

Chapter One: Neoliberalism's moment

Neoliberalism as worldview has sunk its roots deep into everyday life, almost to the point of passing as the 'ideology of no ideology'. Indeed, at this late hour, the world is still full of people who believe neoliberalism doesn't really exist (Mirowski, 2013a, p.28).

Neoliberalism, like many successful political narratives, provides not only a set of economic or political ideas, but also an account of who we are and how we behave...[But] so pervasive has neoliberalism become that we seldom even recognise it as an ideology. We seem to accept the proposition that this utopian faith describes a neutral force – a kind of biological law, like Darwin's theory of evolution, but the philosophy arose as a conscious attempt to reshape human life and shift the locus of power (Monbiot, 2017, pp.30-31).

Neoliberalism has a devastating impact on the early childhood sector with its focus on standardisation, push-down curriculum and its positioning of children as investments for future economic productivity... [Yet n]eoliberalism has become so entrenched in our thinking that for many, there is no alternative: it is simply the way the world operates (Sims, 2017, pp.1,2).

There's a lot of talk in early childhood education and care (ECEC) today about 'outcomes' and 'quality', 'testing' and 'assessment', 'interventions' and 'programmes', 'evidence-based' and 'best practice', 'investment' and 'human capital', 'preparation' and 'readiness', 'markets and marketing'. But why do we talk like this about ECEC, in such technical, instrumental and economic terms? Why have we come to accept such language so unquestioningly as the normal and obvious way to discuss the education of young children? What are the consequences of this language and the thinking behind it? What is going on?

Our attempt to answer these questions is the subject of this book. In a nutshell, we contend that, like so much else in our lives, ECEC has over the last 40 or so years been drawn into the gravitational field of a powerful force, a political ideology that has become increasingly influential across the world since the 1980s: the ideology of neoliberalism. The way we talk so often today about young children and services for them is the language of neoliberalism. This book is an exploration of how neoliberalism, with its distinctive worldview and signature, has 'sunk its roots deep' into ECEC, of how it has come to influence the ways in which we think about, talk about and do ECEC with, in Margaret Sims's words, 'a devastating impact'.

To propose a relationship between neoliberalism and education is not, as we shall see, original; much has been written about the deep penetration of neoliberalism into this field. Most of this work, though, has focused on compulsory and higher education, neoliberalism in the school and university. Some, too, have acknowledged neoliberalism's implication in ECEC, but less has been written on this subject. We aim, therefore, to go more deeply and more broadly into neoliberalism and its impact on the early childhood sector, to make the existence and effects of this ideology more visible, more believable, and in doing so to emphasise the significance of the political and economic for early childhood education.

This is a book of exploration, but as we explore and, hopefully, show more clearly the neoliberal environment and the way it governs and shapes contemporary early childhood education and care, we also want to avoid some traps. One of these traps is reductionism, to end up implying everything is determined by one cause, in this case neoliberalism. There are, of course, other forces and influences bearing on early childhood services, and these will vary from place to place. Moreover, while the influence of neoliberalism is pervasive, how far it has sunk its roots also varies from place to place. Another trap is to treat neoliberalism itself as a homogeneous thing: it may have 'become omnipresent but it is a complex, mediated and heterogeneous kind of omnipresence, not a state of blanket uniformity' (Mirowski, 2013a, p.52). So those who subscribe to neoliberalism will not all sing from exactly the same hymn sheet, context and culture always having a part to play.

Last but not least, while we want to argue that neoliberalism is a very powerful force, impacting on ECEC in substantial and varied ways, we do not want to treat it as if it was all powerful, an irresistible and inevitable force, 'a kind of biological law', before which all must submit and to which 'there is no alternative' - a refrain much used by Margaret Thatcher, the British Prime Minister who, as we shall see, played an important part in establishing neoliberalism as a dominant ideology. This, Joan Tronto argues, is a trap into which it is easy to fall;

Many articles and books have been written that see neoliberalism as a problematic way to organise human societies...Yet, the main response of scholars to neoliberalism has been either to treat it as the new normal or to think of it as invincible. Among the first group, what is surprising is that scholars continue to accept this state of affairs rather than to react against it (Tronto, 2017, p.27)

Neoliberalism is certainly a powerful force and it has a big impact. But it is, as we shall discuss, resistible and is resisted. There are alternatives in theory and in practice. Nor is neoliberalism dominant and invincible in perpetuity. Indeed, arguably neoliberalism has at least peaked and may be starting to enter the phase of decline and fall: as the newspaper columnist John Harris observes, 'a great deal of the free-market, laissez-faire ideas that have dominated the last four decades [are] being criticised and contested, perhaps as never before' (Harris, 2018). While economist Kate Raworth argues that

putting blind faith in markets – while ignoring the living world, society, and the runaway power of banks – has taken us to the brink of ecological, social and financial collapse. It is time for the neoliberal show to leave the stage: a very different story is emerging (Raworth, 2017, p.61).

It is important, though, to keep this talk of decline in perspective. For neoliberalism is by now deeply entrenched – it has 'become part of the mental furniture of the political elite' (Marquand, 2004, p.118) - and reluctant to relinquish its leading role. Despite being subject to increasing criticism and scepticism, despite being seriously undermined by the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath, neoliberalism has shown itself to be resilient, revealing considerable powers of recovery. It is far from finished.

One reason for this staying power is the failure of critics to develop and clearly articulate alternatives to neoliberalism: to not only argue another world is possible but to provide convincing and detailed accounts of what that world might be like and how we might get from here to there. The moral is clear. It is more important than ever for work to be undertaken on developing new ideas, for example about ECEC, and new policies to enact those ideas. The last thing we need now is to throw our hands up in despair, when so much needs to be done to prepare for post-neoliberalism.

The focus of this book is neoliberalism and early childhood education and care, in particular, we explore three ways in which neoliberalism has shaped and governed this field. Competition, choice and calculation are central themes of neoliberalism, and these operate through the medium of the market and transactions in it between buyers and sellers. So in Chapter Three, we examine how neoliberalism's belief in this mechanism has been enacted in ECEC and the place of the market in the delivery of services for young children; we consider, too, what evidence there is about the consequences of delivering early childhood services in this way. In Chapter Four we consider neoliberalism's imaginary of ECEC: the images of the child, the parent, the early childhood centre and the early childhood worker, as

seen through the neoliberal lens, and how these images are productive of the subjectivities or self-identities of these individuals and institutions. Then in Chapter Five we turn to the governing of ECEC under neoliberalism, in particular how it is intensively controlled through the principles and techniques of new public management.

In these three chapters, our focus is on neoliberalism and how it construes and practices early childhood education and care. Our focus is critical, but the focus nevertheless is on this particular perspective or worldview, and its consequences, including whether it seems to work in its own terms – does it do what it says on the tin? This focus does not mean that we think neoliberalism normal, invincible or, indeed, desirable. On the contrary, we view neoliberalism as deeply problematic, eminently resistible and eventually replaceable. In the final chapter, therefore, we go further into why we think neoliberalism has little or no future and turn to alternatives; for if the neoliberal mantra has been ‘there are no alternatives’, ours is that ‘there are alternatives’. We end on a hopeful note (at least for those who, like us, find neoliberalism unpalatable), arguing that this worldview, so powerful for the last 30 years, is faced by growing scepticism and disenchantment, and entering an inevitable period of decline and fall - and that now is the time to develop and propagate different ways of thinking, talking and doing ECEC. The danger facing neoliberalism is, in Michel Foucault’s words, that ‘as soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult, and quite possible’ (Foucault, 1988a, p.155).

But before we move to this exploration of neoliberalism and ECEC, we think it useful to review and reflect on some of the considerable body of work that has been done on neoliberalism and the wider world of education, in particular in primary and secondary schooling, some of which will certainly resonate with early childhood education. That is the theme of Chapter Two. But prior to that, we turn in this first chapter to offer a short introduction to neoliberalism – what it is, how it has emerged as such a powerful force in the world today, and what have been some of its main effects on that world. We finish the chapter by introducing three important concepts that are closely related to neoliberalism: human capital, public choice and new public management.

What is neoliberalism?

We have been induced by certain politicians, economists and commentators to accept a vicious ideology of extreme competition and individualism that pits us against each other, and weakens the social bonds that make our lives worth

living...Neoliberalism has seeped into our language, our understanding of the choices we face and our conception of ourselves. For this reason it has become almost invisible to us: we cannot step back far enough to see it (Monbiot, 2017, pp.25, 29).

Before seeking to answer the question 'What is neoliberalism?', we should first acknowledge that it is a contentious term 'that has attracted a remarkable degree of frustration and fury, in politics, the media and within academia' (Davies, 2016), being dismissed by some as vacuous or useless or a delusion that does not really exist. We disagree, siding with the many writers who have argued that the term describes a meaningful body of thought and action propagated by what Mirowski (2014, p.2) terms 'a thought collective and political movement combined' that has come to operate and exert influence on a global scale. So, if we argue there is such a thing as neoliberalism, what is it?

David Harvey, in his book 'A Brief History of Neoliberalism', argues that neoliberalism has 'pervasive effects on [our] ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world' (2005, 3); or as George Monbiot puts it in the quote that starts this section, it has 'seeped' into our lives, into our consciousness and our identity of who we are. Most people today recognise the signs and symptoms of neoliberalism, including an increasingly competitive and individualised world. Yet far fewer can name or see or comprehend the cause, which (Monbiot's words again) 'has become almost invisible to us.' Indeed, as Philip Mirowski puts it at the start of this chapter, 'the world is still full of people who believe neoliberalism doesn't really exist.' It might be said that neoliberalism hides itself in full view.

Neoliberalism has been variously described as a 'theory of everything' (Mirowski, 2013a, p.23); 'a hegemonic ideology' (Gormley, 2018, p.4) and a 'political ideology, a set of ideas that offer a coherent view about how society should be ordered' (Tronto, 2017, p.29); 'an intellectual and political movement for concrete social and economic change'; and a successful narrative or story (Monbiot, 2016a; Raworth, 2017). It can also be understood as what the French philosopher Michel Foucault calls a 'dominant discourse' 'Dominant discourses' are narratives or stories that have a decisive influence on a particular subject, by insisting that they are the only way to think, talk and behave, that they are the only reality, that they represent *the* Truth.

Such discourses seek to impose, in Foucault's words, a 'regime of truth', through exercising power over our thoughts and actions, directing or governing how we construct the world or

weave reality and, therefore, what we see as 'the truth'. Typical of dominant discourses is how they make 'assumptions and values invisible, turn subjective perspectives and understandings into apparently objective truths, and determine that some things are self-evident and realistic while others are dubious and impractical' (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.17). Or as Elizabeth St.Pierre comments, 'it is difficult to think or act outside [a dominant discourse]...other statements and others' ways of thinking remain unintelligible, outside the realm of possibility' (2000, p.485). In dominant discourses, fictional stories claim to be non-fictional statements, presenting themselves as natural, unquestionable and inevitable, the common sense of everyday life, just something we take for granted. This is simply how things are, the dominant discourse asserts; no need to add any qualifications, to say 'in my opinion' or 'it seems to me' or 'from my perspective'.

What is captured by these various terms to describe neoliberalism is the idea of a particular way of thinking, a particular worldview, a particular utopian (or dystopian, depending on your point of view) vision that has laid claim to understand how human life on earth works and what needs to be done to bring about an ideal future – and that, for reasons we will discuss later, has achieved a position of dominance, not only in areas like the economy and government, but more insidiously in our language, our understandings and even our conception of ourselves and others. What are the basic tenets of this powerful theory, movement, ideology, story?

Neoliberalism is based on certain strong values and beliefs, starting with the three Cs: competition, choice and calculation. Many would see competition as neoliberalism's first principle, its core value, ranging from the radical environmentalist George Monbiot to the French philosopher Michel Foucault to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a mainstay of the global economic establishment, which has described increasing competition as one of the 'two main planks' of the Neoliberal agenda (the second plank, according to the IMF, is 'a smaller role for the state', to which we shall return later in this chapter'). Susan George (1999) puts it this way: 'competition is central [to neoliberalism] because it separates the sheep from the goats, the men from the boys, the fit from the unfit...[supposedly allocating] all resources, whether physical, natural, human or financial with the greatest possible efficiency'. The efficient allocation of resources is a central goal of neoliberalism.

The second C is choice, not the collective choice of a community engaging in participatory democracy, but an ideal of individual choice where autonomous individuals choose between competing offers, to find the product (broadly defined) that best suits their needs, preferences and pockets: competition improves choice, and choice stimulates competition.

While for this synergy to work well requires the third C, calculation, to come into play. In each transaction, both buyer and seller, the one who has something to offer and the one who wants something, must be able to calculate as accurately as possible what terms are in their own best interests, what will maximise their benefits and minimise their costs.

This basic relationship of competition, choice and calculation requires certain conditions to perform as it should and to become embedded in all aspects of life. First and foremost, it needs the establishment and effective functioning of markets, places where sellers and buyers can be brought together and where competition, choice and calculation can work their magic. Neoliberals have a strong faith in markets as the best means of maximising efficiency by ensuring the optimal allocation of resources; the argument goes that 'by discovering a natural hierarchy of winners and losers, the market creates a more efficient system than could ever be devised through planning or design' (Monbiot, 2017, p.30).

This faith in the virtue of markets calls not only for "'market" society [to] be treated as a natural and inexorable state of mankind' (Mirowski, 2013a, p.55), but for extending marketisation to all parts of the economy - and beyond to the rest of society. Indeed, the market is seen as the basis for all social relations. This means the commodification in principle of everything, 'the systematic conversion of common goods into private and tradeable property, that makes possible the reduction of everything to a calculus' (Venn, 2018, p.42). In this way, everything has a price and is tradable in the market place, to be bought and sold for a profit.

Wendy Brown uses the term 'economization' to describe this conversion of domains, activities and subjects previously deemed outside the economic into the economic and the insertion of economic rationality into every nook and cranny of life:

One crucial signature of neoliberalism is its extension of....'economization' – the conversion of non-economic domains, activities and subjects into economic ones – to all spheres of life...[This is] the ascendancy of a form of normative reason that extends market metrics and practices to every dimension of human life; political, cultural, personal, vocational, educational...[T]his form of reason displaces other modes of valuation for judgment and action, displaces basic liberal democratic criteria for justice, with business metrics, transforms the state itself into a firm, produces everyday norms of identity and conduct that configure the subject as human capital, and configures every kind of human activity in terms of rational self-investment and entrepreneurship (Brown, 2016, pp.3, 5,8)

In sum, neoliberalism reduces everything to the economic.

This spread of neoliberal reasoning, beliefs and practices 'from the state to the soul' (Brown, 2015a) is important to understand, marking out, as it does, neoliberalism as a totalising theory and project, a meta-narrative that encompasses everything and everyone and shows 'total blindness to non-economic forms of activity or experience' (Davies, 2015a). Everything, therefore, is reducible to economics and to the logic and practice of the market place, with market relations becoming the basis for all social relations and almost every single aspect of our lives (Shamir, 2008); everything can be allocated a value, its worth rendered measurable and calculable. Competition and choice, self-interest and calculation are applicable even to the most intimate of settings and human relationships, including marriage and parenthood; indeed, the economist Gary Becker received the 1992 Nobel Prize in Economics for his work in applying market principles to human behaviour, including an attempt to use market logics to understand household dynamics (Becker, 1991), including marriage and parenthood. Not only should the market 'be the organizing principle for all political, social and economic conditions' (Giroux, 2004, p.495), but market exchange is valued in neoliberalism as an ethic, 'acting as a guide to all human action' (Harvey, 2005, p.3). We delve further into the role of the market in early childhood education and care in Chapter Three.

Neoliberals believe that private businesses are the best way to deliver products and services, offering more choice, efficiency and innovation through the discipline of competition in the market place; as a consequence, 'needs formerly met by public agencies on a principle of citizen rights, or through personal relationships in communities and families, are now to be met by companies selling services in a market' (Connell, 2013, p.100). This calls for privatisation of formerly public utilities and public services, either selling off public assets or opening up previously publicly-run services to private competition. Taken to its extreme, society itself 'should be run in every aspect as if it were a business, its social relations reimagined as commercial transactions' (Monbiot, 2017, p.30). This process of privatisation is not just about who provides utilities and services, but about their very nature: as Brown (2015) observes, 'public institutions and services have not merely been outsourced but thoroughly recast as private goods for individual investment or consumption'. In short, they are commodified, traded in the marketplace as commodities.

The other side of the coin is a deep distaste for public provision of services, which must, neoliberals believe, inevitably be less efficient and innovative than private counterparts. Where it continues to exist, such public provision should be run as competing businesses,

with private businesses often allowed in to further augment competition. This inevitably means a smaller role for the State, identified by the International Monetary Fund as the second main plank of the neoliberal agenda. Neoliberalism sees no need or case for a strong 'welfare state', providing collective responses to protect citizens against risks and enhance their well-being, indeed this can only undermine the workings of the market and the autonomy and responsibility of the individual.

But a smaller role for the State does not mean no role for the State. Neoliberals should not be confused with their 19th century cousins, *laissez-faire* liberals; while sharing many ideas with their 20th century descendants, including a belief in market relations and an abhorrence of dependency, these 19th century liberals sought to exclude the State entirely from the workings of markets and private businesses. Today's neoliberals seek to control the State, redefining its State, not destroying it; that role is reconfigured, away from being a provider of services and a guarantor of citizen rights, to being an enabler of a market-friendly culture and guarantor of other conditions needed for a neoliberal society. As Mirowski explains,

conditions for [neoliberalism's] existence must be constructed and will not come about "naturally" in the absence of concerted political effort and organisation...What is "neo" about neoliberalism...[is] the remaking and redeployment of the state as the core agency that actively fabricates the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations suited to making the fiction of the market real and consequential...

[Neoliberals want] to explore new formats of techno-managerial governance that protects their ideal market from what they perceive to be unwarranted political interference...[Democracy] must in any case be kept relatively impotent to ensure citizen initiatives rarely are able to change much of anything...One way to exert power in restraint of democracy is to bend the state to a market logic, pretending one can replace "citizens" with "customers" (Mirowski, 2013a, pp.53, 54, 56, 57)..

This last point about customers brings us to a final part of the neoliberal story. Competition, choice, calculation, commodification, markets, the respective roles of the private and the public – all these depend, to deliver the neoliberal utopia, on the last piece in the puzzle: the subject. For neoliberalism has the ambition to re-construct subjectivity, identity, the sense of who one is; as Margaret Thatcher put this goal, 'economics are the method, the object is to change heart and soul'. Neoliberalism 'thoroughly revises what it means to be a human person' (Mirowski, 2013a, p.58), calling forth a very particular subject, an individual with a very particular subjectivity.

The shift from 'citizen' to 'customer' is just one part of a much larger forging of personal identity, the neoliberal subject as *homo economicus*, economic man (or woman). This neoliberal subject is self-interested and competitive; a capable market trader and informed consumer, independent and self-reliant, so able to 'self-manage according to market principles of discipline, efficiency, and competitiveness' (Ong, 2006, p.4); and able, too, to calculate what is in their best interests. She or he is an autonomous self-manager, taking responsibility for her or himself without expecting the solidarity or support of others, focused on finding individual solutions to life's challenges, while eschewing criticism of the system or making demands for any form of social protection.

This subject is responsible for competing successfully in a competitive labour market. This means being an entrepreneur of the self, seeking to maximise returns, 'being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings' (Foucault, 2008, p.226). For this individual, 'every kind of human activity [is reconfigured] in terms of rational self-investment and entrepreneurship' (Brown, 2016, p.5). She or he must be infinitely flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the market, in a state of constant readiness, perpetually prepared for whatever turns up, for whatever new turn takes place in the economy and employment, ever responsive to signals from the market. As such, she or he is 'malleable rather than committed, flexible rather than principled – essentially depthless' (Ball, 2012, p.31). Last but not least, the neoliberal subject, *homo economicus*, flexible and ever ready, is a quantum of 'human capital', a concept we shall explain later in this chapter.

We explore further this neoliberal subject, both as child and adult, in Chapter Four.

A short history of Neoliberalism and its spread

There has been a strong and widespread global trend toward neoliberalism since the 1980s, according to a composite index that measures the extent to which countries introduced competition in various spheres of economic activity to foster economic growth (Ostry, Loungani and Furceri, 2016, p.38)

Most studies would agree with these authors, from the IMF's research, that the 1980s was when the story of neoliberalism became a big hit, gaining an influential following and widespread influence. The historian Tony Judt captures that sense of a watershed decade when he wrote that "[m]uch of what appears 'natural' today dates from the 1980s: the

obsession with wealth creation, the cult of privatization and the private sector, the growing disparities of rich and poor. And above all, the rhetoric which accompanies these: uncritical admiration for unfettered markets, disdain for the public sector...the delusion of endless growth' (Judt, 2010, pp.1-2). But the story has its origins well before then.

This is not the first time that a liberalism of 'unfettered markets' has figured as a dominant regime of political economy, at least in Europe. As previously mentioned, there was a former manifestation that thrived in the early stages of industrialisation in the 19th century, sometimes referred to as an age of *laissez-faire* capitalism. This was followed by the rise of the 'social state' from the early years of the 20th century, in part in response to the growing power of working-class movements, which brought in a greater regulation of free-wheeling capitalism and a greater recognition of the importance of social protection and collective security. Nikolas Rose has written about this earlier turn from rampant free market capitalism – epitomised by the widespread and unrestrained use of child labour in factories and mines - to a more regulated and socially responsible form:

In the face of rising political unrest and evidence of the malign effects of irregular employment, poor living conditions and squalor, socialists and social liberals were now demanding more extensive social intervention to mitigate what were now seen as the inevitable social consequences of capitalist economic arrangements. Whatever their differences, in each case the term 'social' implied a kind of anti-individualism: the need to conceive of human beings as citizens of a wider collectivity who did not merely confront one another as buyers and sellers on a competitive market. Hence at least some aspects of the economy required to be politically governed in the name of the social, in order to dispel a whole range of conflicts...and to ensure social order, social tranquillity, perhaps even social justice (Rose, 1999, p.118).

The 'social state' reached its high point, at least in the West, in the 30 years or so after the end of the Second World War, as welfare states with their collective sharing of risk, progressive taxation and protection of workers' rights contributed to a more equal balance struck between public and private interests, labour and capital (Venn, 2018). But times change, as they always do – a point worth remembering today. The age of the 'social state' has been superseded by the age of neoliberalism, the social swallowed up by the economic, the 'wider collectivity' deposed by the autonomous and self-interested subject.

Neoliberalism, based on free markets, deregulation, and limited government first emerges in the inter-war years, in a reaction, on the one hand, to New Liberalism, Progressivism and the American New Deal and, on the other, to the onset of Nazi and communist totalitarianism. It picked up again after the Second World War, with a meeting in 1947 of free market economists in the Swiss resort of Mont Pèlerin. This group, who became the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) – a closed, members-only debating society, backed by businesses and billionaires – subsequently expanded in numbers (from an initial 39 to 500, at which point membership was capped) and in geographical coverage, to become ‘the premier site of the construction of neoliberalism’ (Mirowski, 2013a, p.29), and a key part of what Mirowski (ibid.) terms the ‘Neoliberal Thought Collective’. This ‘Collective’ built out from the MPS, adding university departments that neoliberals came to dominate (e.g. in the University of Chicago, the London School of Economics, the ‘Virginia School’); foundations for education in and promotion of neoliberal doctrines, examples including those run by the Coors and Koch families; and think tanks and other organisations in the United Kingdom and the United States, where neoliberal ideas and how they might be implemented were spawned, hatched and spread (Mirowski, 2014). With more than 80 MPS-affiliated think tanks by the 1990s, ‘think tanks were the preferred vehicle of neoliberal thinkers’ (Stedman Jones, 2014, p.336). Alive and well today, these think tanks include the Heritage Foundation, the American Legislative Exchange Council and the Ayn Rand institute in the United States, and the Adam Smith Institute and the Institute of Economic Affairs in the United Kingdom.

Led by key figures such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, a huge international network was thus spun, a network that developed multiple contacts with politicians, businessmen and other sympathisers: ‘a web of institutions and people grew up to spread and popularize neoliberal ideas so that eventually they seemed the natural alternative to liberal or social democratic policies’ (ibid., p.153). But to get to the next stage, to be able to put ideas into practice, needed opportunities for radical change to open up. The first of these appeared in 1973 in Chile, when a military coup, led by the right-wing General Pinochet against the government of President Salvador Allende, initiated a turn towards neoliberalism, a new economic direction followed by other Latin American regimes, ‘though with less consistency; and [they] were soon followed by policymakers in other developing countries such as Turkey’ (Connell, 2013, p.100).

Other opportunities also came in the 1970s, with the increasing failure in that decade of the dominant post-war economic regime, social democracy or Keynesian, ‘the system of regulated capitalism and state-supplied services that was dominant in the generation from

1945 to 1980' (Connell, 2013). This failure was marked by a toxic combination of anaemic growth and high inflation, so-called 'stagflation'. But as Raworth (2017, p.67) comments,

the big time came at last in 1980 when Margaret Thatcher [Prime Minister of the UK from 1979-1990] and Ronald Reagan [President of the US from 1980 to 1988] teamed up to bring the neoliberal script to the international stage...[and] the neoliberal show has been playing ever since, powerfully framing the economic debate of the past thirty years.

The neoliberal show gained increasing audiences not only from the performance of the Thatcher-Reagan double act, but through the backing of influential international organisations; '[Neoliberals] learned to appreciate that suitably staffed international institutions such as the WTO [World Trade Organisation], WB [World Bank], the IMF, and other units are better situated [than pure market discipline] to impose neoliberal policies on recalcitrant nation-states' (Mirowski, 2013a, p.62). With the help of the hefty leverage that such Western-based institutions could exert on national governments globally, for example through the dispersal of large loans with strings attached, 'neoliberal policies were imposed – often without democratic consent – on much of the world' (Monbiot, 2017, pp.34-35). Among those imposed neoliberal policies was a portfolio for education, including early childhood education and care, as Amita Gupta observes:

When translated into educational policy and pedagogy [neoliberal] ideas reflect a distinct shift from a group-orientation to an individual-orientation; education pivots from being a social, not-for-profit enterprise to a consumer-based, for-profit movement. In Asia, a "...shared trend of making a 'right' turn through neoliberal policies to reform preschool education" (Lee, 2012: 31) has been observed. This shift is manifested in increased privatization of schools, standardization of curriculum, regulation of institutions through stricter licensing procedures, increased hierarchical control over teachers with a corresponding decrease in teacher autonomy, and a policy narrative that is couched in the language of dominant "Western" ECE discourses (Gupta, 2018, p.14).

This neoliberalising of education is explored in more detail in subsequent chapters.

It was an impressive achievement. The unimaginable had become the new normal; for as George (1999) so aptly puts it, '[i]n 1945 or 1950, if you had seriously proposed any of the ideas and policies in today's standard neo-liberal toolkit, you would have been laughed off

the stage or sent off to the insane asylum'. What had once been the vision of a fringe group drawn from one part of the world had, by the end of the 1980s, become global and dominant. Neoliberalism had transformed the political landscape not only in the UK and the US, but globally, so that at 'the dawn of the 21st century, the triumph of the free market was almost universally accepted by mainstream politicians, public officials, and civil servants' (Stedman Jones, 2014, 329). From local beginnings, emerging from a particular spatial and temporal context, to be precise from the English-speaking world in the 1970s and 1980s, the story of neoliberalism has been borne far and wide in a process of what has been called hegemonic globalisation, 'the successful globalisation of a particular local and culturally-specific discourse to the point that it makes universal truth claims and 'localises' all rival discourses' (Santos, 2004, p. 149).

Such globalisation has owed much to taking advantage of crises when they have arisen, what Naomi Klein calls 'The Shock Doctrine' (Klein, 2008) to describe how crises have provided opportunities for the implementation of neoliberal policies. But the point to emphasise is that the neoliberals created a highly effective and disciplined movement and were ready when crises came along, ready with well-developed ideas and with plans for enacting them, ideas and plans that had germinated in that burgeoning network of individuals and groups, and which had grown out of that first meeting in a small Swiss mountain resort.

Some consequences of Neoliberalism's hegemony

It has become increasingly clear that the Neoliberal economic plot...has whipped us into a perfect storm of extreme inequality, climate change and financial crash (Raworth, 2017, p.63).

The results of this experiment...are not what were promised. Britain went from being one of the most equal societies in the world in the 1970s to one of the most unequal in the 1990s – and it has stayed that way. The share of income going to the top 1% of earners has risen from 3% at the end of the 1970s to 8% currently...Meanwhile those on lowest incomes earn little more than they did in the mid-1990s. The steady increase in life expectancy has stalled and "deaths of despair" – from suicide, drug and alcohol overdose – are on the rise for men and women in their late 40s and early 50s. The likelihood of people on low incomes living on their own is rising, because having precarious, low-paid jobs has led them to forego marriage and a

family, while children from poorer backgrounds increasingly grow up in insecure and chaotic families (Elliott, 2019).

Over recent years, the negative consequences of neoliberal capitalism have become impossible to ignore. It contributed to such traumatic events as the 2008 financial crisis as well as such destructive long-term trends as rising inequality, lower growth, increasing monopsony [a market with only one buyer] and growing social and geographic divides. Moreover, its impact has not been limited to the economic sphere: these events and trends have negatively influenced western societies and democracies as well (Berman, 2019).

Not everyone, not least neoliberals themselves, would take such a dim view of neoliberalism's consequences as do Kate Raworth, Larry Elliott and Sheri Berman. They might point, for example, to raised living standards and reduced poverty levels in many countries over the last 30 years; indeed, 'never before in human history have so many people been lifted out of poverty so quickly' (Banerjee and Duflo, 2020, p.22). As OXFAM notes in its 2019 report 'Public Good or Private Wealth?', [o]ne of the great achievements in recent decades has been the huge reduction in the numbers of people living in extreme poverty, defined by the World Bank as \$1.90 per person per day'. Though the same report goes on to record that in 2018 'just under half the world's population – 3.4 billion people – [were] subsisting on less than \$5.50 a day' (Oxfam, 2019, p.11).

But others would agree with Raworth's, Elliott's and Berman's characterisation of neoliberalism causing a 'perfect storm' of adverse consequences. The 2008 financial crash and the subsequent period of economic recession and austerity were due in large part to the failure of neoliberal beliefs, especially in the virtue of deregulation and the perfection of self-regulating market. While climate change, and other gathering environmental catastrophes, have been fuelled by neoliberalism's espousal of ceaseless growth, driven by the constant stimulation of consumption and an ethos of competition. In her book on climate change, Naomi Klein argues neoliberalism, or 'market fundamentalism' as she calls it, 'has become the greatest enemy to planetary health...we have an economic system that fetishizes GDP growth above all else, regardless of the human and ecological consequences' (Klein, 2015, pp.26, 88). This commitment to growth has created what Tim Jackson calls a 'profound dilemma' for all human societies: 'To resist growth is to risk economic and social collapse. To pursue it is to endanger the ecosystems on which we depend for long-term survival' (Jackson, 2009, p.102). A further profound dilemma arises from the need for collective action

and public intervention if there is to be any hope of effectively tackling the environmental emergency confronting humankind – both anathema to neoliberal doctrine (Klein, 2015).

Even the International Monetary Fund, no enemy of neoliberalism, has argued that some of neoliberalism's claimed benefits have been overstated, while drawing particular attention to the third part of Raworth's 'perfect storm' – inequality, a problem acknowledged by the IMF's own researchers:

there are aspects of the neoliberal agenda that have not delivered as expected...An assessment of these *specific* policies [i.e. removing restrictions on movement of capital and austerity] (rather than the broad neoliberal agenda) reaches three disquieting conclusions:

- The benefits in terms of increased growth seem fairly difficult to establish when looking at a broad group of countries.
- The costs in terms of increased inequality are prominent. Such costs epitomize the trade-off between the growth and equity effects of some aspects of the neoliberal agenda.
- Increased inequality in turn hurts the level and sustainability of growth. Even if growth is the sole or main purpose of the neoliberal agenda, advocates of that agenda still need to pay attention to the distributional effects (Ostry et al., 2016, pp.38,39).

Indicators of growing inequality are shocking. Here are some about wealth inequality taken from the OXFAM's 2019 report:

- In the 10 years since the financial crisis, the number of billionaires has nearly doubled.
- The wealth of the world's billionaires increased by \$900bn in the last year alone [2018], or \$2.5bn a day. Meanwhile the wealth of the poorest half of humanity, 3.8 billion people, fell by 11%.
- Billionaires now have more wealth than ever before. Between 2017 and 2018, a new billionaire was created every two days.
- Wealth is becoming even more concentrated – last year 26 people owned the same as the 3.8 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity, down from 43 people the year before. The world's richest man, Jeff Bezos, owner of

Amazon, saw his fortune increase to \$112bn. Just 1% of his fortune is the equivalent to the whole health budget for Ethiopia, a country of 105 million people (Oxfam, 2019, p.12).

Income inequality has also increased in recent years in nearly all countries, but at different speeds and varying from region to region. It has, for example, grown rapidly in the United States since 1980, but moderately in Western Europe; levels were similar in 1980

but today [2016, they] are in radically different situations. While the top 1% income share was close to 10% in both regions in 1980, it rose only slightly to 12% in 2016 in Western Europe while it shot up to 20% in the United States. Meanwhile, in the United States, the bottom 50% income share decreased from more than 20% in 1980 to 13% in 2016 (Alvaredo, Chancel, Piketty, Saez and Zucmanon, 2018, p.6)

Some of the reasons for this divergence are summarised below, and we will return to this subject later in the book when we consider, and cast doubt upon, some of the extravagant claims made (often by American researchers) for early childhood education and care as a high returning investment.

The income-inequality trajectory observed in the United States is largely due to massive educational inequalities, combined with a tax system that grew less progressive despite a surge in top labor compensation since the 1980s, and in top capital incomes in the 2000s. Continental Europe meanwhile saw a lesser decline in its tax progressivity, while wage inequality was also moderated by educational and wage-setting policies that were relatively more favorable to low and middle-income groups. In both regions, income inequality between men and women has declined but remains particularly strong at the top of the distribution (ibid., p.6)

To which might be added another underlying trend driving rising inequality. After being largely stable for many years, the share of national income paid to workers (labour) has been falling since the 1980s, from about 54% in 1980 to about 40% in 2015 in advanced economies. This means that the share going to capital has risen. Since, the IMF researchers note, 'capital tends to be concentrated in the upper ends of the income distribution, falling labor income shares are likely to raise income inequality' (Dao, Das, Koczan and Lian, 2017). Underlying this shift has been the unequal distribution of the benefits of technological advancement and global economic integration, capital having taken the major share, along with the weakening of trade unions undermining the capacity of labour to resist this trend.

Note in the examples cited above how change in the direction of increased inequality sets in around the early 1980s, coinciding with the onset of the era of neoliberalism.

We could give many more examples, since the theme of increased inequality under neoliberalism recurs; we hope, though, that the relationship between neoliberalism and inequality is clear. But this should hardly come as a surprise. For inequality lies at the very heart of neoliberalism. It is not just some unfortunate by-product, but a key driver of economic efficiency and a necessary condition for the ideal market system (Mirowski, 2013a), a system of competition in which all may have an equal right to compete but in which, too, there must always be winners and losers; for neoliberals, 'inequality has the capacity to sharpen appetites, instincts and minds, driving individuals to rivalries' (Lazzarato, 2009, p.117). So, while some may express concern at the worldwide trend of recent years towards concentrations of income and wealth, such inequality is, to the neoliberal story teller, simply 'the playing out of a neoliberal script to produce a more efficient and vibrant capitalism' (Mirowski, 2013b, p.8).

Growing inequality has been partnered by growing insecurity, not least in employment with the spread of temporary and zero-hour contracts, of enforced self-employment and low paid jobs; in the United Kingdom now, most poor families have at least one member in employment. Again, this should not come as a surprise. Insecurity is the other side of the coin to flexibility, providing a ready pool of labour available to respond to the ebb and flow of the market, an efficient allocation of resources as a neoliberal would argue. Both growing inequality and insecurity have been further enabled by the decline of trade unions (trade union membership in high income OECD member states fell from 30% in 1985 to just 16% in 2018), an early target for neoliberals as an 'inimical force in society...whose main effect was to "distort" the labour market' (Stedman Jones, 2014, p.331), and of collective agreements, anathema to the neoliberal belief in the virtues of untrammelled individualism and individualised incentives (payment by results). This decline in trade unions and consequent changes in bargaining power have played a major part in the significant decline in the share of wages in GDP in both developed and developing countries since the 1980s, referred to above (Onaron, 2018).

Insecurity has not been confined to more marginalised and lower income workers. Albenaz Azmanova (2019) contends that, under neoliberalism, there is a 'precarious multitude' and not just a 'precarious class': economic insecurity has 'come to afflict not only the low-skilled, poorly-educated, precariously-employed and under-paid working classes in exposed industries - the so-called "losers of globalisation". It is increasingly affecting also highly-

skilled, well-educated and solidly-remunerated professionals'. And while the pressures of profit-driven capitalism have always generated economic insecurity, she argues that these pressures have 'intensified in the age of neoliberal capitalism', and further that 'insecurity, more so than inequality, is the social question of our time'.

If neoliberalism has contributed to growing inequality and insecurity, it has contributed also to a weakening of democracy. Put bluntly, neoliberalism has little time for democracy, whether in politics, governance or everyday life. Indeed, neoliberalism is 'profoundly suspicious of democracy' (Harvey, 2005, p.66), which is viewed, at best, as an irrelevance, at worst as a potential hindrance to markets and their efficient functioning, and hence to economic performance and high returns. In this scenario, the democratically active citizen fades away to be replaced by the market savvy consumer; democratic politics gives place to the rule of experts, technicians and managers.

True, some neoliberals would argue that markets provide the purest form of democracy, through the unrestricted working of individual preferences, equating democracy with the exercise of consumer choice and redefining citizens as consumers 'whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling' (Monbiot, 2016b). Viewed from this perspective, the exercise of individual calculation and choice in the market place is lauded over the public deliberation and collective choice of democracy, private interest extolled over public good. But for those who disagree with this understanding of democracy, siding with Gerd Biesta when he says that 'the behaviour of consumers in a market where their aim is to satisfy their needs...should not be conflated with democracy, which is about public deliberation and contestation about the public good and the just and equitable (re)distribution of public resources' (2010, p.54), then neoliberalism has been bad news. In mainstream politics, democracy has been undermined by an electorate increasingly disillusioned and angry with democratic institutions that seem unwilling or unable to tackle discontents arising from inequality and insecurity; while growing inequality has gone hand-in-hand with the growing influence of money on policy-making. Governments of any party have too often appeared to collude with corporate interests and against the public good: as a result, 'whereas the power of elected governments in the postwar period was exercised in part to balance that of corporations and markets, its main role today has become to enforce the latter's power in many settings' (Rustin, 2016, p.15).

In these circumstances, democratic politics has seemed unable to tell and enact alternative stories, stories that connect with the lives of many people, contributing to what Monbiot claims is the dominant condition of the age: alienation.

Alienation means many things. Among them are people's loss of control over the work they do; the loss of connection with community and society; their loss of trust in political institutions and in the future; their loss of a sense of meaning and of power over their own lives; and a convergence of these fissures into psychic rupture. In the political sphere, alienation leads to disengagement, and disengagement opens the way for demagogues (Monbiot, 2017, p.54)

As Monbiot suggests, one important symptom of alienation is a widespread sense of powerlessness in the face of impersonal and unstoppable economic forces, forces that cannot be controlled and to which all we can seemingly hope to do is adapt, doing our best to hang on to the Juggernaut of inexorable change as it races heedlessly ever onwards. Such powerlessness allows what Roberto Unger calls 'the dictatorship of no alternative' (Unger, 2005, p.1) to become established in neoliberalism's 'regime of truth', and with it a failure of imagination, an impoverishment of ambition and a fading of hope in the future.

As if this was not bad enough, democracy has also been undermined by a further consequence of the rise of neoliberalism: the process of 'economization' already referred to, the conversion of non-economic domains, activities and subjects into economic ones. In this process, the social, the cultural, the aesthetic and the political all collapse into the economic, and so are reconceptualised along purely economic lines, being reduced to 'calculative actions undertaken through the universal human faculty of choice' (Rose, 1999, p.141). Edgar Morin recognises this when he says that politics has become 'reduced to technology and economics, and economics is reduced to growth...the civic spirit is weakened, and people find escape and refuge in private life' (Morin, 2001, p.92). In this situation, political questions, with no one right answer but only alternative and often conflicting answers, the essence of democratic politics, are recast in economic terms to be decided by economic and other technical experts, and then left to management to ensure performance, without any semblance of democratic input or of meaningful choices. Societies, thus, become increasingly depoliticised, with contestations about ends (what do we want?) replaced by technical assessments of means (what is best practice?), active citizens re-cast as calculating consumers.

The weakening of civic spirit that Morin writes of can be seen as part of a deeper decay, the weakening of social bonds, relationships described and valued by Nancy Fraser as

the ties between the generations—so, birthing and raising children and caring for the elderly...[and also] sustaining horizontal ties among friends, family, neighborhoods, and community. This sort of activity is absolutely essential to society. Simultaneously affective and material, it supplies the “social glue” that underpins social cooperation. Without it, there would be no social organization—no economy, no polity, no culture (Fraser, 2016a).

Fraser goes on to argue that what she calls the ‘financialized capitalist regime’, or neoliberalism, is undermining people’s capacity to sustain these social bonds, ‘between the need for increased working hours and the cutback in public services’. One consequence, she argues, is a ‘crisis of care’, due to ‘financialized capitalism’s rapacious subjugation of reproduction to production’, which in turn is ‘one aspect of a “general crisis” that also encompasses economic, ecological and political strands, all of which intersect with and exacerbate one another’ (Fraser, 2016b, pp.117, 99).

A final consequence to be noted in this opening chapter is the effect neoliberalism has had on a whole range of services, including different sectors of education. Stedman Jones, the historian of neoliberalism, argues that the long-term effects of this regime are

arguably even more problematic [than the short-term effects]: a legacy of financial deregulation and the wholly inappropriate importation of free markets into the provision of public services such as health care provision, education and housing. These policy areas were classic examples of market failure. It was rarely profitable to provide high-quality services for poorer people...The obsession with the market corroded the idea of the public realm and ate into its foundations (Stedman Jones, 2014, pp.268, 279).

We will explore this issue in more detail in later chapters, when we focus our attention on education in general and early childhood education and care in particular.

Three sub-plots in the story of neoliberalism

In the final part of this chapter, we bring in three sub-plots in the meta-narrative of neoliberalism, each with their own storyline, but each closely entwined with the main storyline of neoliberalism, each sharing that story’s instrumental rationality, technical approach and economistic worldview.

Human capital

Neoliberalism thoroughly revises what it means to be a human person...Foucault correctly identifies the concept of 'human capital' as the signal neoliberal departure – initially identified with the MPS [Mont Pelerin Society] member Gary Becker - that undermines centuries of human thought that parlayed humanism into stories of natural rights...Neoliberalism reduces the human being to an arbitrary bundle of "investments", skill sets, temporary alliances (family, sex, race) and fungible body parts (Mirowski, 2013a, pp.58-9)

Human Capital Theory (HCT), first articulated in the 1950s, has become enormously influential today, not least as we shall see in subsequent chapters in education, including early childhood education and care. It has 'developed into one of the most powerful theories in modern economics...[and] lays considerable stress on the education of individuals as the key means by which both the individual accrues material advantage and by which the economy as a whole progresses' (Gillies, 2011, pp.224-5).

It is closely related to neoliberalism. One of HCT's initial proponents, Gary Becker, was part of that original group of neoliberal thinkers and advocates, the Mont Pelerin Society. Becker, himself, has described the essence of HCT and its importance in the contemporary world.

Human capital refers to the knowledge, information, ideas, skills and health of individuals. This is the "age of human capital" in the sense that human capital is by far the most important form of capital in modern economies. The economic successes of individuals, and also of whole economies, depend on how extensively and effectively people invest in themselves (Becker, 2002, p.3)

Human capital, which as well as competencies and attributes includes attitudes such as reliability, self-reliance and individual responsibility, adds up therefore to 'marketable skills acquired through investment in education and training' (Bernheim and Winston, 2008, p.). The focus then of HCT is on the capacities needed for economic success by the individual, by employers and by national economies. Investment in education - by parents, by the state and by the self - is the main way to fully realise this essential economic resource.

Human Capital Theory thus lays considerable stress on the education of individuals as the key means by which both the individual accrues

material advantage and by which the economy as a whole progresses. In a simple equation, the more and better education individuals possess, the better their returns in financial rewards and the better the national economy flourishes (Gillies, 2015, p.1).

HCT provides powerful reinforcement to the neoliberal image of the essentially economic subject, that *homo economicus* we have discussed above, and which, as Mirowski puts it at the start of this section, ‘thoroughly revise[s] what it means to be a human being’. This revised human being, this subject of neoliberalism, is not only focused on maximising her or his advantage in the market place and operating as an entrepreneur of the self; he or she is conceived in HCT as a unit of economic potential, to be developed and deployed to maximise economic returns. As such HCT is based on certain assumptions about human behaviour: in particular that human beings are seeking to maximise their own economic interests, through for example investing in education and training in the hope of getting a higher income in the future.

It is a sign of how times have changed that back in the 1960s, when the term ‘human capital’ was first being used by academics, ‘it was considered too debasing to be used publicly...[being seen] correctly, as objectifying people and only suitable to refer to anonymous “others”’ (Holborow, 2012, p.101). Theodore Schultz, an early theorist of human capital, was aware of the term’s evocation of slavery. In his 1961 article ‘Investment in Human Capital’, he raised its potentially ‘offensive’ connotation: ‘Our values and beliefs inhibit us from looking upon human beings as capital goods, except in slavery, and this we abhor’. Even today, despite the apparent wide acceptance of the term, ‘it is, in practice, only used in official documents and hardly at all in ordinary conversation (Who, indeed, would spontaneously describe themselves as human capital?)...*Capital*, as applied to individuals, invites identification with guaranteed returns on a fixed sum of money...The metaphor erases social relations’ (Holborow, 2012, p.101; original emphasis). HCT, therefore, contributes to the economisation of life under neoliberalism, that collapsing of the social, the cultural and every other facet of life into the economic, for in HCT, ‘human beings act for economic reasons only’ (Robyns, 2006, p.72).

But there are other problems with HCT. It has been critiqued as not only dehumanising, desocialising and hyper-instrumental, valuing the individual and education only in so far as both contribute to economic competitiveness and productivity, but also as politically reactionary. It is closely associated with methodological individualism, the doctrine that the roots of all social phenomena can be found in the individual’s behaviour (Tan, 2014), so

letting structural injustices, such as inequality and insecurity, off the hook. From a similar perspective, Steven Klees argues that

contrary to the hype, the human capital discourse, and offshoots of it, like the “Knowledge Economy”, have been, at least in one way, some of the most destructive ideas of the modern era. Solving the triple challenge of poverty, inequality, and jobs has been unproductively directed to lack of individual skills and education instead of to capitalist and other world system structures whose very logic makes poverty, inequality, and lack of employment commonplace (Klees, 2018, p.14; original emphasis).

So, rather than bearing down on poverty and inequality through redistribution of income and wealth, HCT deflects attention to solutions that enhance human capital development, solutions that emphasise the individual taking responsibility for improving themselves through, for example, undertaking more education or training (Leary, 2019).

A further problem is that recent experience casts doubt on whether the individual and national cultivation of ‘human capital’ does actually pay off in the economic terms predicted by the theory. Investment in human capital through education may not, in fact, be delivering its expected returns. While Klass acknowledges that abilities that contribute to human capital, such as numeracy, literacy and problem solving, may pay off in the labour market, he argues they will only do so when they are valued; the more ‘useful and important question is the demand-side one, usually ignored by human capital theorists, regarding how we can create good jobs that require valuable skills’ (ibid., p.14). In fact, young people entering adulthood today have invested in education as never before, yet many struggle to find employment that is secure, satisfying and well remunerated; as a result generational progress, the expectation that every generation should enjoy higher living standards than the one before, has ground to a halt (O’Connor, 2018). Margaret Stuart, too, in her thesis on ‘Human Capital Theory and Early Childhood Education in New Zealand’, casts doubt on ‘the expectation that ECEC policies based on the principles of HCT will be able to achieve what they promise’ referring to ‘the unfulfilled promise of HCT...[and how] HCT acts as a modern-day form of alchemy in contemporary Western societies’ (Stuart, 2011, pp.210, 211, 213).

Despite such gathering problems, the influence of HCT and the primacy attached by governments and international organisations to the promotion of human capital continues unabated, unruffled by criticism. What should be a fundamental political question – what is

your image of the human being? – has been cast aside in favour of dwelling on the technical question: what technologies are best able to augment the human being as human capital.

Public choice

James Buchanan's and Gordon Tullock's Virginia school public choice theory undermined the basis for a public sector that was defined by public service rather than by self-interest and profit...[Under this theory] the particular interests of the bureaucrat or bureaucracy supposedly displaced the public interests of citizens they were supposed to serve (Stedman Jones, 2014, pp.332, 334)

Buchanan's ideas began to have huge impact, especially in America and in Britain. In his home country, the economist was deeply involved in efforts to cut taxes on the wealthy in 1970s and 1980s and he advised proponents of Reagan Revolution in their quest to unleash markets and posit government as the "problem" rather than the "solution"...In Britain, Buchanan's work helped to inspire the public sector reforms of Margaret Thatcher and her political progeny (Parramore, 2018).

Accompanying the rise of neoliberalism has been a declining belief in the dependability and efficacy of government and public services; the public sector and the state have fallen out of favour, losing trust, as the private sector and business have risen. This onslaught on public services and the public sector has been further fuelled by the development and adoption of public choice theory, closely associated with a Nobel prize-winning economist, James Buchanan. A member of the Mont Pelerin Society, Buchanan believed that 'people were primarily driven by venal self-interest...[wanting] to control others and take away their resources', in a society which he saw as 'a cutthroat realm of makers (entrepreneurs) constantly under siege by takers (everyone else)' (ibid.). With this dismal view of human nature, Buchanan set himself to protect the wealthy from the demands made on them by democratic societies, through for example sowing mistrust of government institutions. At the 50th anniversary of the Mont Pelerin Society in 1997,

Buchanan and his associate Henry Manne, a founding theorist of libertarian economic approaches to law, focused on such affronts to capitalists as environmentalism and public health and welfare, expressing eagerness to dismantle Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare as well as kill public education because it tended to foster community values. Feminism had to go, too: the scholars considered it a socialist project (ibid.).

Public choice theory refines and sharpens neoliberalism's attack on the public domain. With its 'dismal view' of human nature, 'primarily driven by venal self-interest', it dismisses the idea of dispassionate public servants, whether politicians or officials, who are committed to and motivated by ideals of public service and the public good. It recasts them instead in the mold of *homo economicus*, seeking to further their own interests and maximise their own personal advantage, just like everyone else. Indeed, in this scenario the public sector has come to be viewed not only as inherently inefficient but also as inescapably self-seeking, in sharp contrast to the private sector, viewed as inherently efficient and with the adverse effects of self-interest curbed by the discipline of the market.

Public choice takes the same principles that economists use to analyze people's actions in the marketplace and applies them to people's actions in collective decision making. Economists who study behavior in the private marketplace assume that people are motivated mainly by self-interest. Although most people base some of their actions on their concern for others, the dominant motive in people's actions in the marketplace - whether they are employers, employees, or consumers - is a concern for themselves. Public choice economists make the same assumption - that although people acting in the political marketplace have some concern for others, their main motive, whether they are voters, politicians, lobbyists, or bureaucrats, is self-interest (Shaw, nd.).

At least three important consequences flow from this sceptical and distrustful view of the public sector and its servants. First, it further undermines the public provision of services, building on the general hostility to an active 'social state' embedded in neoliberal thinking; far better, the argument goes, that provision is provided privately, where it benefits from the discipline of the market place and escapes the malign influence of so-called 'producer interests'. Second, it assumes no-one, least of all those working in the public sector, can be trusted, since ideals such as public service and the public interest count for nothing in practice; institutions and organisations instead should be seen and treated as chains of low-trust relationships in which performance depends on incentives or sanctions. Third, it follows from this that remaining public involvement in policy and provision should be subject to market principles and disciplines, and strongly managed to curb self-interest and tackle inherent inefficiency - which brings us to our third sub-plot.

New public management

Since the 1980s a range of OECD countries have reformed their public services in line with ideas taken from private business and economic theories developed from modelling private business... This wave of reform is often referred to as 'New Public Management'. NPM was born of a technocratic mindset. It has been driven by the demand for increased efficiency and accountability, rather than the need to maximise other values, such as fairness, equity, due process and public participation (Vabø, 2009, p.2).

New Public Management (NPM) has been described as the neoliberal way of governance (ibid.), the way in which organisations and systems are governed under this regime. NPM refers to the reform of the public and non-profit private sectors based around the importation and application of management methods from private business, inscribed with the ethos of competition, the logic of the market and the demands of customers.

[A]t the ideological heart of the NPM was the conviction that the public sphere of services, organisations and institutions would be improved by the application of public choice theory, business values, micro-economics and market mechanisms... the extension of business practices to the public sector... in an attempt to make [public sector organisations] more like firms (Norris and Kuschner, 2007, p.3).

The term 'New Public Management' first emerges in the 1970s, evolving from the Public Choice discourse, with its concern to curb self-interest in the public sector and its supposed interference with the public interest (Widmalm, 2016), but also as a response to economic crises and fears about the growing costs of public services and welfare. NPM got taken up by neoliberal think tanks and governments, notably in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, in their desire to modernise, reduce spending and improve efficiency, effectiveness and excellence. But it became widespread during the 1990s, 'on account of an international booming consultancy industry, finance institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and above all OECD through their Public Management (PUMA) reports' (Vabø, 2009, p.8). In many respects, therefore, the history and spread of NPM parallels that of HCT and Public Choice theory, and of neoliberalism itself.

Christopher Hood, who first coined the term 'New Public Management', identified seven overlapping principles that often figured in discussion of NPM (Hood, 1991): 'Hands on' professional management in the public sector; explicit standards and measures of performance; greater emphasis on output control; a shift to disaggregation of units in the public sector; a shift to greater competition in the public sector; stress on private sector

styles of management practice; and stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use. Underpinning these principles, and picking up again on the issue of trust, or the lack of it, Dunleavy and Hood (1994) describe one of the key features of the shift from 'old public administration' to NPM as coming to view organisations as 'a chain of low trust principal/agent relationships' (Norris and Kuschner, 2007, p.4).

But rather than a uniform and coherent programme, defined by the standardised application of common principles, NPM should be seen as taking diverse forms in different countries and policy areas:

NPM is a loose term and the different elements suggested under this umbrella [of seven principles] do not occur in every case...[C]haracteristic mixtures vary from country to country...[NPM is] an umbrella concept used to label a shift from traditional public administration to public management characterised by use of market-type mechanism and business styles of management...[But] marketization and business-style management have continued to coexist as the common core of NPM (Vabø, 2009, p.3).

NPM is more than just a technique of managing better, in a more business-like way. It is a vital element in the fundamental transformation of society through neoliberal reason:

It is through governance practices that business models and metrics come to irrigate every crevice of society, circulating from investment banks to schools, from corporations to universities, from public agencies to the individual. It is through the replacement of democratic terms of law, participation, and justice with idioms of benchmarks, objectives, and buy-ins that governance dismantles democratic life while appearing only to instill it with "best practices" (Brown, 2015)

What NPM has represented, therefore, is not only the spread of private business management techniques into the public sector (in which we include the non-profit private sector), but also a way of thinking about the sector in economic terms, wholly consistent with neoliberalism's 'economization' agenda. All public services are commodified, construed as private businesses competing in the market place, and needing to be strongly and systematically managed to maximise returns on investment through high performance. This new imagery displaces all others, including those that envisage public services as democratic institutions at the service of and involving participation by local communities and their citizenry.

NPM also serves another purpose for neoliberalism; it disciplines or governs people to behave in neoliberal ways, and eventually to come to embody them. Jeremy Gilbert argues that most people do not want to be subject to neoliberal norms: 'Teachers want to teach and students want to learn because teaching and learning are fundamental to any fulfilled human existence, and not just so that the corporations that students will work for can make money' (Gilbert, 2020, p.65). NPM coerces teachers, and others, to adopt neoliberal norms, and is supported in this task by the emergence over the last few decades of a new class of managers:

Their main job, unlike that of old managers of business or government agencies, is not to make sure that the organisation runs efficiently and effectively. Their job is instead to discipline other workers within the organisation, to force them to follow neoliberal norms such as meeting targets and fulfilling competitive criteria. A complex and oppressive bureaucracy has grown since the 1970s, in corporations and in the public sector, the purpose of which is to monitor, audit and direct the behaviour of citizens constantly, forcing them to comply with neoliberal codes (ibid., p.66)

New public managers for the era of new public management, a powerful group with a strong commitment to the neoliberal project and its way of thinking, and focused on results, on the achievement of predetermined goals, on performance.

We conclude this brief discussion of NPM with three observations. First, NPM has given great impetus to the importance of numbers in public services, including education. In a competitive market (which we discuss in Chapter Three in the case of early childhood education and care), parent-consumers need some way of assessing the performance of competing providers, to enable them to make informed' choices. Similarly, governments funding such services, whether provided publicly or privately, and doing so to deliver particular policy goals need some way of judging performance – if they are getting what they are paying for. The answer to both needs has been sought in ever more quantitative measures as new public management introduced a culture to the public sector 'that was characterised by constant monitoring and the construction of targets and league tables for every public service' (Purdue, 2005, p.123). Spurred on by distrust of professional judgement and the ideology of consumer choice, the result has been what Jerry Muller terms 'metric fixation...the seemingly irresistible pressure to measure performance, to publicize it and reward it, often in the face of evidence that this just doesn't work very well' (Muller, 2018, p.4). We shall see this process at work in ECEC in Chapter Five.

Second, NPM, with its commitment to standardised measures to assess performance (on the principle that what can't be measured can't be managed), epitomises neoliberalism's close relationship with the paradigm of positivism, the paradigm supplying neoliberalism with a necessary epistemological foundation. For positivism believes in the possibility of producing, through the application of systematic methods, knowledge that is value- and context-free, universal and replicable, in short an objective Truth, *the* Truth. Such knowledge holds out the prospect of being able to reach a final and correct conclusion, free of context and perspective, untroubled by positionality or other complexities.

Positivism is not, therefore, a paradigm at ease with context or complexity, inter-connectedness or life's irreducible messiness. As St. Pierre has argued:

Many of these ideas [associated with positivism] illustrate an age-old desire to get below the messy, contingent surface of human existence to a pristine, originary foundation, a bedrock of certitude...[which persists] because of the romance of an orderly, progressive, predictive empirical science based on fact devoid of value as the final arbiter (St. Pierre, 2012, p.493).

This, of course, is exactly the kind of epistemological foundation that neoliberalism, and 'professional management', needs. Both crave knowledge that can act as 'a bedrock of certitude', and so enable accurate calculations and correct decisions in the market place, as well as effective management. Business, we are constantly reminded, dislikes uncertainty; positivism holds out the prospect of avoiding it through the generation of objective, stable and certain knowledge based on measurement and numbers.

Third, neoliberalism pays high regard to individual choice and freedom, individual responsibility and self-management. Yet NPM is about strong and hierarchical control of the individual. This apparent paradox is not really a paradox. For neoliberalism is about achieving the best deals and the highest returns, based on achieving the greatest efficiency in performance - and that requires strong management of others. Individual choice and freedom are fine as far as they go, but there are places they cannot go, including the rejection of individual choice and freedom when, for example, they settle for less efficiency in favour of, say, more job security and satisfaction; *homo economicus* cannot opt to be someone else.

NPM is subject to extensive academic and public criticism today, for example ‘for providing perverse incentive structures, overwhelming and ineffective evaluation structures, a dehumanizing work environment, and for deprofessionalizing a number of occupations in the health, education, research and administration sectors’ (Widmalm, 2016, p.128). Doubts have also grown about its over-reliance on measurement and numbers, with the consequent denigration of personal judgement based on experience and the attendant risk of simplification: ‘the problem is not measurement, but excessive measurement and inappropriate measurement’ (Muller, 2018, p.4). Yet despite this growing questioning and disenchantment, NPM and its ‘metric fixation’ remain forces to be reckoned with.

A note on terminology

Any book about formal services for young children (i.e. those below compulsory school age) has to struggle with how to label these services. Our preferred choice would be ‘early childhood education’, because we think that these services should be conceptualised and organised as primarily educational and as the first stage of the education system – though we recognise that this begs many questions about the meaning and purpose of ‘education’, and the many other functions that early childhood services do or could perform. For example, in our view, all mainly educational services *should* have a strong element of care (expressed both as an ‘ethic of care’ and by having opening hours that take account of carers’ working hours); and should also be multi-purpose, acting as “public forums situated in civil society in which children and adults participate together in projects of social, cultural, political and economic significance’ (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2013, p.73). In practice, though, many do not match this ideal.

We have decided instead to use the more common term ‘early childhood education and care’, sometimes ‘ECEC’, so there can be no mistaking that we are covering both services described as mainly educational or pedagogical and those described as mainly for ‘childcare’ (understood to be primarily for children with employed parents). As very few countries have fully integrated early childhood services, the Nordic states being the main exceptions, this education/care split is still unfortunately the norm globally. When we refer specifically to mainly educational or pedagogical services (e.g. those in schools or kindergartens), we use the term ‘early education’, and when referring specifically to ‘care’ services we use the term ‘childcare’.

Conclusion

We have used this chapter to set out the aims of the book and introduce its contents. We have also set the broad scene for our more focused study of education, and in particular early childhood education and care, in subsequent chapters. That broad, neoliberal scene, we have argued, is dominated by a set of inter-connected beliefs, assumptions and practices, inscribed with an economic understanding of life expressed in an assemblage of economic images, values and relationships. At its centre is the economization of life, which to quote Mirowski again 'has sunk its roots deep everyday life'.

This is a scene in which the language we introduced at the start of this chapter, so prevalent today in early childhood education and care, begins to make perfect sense. It is significant, too, that this language is in the English language, since the epicentre of the story of neoliberalism, and its associated sub-plots, has been the English-speaking world, and in particular the UK and the US. This is a language that bears concepts and ways of thinking that are particularly at home in this cultural context.

We turn now to consider how the story of neoliberalism, with its sub-plots, has impacted the world of education, starting first with an overview of compulsory schooling and higher education.