be categorised (by gender, class, religion, race or ethnicity), but rather as they stand as a legal subject.⁷⁶ On this view, the welfare state delivers its services "without showing partiality to one at the expense of another".⁷⁷

The liberals who thought of the state as a rational institution did so because they believed in equality. Their idea of equality was not the equality - or the right - to diversity but rather the equality of equals. The assumption was that the state manifest in the same way as the market: it was a constituted by many different individuals that contracted freely and by way of their legal status only. Class and other social markers did not come into it. But Durkheim⁷⁸ proved long ago that the market was not simply constituted by individuals that contracted freely. Rather, all market relations - and the laws and rules that governed contracting parties - were in fact embedded in the "moral" (today he might have said "cultural") law of society. Similarly, the modern state's legal rationality - its attempt to make all

71 Daycare Trust. 2004. *Positive practice. Achieving equality in childcare: a guide for practitioners*, Daycare Trust: London

72 Butcher, T. 2002. *Delivering Welfare*, 2nd edition. Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 3-4

73 Weber, M (edited by H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills). 1948. 'Bureaucracy,' in: *From Max Weber. Essays in Sociology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

74 Weber, M. 1930. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London: Routledge

75 Mill, J. S. 1991. *On Liberty and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

76 Butcher, *ibid*

77 Greenwood, J. & Wilson, D. 1989. *Public Administration in Britain Today*, 2nd edition. London: Unwin Hyman

78 Durkheim, E. 1933. *The Division of Labour in Society* (trans. by G. Simpson) Collier Macmillan Publishers: London

that engage with it equal - is underpinned by its own “substantive cultural factors”.⁷⁹

This implies that state policies and its mechanisms of delivery are in fact what we will call “cultural products”. This means simply that rather than being rationalised and secular they are founded upon, developed within, and dispensed by individuals and organisations that derive a specific view of the world from their own cultural heritage.⁸⁰ The state, in this view, is merely a formalisation or a “structural effect”⁸¹ of one group’s particular cultural viewpoint: the cultural viewpoint of the ruling elite, or at least of those that perform the duties of governance. In the case of childcare, this fact is clear to see. The distinction that the government and Daycare Trust see between formal and informal care is based upon the idea that what counts as “formal” care is also that which is found in extra-familial settings. Yet many parents (black, minority ethnic and white), think of childcare differently. As such, they hold their own cultural understanding of what childcare is, and this is different to the one enshrined in the National Childcare Strategy. To hope for an objective, rational state - or an acultural or decultured childcare sector is futile. The question thus presented is how best to limit the discrepancy between the cultural assumptions enshrined in the state and those that are enshrined in us.

Considering this, it is not surprising that many parents from black and minority ethnic communities choose not to use formal childcare. As we have seen, the government and Daycare Trust suggest that parents must give up their own beliefs about childcare and use formal care - or childcare that conforms to their understanding of it - instead. This policy, which is essentially one of assimilation,⁸² devalues and undermines not only the diversity of approaches to childcare but the many cultures, faiths and histories from which they spring as well. As such, we suggest, the National Childcare Strategy is essentially “culturalist”.

As a form of discrimination, “culturalism” has hardly begun to register with those that practice it that it is indeed

a form of discrimination akin to racism. But culture, and with it faith and language, have to a large degree replaced old-style biological racism as the new rhetoric of exclusion of immigrant communities. In an interesting look at the new boundaries and rhetoric of exclusion in Europe, Stolcke⁸³ suggests that there is a growing tendency to “blame all... socio-economic ills... on immigrants who lack ‘our’ moral and cultural values”.⁸⁴ She continues, but “[t]he fact that nation-states are by no means culturally uniform is ignored”. Hobsbawm⁸⁵ has, discussing the rise of modern nationalism, clearly described this problem:

“The equation nation = state = people, and especially sovereign people, undoubtedly linked nation to territory, since structure and definition of states were now essentially territorial. It also implied a multiplicity of nation-states so constituted, and this was indeed a necessary consequence of popular self-determination...But it said little about what constituted “the people”. In particular there was no logical connection between a body of citizens of a territorial state, on the one hand, and the identification of a “nation” on ethnic, linguistic or other grounds or of other characteristics which allowed collective recognition of group membership.”

In fact, according to Marshall⁸⁶ the self-identification of “the people”, in the UK at least, followed the development of democracy and citizenship. Similar to the liberal theory of the rational bureaucracy, the ideas on which this identification was based stemmed from the right to buy, sell, and contract in the market place. But there was also - as Hobsbawm says - a sense of nation and people, and citizenship rights were therefore also based on social rights which entitled the right to economic welfare and social heritage (or culture). These rights sprang up, significantly, around the end of the 19th century, when British imperial expansionism and colonialism brought to wide attention “other” peoples and “other” cultures in the context of domestic industrialisation and urbanisation. The English working classes, campaigning for rights of their own, rallied around

79 This point has been clearly argued in what can be read as a comparative study of the state: Fuller, C. J. & Harriss, J. 2001. “For An Anthropology of the Modern Indian State,” In: C.J. Fuller and V. Beni. 2001. *The everyday state and society in modern India*, London : C. Hurst, pp. 1-30

80 Steinmetz, G. 1999. “Introduction: culture and the state,” in: G. Steinmetz (ed). *State/culture: state formation after the cultural turn*, pp. 1-49. Ithaca: Cornell University Press

81 Mitchell, T. 1991. “The limits of the state: beyond statist approaches and their critics,” *American Political Science Review* 85: 77-96; 1999. “Society, economy, and the state effect,” in: G. Steinmetz *State/Society: state formation after the cultural turn*, pp. 76-97

82 Back, L. Keith, M. Khan, A. Shukra, K. & Solomos, J. 2002. “New Labour’s White Heart: Politics, Multiculturalism and the Return of Assimilation,” *Political Quarterly* pp. 445-454

83 Stolcke, V. 1995. “Talking Culture. New Boundaries, New Rhetorics of Exclusion in Europe,” *Current Anthropology*, 36(1): 1-24

84 Ibid: pp. 2

85 Hobsbawm, E. J. 1990. *Nations and nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 19

86 Marshall, T. H. 1992. *Citizenship and social class* London: Pluto Press

a unifying flag of socialism.⁸⁷ And the differences between them were flattened out.

Thus, the creation of a feeling of “Englishness” and then “Britishness” was based on the pursuit of social justice (among “modern” equals), and in the face of overseas differences (African, Asian and South American “premodern” cultures).⁸⁸ The feeling was made endemic then, and it still continues today. The logical response to this problem, then, is to enable those many cultures and histories that reside in the modern nation-state to become part of it. We thus advocate a policy of multiculturalisation.

Culture/multiculturalism

The concepts of culture and multiculturalism are difficult ones and FIRST proposes to publish a separate paper on these. In this paper we shall employ two understandings of the term culture, and then consider one definition of multiculturalism. However it must be remembered that a considerable literature surrounds the meanings of these terms, and any discussion here will necessarily be partial. For example, “culture” has been described as one of the most difficult words in the English language.⁸⁹ As long ago as the 1950s anthropologists had acquired 161 definitions of the term.⁹⁰ Here, we shall use two definitions of the term. First, we shall consider culture to be the naturalistic basis of human being, learning and sociality. Secondly, culture will also be viewed as a form of political association, and therefore as a rhetoric of inclusion and exclusion.

Culture

Our first definition stems from the recognition that if sociality is based on anything, then that is common understanding. As such, all humans share - through their evolutionary past - the ability to conceive and perceive of the

world in two ways. The first is through their intuitive knowledge of space, time, environment (including types of living things), empathy, and sociality.⁹¹ The second, mapped onto the first through learning, gives to these things their unique - that is to say, cultural - characteristics. Viewed in this way, culture does not, as some might argue, make intra-cultural communication “impossible” or at least “very difficult”.⁹² This is because all humans, of whatever background, share the same basic understandings of the world and the things that are in it. But equally, culture is also deeply engrained. We learn it from birth, and this is why childcare is so important: it is the principal means by which cultural knowledge, history and language is passed between the generations. It imparts to us our knowledge of “what goes without saying”.⁹³ Through culture, we learn *what* things in the world hold special relevance for us. In a very real sense, everything is cultural (the economy, the political system, the social system) because everything is embedded in the way that we approach - assume - things to be.⁹⁴ Even our most rational market actions are embedded in a set of preconceived ideas about what constitutes, at the very least, “a fair price”.⁹⁵

Secondly, and perhaps most recognisably, “culture” has become a language of and for power. Culture can be used as both an excuse for discrimination (as in discrimination against “other cultures” that are said to threaten national cohesion), or as an argument for self-determination (against an occupying power, or central or federal government). In the UK, cultural politics was unheard of until relatively recently but it has since become one of the major political battlefields of our time.⁹⁶ Opposition against immigration and the European constitution on the one hand, and support for parliamentary devolution to Wales and Scotland on the other, have all been fought deploying a concept of cultural difference. But more widely known as

87 Tompson, E. P. 1963. *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin: London, pp. 781-915

88 Loomba, A. 1998. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* London: Routledge

89 Williams, R. 1981. *Keywords*, London: Flamingo, pp. 87

90 Kluckhohn, C. & Kroeber, A. 1952. *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*, MA: Harvard University Press

91 Cole, M. 1996. *Cultural Psychology. A once and future discipline* Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press; Sperber, D. 1996. *Explaining culture: a naturalistic approach* Oxford: Blackwell

92 For example Wittgenstein’s claim that “we cannot find our feet” with others - even those in our own culture - because of the unbridgeable gulf of interpretivism that lies between us. Cited in Geertz, C. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books

93 Hannerz, U. “When culture is everywhere: reflections on a favourite concept,” *Ethnos* 58: 95-111; Bloch, M. 1998. “What Goes Without Saying: The Conceptualisations of Zafimaniry Society,” in: M. Bloch *How We Think They Think. Anthropological Approaches to Cognition, Memory, and Literacy* Oxford: Westview Press, pp. 22-38

94 Popper, K. 1963. “Towards a rational theory of tradition,” in: K. Popper *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* London: Routledge, pp. 161-182

95 Granovetter, M. 1992. “Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness,” in: R. Swedberg and M. Granovetter (eds), *The Sociology of Economic Life* Boulder: Westview Press

96 Parekh, B. 2000. *Rethinking Multiculturalism. Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* Basingstoke: Palgrave

“cultural” are the arguments put forward by minority ethnic groups for legal rights and protections for the purposes of “preserving their culture”.⁹⁷ It is this particular assumption of culture - that culture is something exhibited by the immigrant population - which is also the assumption held by the class of policy-makers. In the case of childcare, it is not in response to the question of why take-up rates amongst working-class whites are so low do we hear the reply “it is because of ‘cultural difference’”. We hear it only when we ask the question about minority ethnic groups. It is this naivety that we must challenge.

Thus the “culture concept” - which is most usefully understood as both our learnt ways of “seeing and being” in the world and also a direct form of political expression - has been restricted to a single use: that of describing the problems of racial and ethnic politics. As such, mainstream politics has been able to sideline the issue as belonging to the concerns of a radical fringe, and has pursued its own politics with the false belief that it remains outside of culture. But culture is everywhere, in our minds and in our lives. We understand the world through it, and we frame our political ideas with it. Therefore culture cannot simply be “what immigrants have”. Rather culture is some thing that we all have - and must have - by our common human nature. Culture pervades white working class communities just as much as it pervades South Asian or Afro-Caribbean communities, and cultural discrimination is as real for the former as it is for the latter. Witness, for example, the well-known fact that white working class communities benefit far less from the welfare state than white middle class communities do.⁹⁸ The reason for this discrepancy lies in the fact that working class needs and priorities for health - from practical issues like opening hours to cultural and linguistic problems such as the “middle-class speech” of Doctors - are not often met by the NHS.

It follows, therefore, that if we all have culture, and are all exposed to the possibility of our culture conflicting with the culture of the state and its servants, how can we be certain that the policies of the state will be in any way be reflective of different needs and priorities? The answer, of course, is that

we cannot - at least, we cannot so long as we pursue our present course of thinking that the state is a rational, de-cultured form. What this fact calls for, then, is a reconceptualisation of the state for the multicultural society.

Multiculturalism

The antithesis of multiculturalism is monoculturalism, and we have seen how this is the endemic condition of the contemporary British state. It thinks of itself as an acultural, rational bureaucracy, and develops policies in the belief that they too reflect this assumption. Furthermore, it delivers them from the centre out. A multicultural state would have to recognise that it is in fact a cultural institution, and that the policies it advocates are cultural products. If we wanted to multiculturalise the state, in this case, we would have to somehow include all cultural communities within that process. This can only be accomplished if multiculturalism rides alongside localisation.

Localisation implies the reorganisation of state bureaucracies so they become closer to the communities they are serving. It is a critique of central government because rule from the centre implies a “top down” approach to government. “Top down” policies are thought to be distant from local needs and priorities because they are formulated by a handful of people that decide - without full control of local facts - what should and should not be done in response to any given problem. This is the current state of the Sure Start Unit. FIRST found that while the National Childcare Strategy called for greater “joining-up” between the centre and localities, in reality the centre did not know what was going on at the local level. It was accepted that local authorities and EYDCPs simply had to “get on with it” without much guidance or support from the Unit. Interviews with staff of EYDCPs also revealed that they were sceptical the centre knew what was going on, and often felt that they were left to run things by themselves. But for them, because they are denied statutory status and revenues, this “hands off” approach simply proved frustrating. They were at once cut adrift from the Unit but also dependent upon it if they wanted to affect any real change in childcare to meet local needs and priorities.

97 Ibid

98 Black Report. 1980. *Inequalities in Health: report on a research working group*. London: HMSO; Townsend, P. & Davidson, N. 1982. *Inequalities in Health*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Transforming Childcare: The Local ICAP

The centralist, “top-down” approach to childcare advocated in the National Childcare Strategy is not proving to be the most efficient method for developing the sector. Therefore the Strategy should be abandoned and replaced by a multicultural and localist agenda that would empower families and communities to develop the forms of childcare that they desire. This approach calls for the devolution of legislative and spending powers to local authorities and a new network of local “Integrated Childcare Active Partnerships” (ICAPs). ICAPs would replace EYDCPs and Children’s Trusts to take the leading role in working with parents and community organisations to build care networks and opportunities that grow directly out from local needs and priorities.

We argue that the benefits of childcare discussed earlier are common to all families, communities and cultures. As we saw in relation to the Daycare Trust’s *Parents’ Eye* report page 17, parents from diverse backgrounds recognise the benefits of childcare for individual children but also for their community too. There is no reason to think, therefore, that the kinds of childcare preferred by many parents - those centred on “informal” care networks of family and close community - would place in jeopardy such benefits. Parents would not support them if they did. Simply put, while we can all agree that the benefits of childcare are good, we should not think that there is only one road to achieving them. In fact, only by recognising the diversity of approaches will we ever build enough trust in maintained childcare for parents to consider using it, and help make public investments in childcare not only break-even but return a profit. ICAPs can deal with this challenge head-on.

The ICAP philosophy

The first principle of ICAPs - and this is what makes them appealing - is that they are first and foremost intelligence

gathering units. ICAPs must command deep, ethnographic understanding of the communities they serve and this knowledge must continue to grow over time as communities change and needs and priorities with them. Without this, they can never hope to include diverse perspectives on childcare.

Once understanding has been developed, the other principles of ICAPs will slot into place. Multicultural childcare is childcare that does not exclude on grounds of race, ethnicity, or disability, and it ensures the continuation of diverse languages and practices. As local organisations, ICAPs are constituted by and for local people, and draw on local democracy to develop diverse approaches to childcare. Their aim is to encourage greater participation in childcare, and thus spread the benefits of it to all sections of the population. The key elements for successful multicultural childcare include;

Integrative. ICAPs remove the distinction between “formal” and “informal” childcare. Recognising that no single type of care is enough for any parent, the ICAP model allows for real choice between a spectrum of services. This allows for an imaginative development of services by individuals and organisations. As natural reflections of local needs, ICAPs draw from the relevant experience and skills that only communities can offer.

Childcare. The aim of childcare, in the ICAP model, is simply childcare. It is not the responsibility of ICAPs (or central government) to decide for parents what childcare is - that is the responsibility of parents, their children, and the services in question. ICAPs merely facilitate these choices and turn them into practical applications. But this does not mean abandoning commitment to reducing child poverty, increasing literacy, and encouraging employment. These benefits are wants common to us all, and common to all forms of childcare. Genuinely local childcare strategies are

therefore more efficient at realising the benefits of childcare, because they are more effective at encouraging participation in childcare. To assess their success in both, they will set themselves ambitious but locally meaningful targets. A transformed OfSTED could then judge progress towards them regularly.

Active. ICAP solutions grow out of local needs and concerns. But that growth does not end there. They must continue to grow and change as communities grow and change. In this way ICAPs are alive and alert: they change to suit the needs and priorities of all members of a community, old and new. But ICAPs are also active in a second sense. They work to cure social exclusion and crime in their community, the causes of which they understand perfectly because they are part of the community. In this way, childcare really does become the “new frontier of the welfare state”.

Partnerships. Finally, the ICAP model is based on the fact that the state is not the only - or at times the best - organisation to encourage participation in childcare, build local democracy, or understand local needs. This is especially true in diverse communities. Childcare solutions - integrated and active - must also be dynamic and quick. They need to judge, understand and respond to changing local conditions as they happen. Therefore they would seek to work with charities, social enterprises, and private companies because, at one remove from any governmental influence, they can hold more legitimacy for some excluded communities.

Organisational structure

The organisation of ICAPs must reflect current problems and future challenges if they are to prove to be effective organisations. As such they must hold statutory, spending powers of their own. EYDCPs and the Children’s Trusts that are now replacing them both lack proper statutory status. As we have seen, this severely limits the scope of childcare they can support because they depend on legal regulation developed from the centre. To ensure that ICAPs can meet the needs and priorities of local communities, they must be allowed to respond to them effectively. This calls for statutory powers to be given over to them.

Similarly, spending powers must also be localised in the sense that any form of childcare that can make a case for itself receives public funding. It is clear that childcare benefits everyone in society, even those that do not have children of their own. There is a strong case, then, for further public investments to be made, along the lines suggested by PricewaterhouseCoopers. Childcare Revenue Pools, which are allocated to ICAPs for further distribution to settings and providers, should therefore come directly from the Treasury. The Treasury must allocate levels of funding according to independent assessments of local needs and

priorities. It cannot simply take average ward conditions as its guide, however, because, as we have already seen, the majority of poor families live in pockets of deprivation within well-off areas.

The pamphlet does not advocate revenue-raising powers for ICAPs themselves. We are not interested in promoting competition in the neoliberal sense amongst these organisations, because an “ivy league” of ICAPs must not be allowed to develop. Social enterprises may consider the ICAP Childcare Revenue Pool their first port of call when meeting starting-up costs and considering sources of funding for on-going support. No community co-op should be allowed to close because they cannot fill all their places, if there is sufficient cause to believe the setting/provider meets local needs. Private enterprises, unless they offer affordable (by local means) childcare places, may not apply to the ICAP for financial support (the Working Tax Credit would still apply for parents using private care as they do now). The amount of help that private settings/providers may apply for would also be linked to the percentage of affordable places they offer, once they have at least 60% of places that are affordable.

Overall, we argue for choice and competition to be introduced in the sector. But this is not in the economic sense of the term but rather in a cultural sense. ICAPs should inspire settings/providers to compete for funds on the basis of how they aim to succeed in, and recognise change within, local cultural models of childcare. As such, ICAPs would be comprised of three interlocking teams, each with a portfolio for different aspects of the operation. These are:

1. **The Intelligence Unit.** ICAPs depend on cultural knowledge, and the collection and interpretation of each community’s culture, faith, and childcare needs. ICAPs, although local democratic organisations, cannot assume that all members of the community have the time or even the desire (for whatever reason) to take part in the decision-making process. Yet their views are crucial - perhaps more so than those who engage actively with the ICAP - because it is they who are isolated and excluded from the state. Therefore one or more full-time staff with training in needs assessment and intelligence gathering methods, particularly qualitative methods, must engage in the on-going development of local knowledge.
2. **The Operations Unit.** Members of this unit would be responsible for the oversight of programmes in local communities. Using knowledge generated about the community by the Intelligence Unit, and having listened to the needs and priorities expressed by providers and families, they will facilitate development of legal con-

tracts that underpin all childcare operations in their area. These might range from the loosest collections of childminders in families and close community networks to the most formal of daycare centres. The important point is that different approaches to childcare receive the support they require and turn local childcare needs into practicable solutions.

3. **The Financial Unit.** This side of the operation would receive monies from the Treasury and distribute it according to directions provided by the Intelligence and Operations Units. It would also be responsible for entering into partnerships with community based organisations, social and private enterprises.

ICAPs: Some potential problems and solutions

It might be objected that such a degree of localisation must imply a loss of accountability at the centre. We argue that localisation is the correct route for the government's childcare strategy to go down because this is the best and fairest way for ensuring the development of affordable, meaningful and useful childcare. All of the evidence suggests that parents do not want or care about childcare services that accord to some arbitrary national standard; rather it suggests that they want childcare they can afford, where they live, and that suits their needs and priorities. In this case national politicians can be held accountable precisely by how successful local authorities and ICAPs become in building up their own childcare strategies. It would be their new responsibility to see that statutory powers and revenues flow efficiently to the local level, and that they are not abused or dominated by any one particular section of a community.

Local authorities and ICAPs must build their own set of targets and use these as indicators of how successful they are at developing a local childcare strategy. The important point is that these targets, and the services and developments they are linked with, reflect what is seen to be important and good about childcare in the communities where they are accountable. As such, central government does not have responsibility for national standards if what we mean by that phrase is an arbitrary set of targets that do not speak to the needs and priorities of large sections of the population. The government does have a responsibility for national standards only if we mean by that phrase a commitment to developing a set of standards to meet the real needs and priorities of real people and real communities.

As we have said previously, just because we advocate localisation and diversification this does not mean that we advocate abandoning the drive to full literacy and numeracy, or reducing child poverty for example. The simple fact is that no parent that takes any interest in their child's welfare is likely to deny them the chance, for example, to learn fluent English. The only instances when children fail to learn English fluently - except in cases when parents take no interest in their child's welfare, in which case the problem becomes one for child protection agencies - are to found in circumstances when the education of that child is racially and/or culturally discriminatory.⁹⁹ In this case, the best response we can think of is to change the institution so that it reflects better the racial and cultural backgrounds of children and their families.

It might also be argued that settings/providers run by loose cooperatives of parents will not be very good at ensuring educate, which depends on a structured curriculum. For example, they may be too transitory and unstable to attract full time staff members with the right qualifications. In this case ICAPs would supply, as a condition of financial support and depending on when the setting/providers are meant to operate and who it will be for, at least a part time early year's educator to teach the curriculum. This curriculum, which certainly holds cognitive, literacy and numeracy development as its goal, should also be composed of significant local and cultural elements. For example, the pursuit of local standards in literacy might be set for more than just the goal of fluency in English. Research shows that children fare better in childcare and early year's education when a substantial portion of it is in their first language, or the language used at home.¹⁰⁰ The interesting thing about the brains of human infants and children is that they are devoted language-learning machines, and they have no trouble whatsoever in learning several languages at once.¹⁰¹

ICAPs should therefore promote the curricularisation of local languages alongside English for all children, not just those that speak that other language at home, or who descend from it. When local languages are awarded the same priority as the national language (and other European languages), speakers of and descendents from those languages will be likely to feel as much a part of the (multilingual) "nation" as anybody else. Combine this with equal recognition of histories, cultures, religions, foods, fes-

99 The educational failure of black and minority ethnic children is well known and is subject to much on going debate. In reference to language issues, however, see: Sharma, D. 2000. "Educational Issues," in: A. Lau (ed.). *South Asian Children and Adolescents in Britain*. Ethno-cultural issues, London: Whurr Publishers, pp. 157-175

100 Ibid.: pp.162-165 for a brief review of the arguments

101 Pinker, S. *The Language Instinct*

tivals and so on, and we are beginning to move towards standards that actually matter, and witnessing the development of the first truly “globalised” generation, confident in communication with people from diverse backgrounds and respectful and interested in their own and others lives.

Finally, parental concern over abuse in settings and public concern over abuse in the home are both very important issues for ICAPs. Certainly it is the case that the vast majority of abuse - physical and sexual - is carried out by family members and close family friends. In this case greater levels of family and close community childcare does not increase the risk of child abuse *per se*, but it does increase the risk of bringing out what was already threatened, or increase the frequency of what was already going on. Both of these are very serious complications, and we also have the added issue of children reporting on family/friends whom they are taught to trust by their unsuspecting parents. Our solution is to ensure that all children from the earliest age are taught - as they should be regardless - about the dangers of abuse and given clear and simple lines for communication in the event or threat of abuse. Furthermore, ICAPs should operate regular, ongoing and random visits and interviews with children in all settings/providers as part of their operation, and one of the key things these individuals will be responsible for will be to look out for signs of abuse. At the same time we must also recognise that the rate of child abuse is very small and the degree of media attention it receives far outweighs the actuality of its occurrence. We should not resist the development of a truly multicultural childcare sector because of fears that are, to a large extent, unfounded.

A transformed OfSTED

Local accountability, standards and regulations are critical and there must be clear and unambiguous guidelines to be followed in relation to each of them. But while OfSTED inspectors now look towards arbitrary sets of targets developed at the centre, we argue that their work is only meaningful when targets are set by communities them-

selves, and when they also decide the routes they take to reaching them. We assume that no parent or community seriously imagines that it can survive well if its future generations cannot perform with excellence in the wider society (for example, if their English skills are poor or if they know little about “UK history”). But we also assume that communities must feel their own languages and histories are respected and allowed to flourish. All children growing up in a community - regardless of their background - should be able to converse to at least a basic level in languages that are spoken in that community.

OfSTED should continue to hold responsibility for regulation of all the things we have discussed, in partnership with ICAPs. But while OfSTED now measures performance according to an arbitrary set of standards, in the future it would measure success by using only the yardsticks that count for that community. Performance in English and Maths must be top of the agenda - as most would agree - but immediately following these should be performance in other languages spoken locally (which is just as likely to include Celtic languages as South Asian languages, for example), and global history and culture. As such, the transformed OfSTED could hold responsibility for ensuring:

1. Proper and transparent organisation, accountability, investment and expenditure in ICAPs and providers.
2. The steady progression towards pre-agreed local targets on literacy, numeracy and other indicators of child cognitive development.
3. That standards within all providers are of the highest quality.

In the case of financial accountability, inspectors would ensure that providers are fulfilling the obligations agreed to in advance with the ICAP on how the financing was to be utilised. In the case of loose cooperatives that hold no contractual agreements between them, the individuals involved would always be legally bound to the ICAP. These individuals will be as committed to the targets set by the ICAP as any trained professional is expected to be, and should only be expected to take on roles that they can perform.

Conclusion

We have argued that the benefits of childcare are common to us all, irrespective of our own culture, faith, or class. However we have also tried to point out that there is no single model of childcare, and therefore no so single approach to realising those benefits. The government has failed to recognise this crucial fact, and therefore it is putting at risk not only the investments and recent successes of the National Childcare Strategy but also the well-being of white, black and minority ethnic children, families and communities.

Our proposed solution to this problem has been two-

fold. First, we argue that localisation of the Strategy - and devolution of legal and spending powers - to communities can limit the degree to which policy represents a "top-down" vision of childcare. At the same time, however, this opens to the door for multiculturalisation. As local childcare strategies develop out of, and become organically linked to, immediate and meaningful needs and priorities, excluded communities will find that childcare is by them, and for them. Only in this way can childcare become the new frontier of the multicultural welfare state.



Appendix

Methodology

This paper was developed in a series of stages. It is predominantly a literature review and critique of others interpretations of their own research, reinterpreting their findings in a way that seems more fitting to the facts presented. In addition to reviews of the key policy documents and published government research (cited throughout the text), an extensive review of the academic literature was also conducted. This developed in large part from the author's background as an anthropologist interested in childhood and youth development and social exclusion, and also called for new explorations of other disciplines; namely, political philosophy and political sociology.

Original research was conducted with the intention of testing the interpretations the author made of others research. This research took the form of semi-structured interviews with a range of individuals that broadly represented the key areas of interest to the argument of this pamphlet. Interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes, and responses were recorded using a pen and paper. Although the author used a pre-written template for each interview, most respondents talked around the subjects as had been hoped. Therefore interviews developed along lines that both the researcher and the respondent seemed comfortable with.

Due to time constraints, only fifteen interviews were conducted over a period of two weeks. The majority took place face to face; three took place over the telephone and/or via email. All informants were guaranteed confidentiality. Interviews took place with representatives of the following organisations:

- **Sure Start Unit.** Interviews were held with representatives of relevant teams within the Unit. A total of four

people were contacted. Three accepted, one declined.

- **Lambeth Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership.** Interviews were held with three individuals in this organisation. In addition to the interviews, these individuals supplied me with a number of relevant but unpublished documents (cited in the text).
- **The Daycare Trust.** Interview was held with a staff member that had worked on the *Parents' Eye* project.
- **Social Enterprise London.** Interview was held with a staff member responsible for the development of childcare.
- **Urban daycare settings.** Telephone interviews were held with individuals from four randomly-selected daycare settings in London. Due to the small size of these organisations, I will decline to name them to preserve anonymity.
- **Rural daycare settings.** Telephone interviews were held with individuals from three randomly-selected daycare settings in south Devon. Again, to protect the anonymity of these individuals I will decline to name them specifically.

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Research by Tom Widger