

Chapter 12

Family Day Care: The Trilemma of Professionalisation, Sustainability and Fairness in Flanders, France and Germany



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Abstract Although they were probably the first form of day care for the youngest children, family day care (FDC) providers have long been mistrusted by governments and the leading bourgeoisie in Belgium, France and Germany (see for instance N.W.K., 1922 for Belgium). It is not until the 1980s that family day care provisions gained momentum in several countries (see for instance Mooney A, Statham J (ed), *Family day care. International perspectives on policy, practice and quality*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2003) in a period of economic downturn, as a cheap way to deal with the increasing demand for child care for the under-threes. Under the veil of a “home as haven” ideology (Rapp G, Lloyd S, *Fam Relat* 38(4):426–430. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/585748>, p. 426, 1989) or under the political assertion of “what women naturally do” (Urban M, Dalli C. A profession speaking and thinking for itself. In: L Miller, C Dalli, M Urban (eds) *Early childhood grows up. Towards a critical ecology of the profession*. Springer, Dordrecht/Heidelberg/London/New York, p. 519, 2012), childminders were brought to the forefront of early child care policies, despite earlier criticisms of the “home away from home” thesis that childminders did not need qualifications as they were mothers (Mayall B, Petrie P. *Minder, mother and child*. Institute of Education, London, 1977). As a result, two to three decades later, in another period of economic austerity, many regions and countries are faced with high attrition rates with over 3000 childminders stopping work in Flanders in the last 5 years and the percentage of early child care services in family-based provision in Sweden diminishing from 30 to hardly 5% (e.g., *Kind en Gezin. Jaarverslag 2014*. Kind en Gezin, Brussel Jaarverslag 2014. Kind en Gezin, Brussel, 2015 (Korpi BM. *The politics of preschool. Intentions and decisions underlying the emergence and growth of Swedish preschool*. Ministry of Education and Research, Stockholm, 2007) *The politics of preschool. Intentions and decisions underlying the emergence and growth of Swedish preschool*. Ministry of

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Education and Research, Stockholm). Questions of professionalisation, sustainability and fairness are also gaining increasing political attention (Layland J, Smith A. *N Z J Educ Stud* 50(1):71–86, 2015) as it becomes clearer that qualifications matter more for the educational quality of FDC than years of experience (Fukkink RG, Lont A. *Early Child Res Q* 22:294–311, 2007). As a result, countries face quantitative and qualitative challenges (see for instance the European Qualification Framework in Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care. Proposal for key principles of a quality framework for early childhood education and care. European Commission, Brussels, 2014) and it is far from evident that a new generation of family day care providers will emerge to fill this gap. In this chapter, we discuss this trilemma of professionalisation, sustainability and fairness in general and focus also on these issues within three non-English speaking regions – Flanders, France and Germany – which are regions where these issues have hardly been documented in the English language literature. We look at how the issue of working conditions, both financially and socially (and thus the issue of fairness) increases the tensions in the discussions of professionalisation and sustainability. We discuss these tensions and document how they are shaped in policy and practice

A Historical Hindsight

Throughout history, FDC providers have been both valorised as well as demonised (Jones and Osgood 2007). Across a range of country contexts, FDC has been associated with conditions that were nothing short of calamitous: unhygienic and irresponsible practices were the rule rather than the exception. Within the Belgian context, a governmental report in 1920 stated that:

In their [the nurses – visitors] reports, the pitiful way in which these tiny creatures are treated is repeatedly stressed, for these paid *wardresses* (sic) do not possess even the minimal knowhow required to perform their duty. In this way, the children, these tiny creatures are either victimised by their guardians' ignorance or by their negligence, albeit mostly not in a premeditated fashion but as the result of mere incompetence (Jaspar 1920 in NWK 1922, own translation).

The quote is eloquent in expressing the concern about the quality of care delivered by FDC providers, and specifically in relation to child mortality. At the same time, however, governmental reports such as the above did not take into account the pitiful conditions in which the FDC providers had to perform their job: poor housing, lack of sanitation and low wages. This decontextualisation functioned to position the individual providers as responsible for the lack of quality of their service and led to their public demonisation (Vandenbroeck et al. 2010).

Post World War II, while infant mortality decreased, and contingent with the introduction of psychology as the scientific foundation of care and education, the ever-growing importance given to the idea that mothers should stay at home to raise their own children was consolidated with the rise of attachment theory (see Bowlby 1965). By the 1950s and 1960s, the importance of maternal care had become fully

popularised, further disparaging mothers working outside the home as well as other (institutionalised) child care services (Burman 1994).

Although in the 1970s public child care services gradually expanded in most affluent countries, the subordinate role of the FDC provider relative to group-based public child care remained intact. In this context, public child care services merely functioned as a lever for the emancipation of highly educated women working outside the home, rather than to propagate care and educational environments for the well-being of children or to alleviate the situation of the (un)professional status of childminders. Indeed, as we argue next, it was not until the beginning of the 1980s that FDC providers gained recognition and positive attention from policy makers (Vandenbroeck 2009).

A Series of Unfortunate Events?

The 1980s brought a sudden end to the welfare state that had flourished during the 1960s and 1970s and therefore also to the expansion of child care services advocated by feminist movements on the European continent. The oil crisis, accompanied by substantial price increases, stock market crashes and bankruptcies, led to an economic crisis characterised by governmental budgetary constraints and high unemployment. One consequence was that low-skilled women were locked out of the labour market, even as employment for higher educated women in the growing tertiary sector continued to increase. As a result there was a growing need for new child care places in a period of budgetary constraints. In this context FDC providers thrived across much of the Western world (Mooney and Statham 2003). From being a highly distrusted, unregulated (Alberola 2009; Gelder 2003), little monitored and barely recognised workforce (Vandenbroeck 2009), in the 1980s, FDC providers became highly valued as serving a dual goal. Firstly, through the very low wages and precarious working conditions (e.g., no social security) of the FDC providers new child care places were secured without much impact on governmental budgets. Secondly, as FDC providers were primarily recruited among low educated women, unemployment statistics were substantially reduced. In the public perception, FDC providers were seen as substitute-mothers who did “what women naturally do” (Urban and Dalli 2012, p. 519) and wielded their maternal skills and experiences (Vandenbroeck 2009) to provide a “home away from home” (Mayall and Petrie 1977). The unprecedented growth of FDC in the 1980s and 1990s entailed a trend of deprofessionalisation or counter-professionalisation of the child care workforce, since a growing proportion of formal child care was delivered by providers who did not have to meet any qualification requirements; this deprofessionalisation was legitimated by a vague concept of female “love” and short training sessions (Peeters 2008, 2012).

Two to three decades later, the rise of globalisation coupled with a pervasive neo-liberalism has bequeathed a definite trend towards privatisation of hitherto public services (Penn 2014) and a focus on individualism and personal responsibility. The

introduction of concepts such as autonomy and freedom of choice for parents into public policy discourse has been used to justify funding cuts in a number of public services, including in the field of early childhood education and care (Vandebroek 2009):

[...] just like France, Belgium has gone from policies promoting public day-care services to give all children an equal start in life to policies supporting more private and family forms of care. Also, as in France, this shift in policy has been presented as a way to promote 'free choice' for families (Morel 2007, p. 627–628).

These outgrowths of the neo-liberal turn are not only apparent in Flanders and France but in many other countries; in times of economic downturn, private and family forms of child care are promoted as a cheap answer to deal with the increasing demand for child care for the youngest children (Mooney and Statham 2003). However, the combination of counter-professionalisation and precarious working conditions raises on-going questions in present times: questions of sustainability, questions of fairness and questions of quality. These issues are particularly salient as they also question the role of the State.

The Downturn of Child Care as a Public Good

At the time of writing, the coincidence of the privatisation of services, the 'home-as-haven' ideology and the language of individual choice, has resulted in the down-playing of the importance of the State as the public provider of accessible and affordable child care. The language of choice has framed parents as responsible consumers; yet by simultaneously denying structural positions of disadvantage (Burman 1994) this language also effectively nullified choice. As a consequence, for many years, parents have been held responsible when 'choosing' child care of lower quality, denying that choice is always moulded by environmental constraints (Vandebroek and Lazzari 2014).

Meanwhile, in policy as well as in the academia there is a growing consensus that the quality of ECEC is a crucial precondition for an equal headstart for every child (Penn 2009; Urban 2008) and a growing concern about unequal quality. There is abundant evidence that both pre-service and in-service training are important levers for achieving benefits from ECEC provision (Urban et al. 2011; European Commission 2014). National and international politics have now acknowledged that ECEC of high quality benefits *all* young children. Consequently, the days when child care could be considered as just about taking care of children are now a distant memory, and thus FDC is expected to provide much more than custodial care (Vandebroek 2009). Rather, the early years are now considered particularly important from an educational perspective and not just from a labour market perspective (Sylva et al. 2004; Urban 2008; Vandebroek et al. 2010). In the context of growing income inequalities and increasing diversity, child care is considered to

be particularly beneficial for disadvantaged children, thus making the educational aspect of early childhood provision increasingly important. As a result, the “home-as-haven” ideology is increasingly countered with the question “whose home”? In this way, the quality of FDC has become a public as well as a political concern (Davies et al. 2012; Layland and Smith 2015). It has also become a focus for researchers (e.g., Layland 2015) with empirical studies severely challenging the ‘home-as-haven’ assumptions and showing that training and qualifications matter more to quality than years of experience (Fukkink and Lont 2007).

Within this context, tensions between the imperative to invest in the quantity versus the quality of ECEC provisions have increased. Quality of ECEC has become an increasingly important area of investment, as solving inequalities is now seen as less a matter of redistributing outcomes (e.g., through taxation), and more a matter of investing in equality of opportunities (through early education) (see Morabito and Vandenbroeck 2014).

This tension becomes particularly salient knowing that “high levels of systemic professionalism are more difficult to achieve when ECEC is predominantly private and market-oriented” (Urban et al. 2011, p. 46). In this way, the FDC profession has evolved from being the solution to the child care problem in the 1980s to being part of the professionalisation problem in the new millennium. The net result is that FDC providers are back to being the Cinderellas of child care, much as they were a century ago. Indeed, FDC providers are in the middle of a trilemma that straddles sustainability, professionalisation, and fairness. Over the last decades, expansion of ECEC has been through (in many countries often unregulated or de-regulated) FDC and through the privatisation of services brought about by neo-liberalism. This is in tension with the renewed attention to professionalism and fair working conditions, and thus to the sustainability of the ECEC system. Moreover, it appears that processes of professionalisation are not only reputed as essential preconditions for quality but are additionally eulogised as possible remedies for looming shortages in the field of ECEC (Vandenbroeck et al. 2013):

A highly skilled workforce is the decisive factor for delivering early years quality and improving outcomes for young children. However, the current state of the sector presents a real barrier to achieving the high quality, high value workforce that is needed (Cooke and Lawton 2008, p. 16).

The Trilemma (Part I): Tensions Between Quality, Sustainability and Fairness

The rest of this chapter elaborates on these tensions between the needs for professionalisation, fair working conditions and sustainability. We argue that – considering the recent history – the attrition of FDC is probably inevitable; and that the time is over when FDC can be considered the cheaper surrogate of centre-based child care.

As we noted earlier, FDC experienced significant growth in the 1980s and 1990s in many countries, recruiting among low-educated and unemployed women. This cohort is now reaching the age of retirement, or will do so in the next decade. As a result, many countries in Europe and beyond are facing significant attrition of FDC providers and the extent to which new cohorts of FDC providers will compensate for this natural attrition is highly questionable. Nowadays, ECEC of a high quality is not only premised on the principles of accessibility, availability and affordability (see Vandenbroeck and Lazzari 2014) but is also valued in terms of sustainability and fairness and increased professionalism. However, the growing demand for quality in terms of enhanced professionalisation (Layland 2015) is largely at odds with childminders' everyday realities. In our current society, where the need for child care workers is vastly increasing (Cameron and Moss 2007), the goal of sustainable and social child care as well as any aspiration for professionalisation is challenged by a climate where investment in training is undermined by low pay and where gaining extra qualifications seems counterproductive in the face of very few job opportunities and limited job mobility (Cooke and Lawton 2008; Oberhuemer 2011; Urban et al. 2012).

This trend has reinforced the natural attrition of an already decreasing number of childminders (Cameron and Moss 2007) and poses additional difficulties in recruiting and retaining early years workers (Moss et al. 2006). Today, it is simply not possible anymore to recruit a workforce, claiming that this is 'what women naturally do', firstly because "the young women who traditionally made up the bulk of the caring workforce can find better paid employment elsewhere" (Ball and Vincent 2005, p. 562), and secondly because in most countries women are becoming increasingly higher educated than men (OECD 2012). In addition, attempts to attract more men in the ECEC sector have been only minimally successful. Despite several campaigns and some (limited) progress in the Nordic countries, not a single European country has met the benchmark of 10% men in the ECEC workforce (Peeters et al. 2015). It is also quite clear that lowering the standards cannot compensate for the on-going attrition. In conclusion, it is far from evident that a new generation will fill the gap. In order to tackle this trilemma of professionalisation, sustainability as well as fairness, the childminding profession requires an upgrade.

Flanders, France and Germany in Focus

In Flanders, France, and Germany the argument "that the quality of early childhood services and the improvement of opportunities for children and families are associated with more highly trained staff" (Dalli et al. 2012, p. 3) was welcomed by policy makers vis-à-vis the FDC sector. In practice, however, attempts at professionalising the FDC sector were hampered by what Peeters (2008) called the *mother ersatz-model*.

There are also other factors that have hampered the professionalisation of this field. For example, the childminding job is often seen as a stopgap job or a temporary

escape from unemployment, a way of earning an income whilst one's own children are young (Everiss and Dalli 2003; Gelder 2003; Peeters 2008). Such a motivation for entering this workforce is hardly conducive to a desire to invest in further qualifications. Moreover, research conducted by Deglorie (2009) has demonstrated additional push factors such as social isolation, financial incapability and/or other career opportunities (Deglorie 2009), which propel temporary childminders out of the job. Additionally, the childminding profession has been characterised by low pay, low recognition, a lack of job mobility and precarious working conditions (Aballéa 2005; Heitkötter et al. 2010; Peeters 2008, 2012; Van der Mespel 2011).

Furthermore, tackling issues of steady attrition has not gained much support within the childminding workforce itself as the workforce is internally divided on the matter of professionalisation (i.e., training, qualification and recognition) (Aballéa 2005; Alberola 2009; Bouve and Sellenet 2011; Cresson et al. 2012; Everiss and Dalli 2003; Gelder 2003; Wiemert and Heeg 2012). While on the one hand there are advocates of childminding as a learned and skilled profession (Alberola 2009; Champlong 2011; Fagnani and Math 2012), on the other hand there are still proponents of the private *mother ersatz-model* (Aballéa 2005; Alberola 2009; Bouve and Sellenet 2011; Garrity and Grath 2011). The first favour the idea of a reliable, sustainable and qualified profession (Kerl-Wienecke et al. 2013), while the latter remain entrenched in the belief that professionalisation is redundant (Alberola 2009; Kerl-Wienecke et al. 2013) and eulogise the informal character of the job, claiming that love for children and professional status do not go well together (Garrity and Grath 2011).

Despite these difficulties, several countries in Europe have invested in pathways to the professionalisation of the FDC workforce. We focus on three of these: the Flemish Community of Belgium (Flanders), France and Germany. These three countries are particularly interesting as they are seldom documented in the English language literature and their cases show how difficult the way out of the trilemma may be. We do so informed by a documentary analysis of: governmental documents; grey literature; as well as research reports from the year 2000 and onwards. In practice, the selected literature was obtained via contact with four academic researchers in the field, who contributed references and nationwide research material. These researchers were selected by dint of their extensive knowledge, expertise and experience within the field of ECEC and their academic contributions to the early years sector. The remaining sections of this chapter are based on our analysis of this literature.

Theoretically, Flemish FDC providers have to complete 40 h of initial training (Kind en Gezin 2014); French FDC providers are expected to complete 120 h (Champlong 2011) and their German colleagues 160 h (Kerl-Wienecke et al. 2013) of training. However, in Flanders these requirements have only recently been implemented (1 April 2014); in France the practical implementation of the training is reported to be inadequate and ad hoc (Alberola 2009; Champlong 2011); and in Germany, training is only required when taking care of more than five children at the same time (Oberhuemer et al. 2010b). Thus, in practice, these requirements can barely be considered as a sustainable path to professionalisation in the early years.

Moreover, policies in Flanders, France and Germany have not considered possibilities for horizontal job mobility (for instance to other front-line caring professions) or for vertical job mobility (increase in rank, by becoming a social worker or an early childhood trainer for instance) and there are no specific degree requirements that contribute to further validation and recognition of the childminding sector (Alberola 2009; Heitkötter et al. 2010; Peeters 2012). In Germany the first steps towards job mobility have recently been taken with the development of the *Kompetenzprofil Kindertagespflege* (competence profile FDC). The competence profile has integrated the wide range of information – the needed knowledge, skills and attitudes – relevant to the childminding profession across the different states in Germany into a national directory of childminding competences. In this way FDC competencies can be included into the curricula of different professional vocational programmes which also have provision for recognition of previous on-the-job experience. The competence profile is also being recommended for use by FDC facilitators or service managers (Kerl-Wienecke et al. 2013) as a guideline for training and evaluating FDC providers. In Flanders, some job mobility within the FDC sector is likewise being promoted through the recognition which schools offering training for the centre-based role of *Begeleider in de Kinderopvang* (mentor in childcare centre) provide for the obligatory 40 h of training required by the Flemish government as a precondition to working in the childminding sector. Programmes offering the *Begeleider in de Kinderopvang* training now accept the certificate of 40 h *previously acquired competences* as a certificate of prior learning and exempt holders of the certificate from repeating that training as part of acquiring their qualification to work in childcare centres. In this way, both the competence profile in Germany, and the previously acquired competences in Flanders function as a stepping-off point to further training and vocational education, and thus job mobility.

Notwithstanding the fact that the recognition of prior learning opens up pathways to formal qualifications, the main focus on competences further shifts any responsibility for learning, professionalisation or job mobility onto the sole individual (Vandenbroeck et al. 2013). Thus, although these lists of competences might seem an attractive way to upskill the FDC workforce, in practice, the childminder who attains them is left with a list of required skillsets and procedures (Vandenbroeck et al. 2013) and in the unenviable position of “having achieved only a transition from the worker as substitute mother to the worker as a lower or higher grade technician” (Moss 2012, p. viii). In this context, Urban et al. (2011) also critically note that structural qualifying pathways should be effected at all levels of the competent ECEC system rather than shrugged off onto the individual as the sole precondition for professionalisation.

Clearly, professionalising the FDC sector is rather difficult when internally a part of the workforce is still succumbing to the simplification of the work as mothering (Ball and Vincent 2005). In the absence of a shared professional identity, externally implemented policies for professionalisation are insufficient, individualised and overall unsustainable. With this in mind, the answer to the question “who will do the care work in the future” (Cameron and Moss 2007, p. 51) is unlikely to be answered by the childminding workforce.

Furthermore, a split in administration of preschool education versus child care in Flanders, France and Germany (Oberhuemer et al. 2010a; Penn 2014) has stifled any political will to invest in FDC, reducing the childminding workforce to a single pawn in the larger political playing field.

The Logic of No Alternative?

By contrast with the existing traditional structures of child care services and the haphazard patchwork route into a childminding career, new hybrid forms of child care have been introduced in France and Germany (Bouve and Sellenet 2011; Stempinski 2006); these hybrid forms offer new possibilities and alternative routes to professionalisation.

In Aix-en-Provence (France), *les crèches satellite* (satellite nurseries) have been installed (see Bouve and Sellenet 2011) to unite centre-based care and FDC. In practice this means that two or three childminders spend a considerable amount of time in the *crèche* (nursery) where they exchange experiences, educational practices and receive individual as well as joint support from the *puéricultrice* (child nurse), while the children in their care interact and play within a larger group of peers. Besides the increased visibility of the FDC provision and any long deserved professional acknowledgment, this project offers childminders as well as public service providers the possibility to jointly reflect on long-established daily routines, to instigate collaboration, as well as a thorough analysis of practices. Similarly, in Germany, FDC services have been linked up to *Kindergarten* (nurseries). German research conducted by Stempinski (2006) showed that a beginning acquaintance between two divergent professions has been set up via shared spaces, materials and equipment (Stempinski 2006; Wiemert and Heeg 2012). Possibilities for dialogue were facilitated with the overall aim to create a common pedagogical understanding between centre-based care workers and FDC providers. This initiative has also facilitated children's transitions between different types of care (Stempinski 2006). In both examples, continuity of care is guaranteed (Bouve and Sellenet 2011; Wiemert and Heeg 2012). Such pluriprofessional teams (Alberola 2009) not only allow reflection, dialogue and discussion about the meaning of the work that early childhood teachers and childminders do, its required competences and professional status, but also enhance the development of a joint professional identity (Wiemert and Heeg 2012). Via a process of continuous professional development (see Eurofound 2015), peer-learning and the exchange of good practices (Urban et al. 2012), the co-construction of knowledge and shared understanding is promoted.

These examples not only evidence that co-operation is an effective, important and necessary way for the further professionalisation of the FDC workforce, they also broaden existing conceptualisations of professionalisation beyond the political imposition of individual training requirements and competence profiles and encourage the re-thinking of the existing dichotomy between FDC and centre-based care.

Also, in this way, matters of social isolation, insufficient training and low recognition (Bouve and Sellenet 2011) are tackled.

The Trilemma (Part II): Bringing Quality, Sustainability and Fairness Together

The OECD (2006) recommended that early years policies should strive for a systemic and integrated approach to ECEC to promote a universal approach to access and substantial public investment in services, alongside a participatory approach to quality improvement and appropriate training and working conditions for all staff in ECEC provisions (OECD 2006).

However, when it comes to the FDC workforce, it appears that the predominant ‘home-as-haven’ ideology and the discourse of ‘choice’, have acted to thwart public investment in this field and left it at the mercy of the dominant economic and political tendencies (Vandenbroeck et al. 2010). These forces positioned early childhood services as a private commodity rather than a public good (Moss 2007) and hampered processes of professionalisation as well as hindered the drive for fairness and sustainability in ECEC. In this way, they also undermined the ideal of children’s overall entitlement to care (Lloyd 2012; Moss 2007). Moreover, the origins of child-minding as surrogate mothering, the lack of a professional identity and the lack of policies for professionalisation, have acted to maintain the status quo of low pay and valorisation, poor working conditions and social isolation (Bouve and Sellenet 2011).

Within this context, emergent hybrid forms of child care services might offer an escape route out of the logic of no alternative and prompt a rethink of the artificial dichotomy between public child care services and FDC rather than vindicating more of the same (Cameron and Moss 2007). *Les crèches satellite* challenge clichéd simplifications of substitute-mothering and show how via co-operation – rather than individual responsibility – matters of social isolation and low valorisation can be tackled. These hybrid forms of child care function as sites of constant reconstruction (Urban and Dalli 2012) of professional identities through dialogue, reflection and discussion (Mouffe 2005). In the aspiration for sustainable child care, “many structural characteristics need to be considered simultaneously; with an understanding of how each structural characteristic has an impact on quality within each national system” (European Commission 2014, p. 30).

Recently, the European Commission argued that “long-term investment in reflective professionals, as well as in participatory practices [...] creates a dynamic environment where participants learn from each other” (European Commission 2014, p. 49). It is these long-term investments that are necessary conditions to overcome the trilemma of sustainability, fairness and professionalism. Hybrid forms of child care services such as the linking of *Kindergarten* and FDC services in Germany or *les crèches satellite* in France function as prime examples of this long-term invest-

ment and encourage FDC providers and public child care services to share a common pedagogical understanding as joint reflective practitioners, unimpeded by budgetary savings in times of austerity and retrenchment: a perfect start for the much required upgrade of the childminding profession.

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