

# The pedagogy of childminding: developing a study of family child care in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

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## 1. Background to NCB

NCB's vision is a society in which all children and young people are valued and their rights respected. We are dedicated to advancing their health and well-being across every aspect of their lives, and aim to achieve this through: reducing inequalities in childhood, ensuring children and young people have a strong voice in all matters that affect their lives, promoting positive images, enhancing health and well-being, and encouraging positive and supportive family and other environments.

As a membership and infrastructure support agency, NCB hosts many single-issue or single client groups, networks, fora, councils and partnership programmes, and provides essential information on policy, research and best practice across the children's sector. Our membership of 2,000 – including 80% of Local Authorities as well as young people (Young NCB) and professionals from education settings, social care, youth, crime, government, local authorities, children's trusts, health authorities, hospitals, primary care trusts, schools, voluntary organisations and multi-agency organisations – provides NCB with a vast dissemination mechanism spanning most facets of the work of the children and young people's sector.

Innovative practice and development and the influencing of national strategy and good practice are central to NCB's work nationally. NCB have a staff of 229 working with professionals and young people within schools and children's centres, residential care homes, special schools, health settings, youth facilities, secure settings and communities. We undertake around 60 projects each year ranging from children in care to children living with HIV or in youth custody, which enables us to truly claim that we cover every aspect of children's lives.

NCB's principal areas of activity are:

1. Infrastructure support given to extensive networks across the country which focus on single issues or the needs of single client groups.
2. Participation and engagement of children and young people particularly the most disadvantaged.
3. Development of practice, management and quality of services at local, regional and national level.
4. Improved performance of all professions that impact on the lives of children and young people.
5. Influencing and informing on policy and legislation in the interests of better outcomes for children and young people.
6. Disseminating information to all those working with children and young people via website, publications, media, conferences and training.
7. Keeping NCB Membership abreast of information on policy, research and best practice and latest developments in the children and young people's sector.

These aspects of our work put NCB in a good position to undertake this project, particularly with reference to points 4, 5 and 6. We put our principles into practice through the following departments:

***Well-being Department.*** This department is the home for a number of programmes of work and individual projects that address the need for well-being in children's and young people's lives. The department considers well-being to be a dynamic concept which includes the aim that all children should be safe and loved, free from harm and have a healthy and happy childhood with the chance to fulfil their potential. What comprises well-being will vary for different people and at different times. To accommodate these differences, the department works under some basic principles including:

- the active participation of children and young people
- that children and young people should be seen as whole, rich human beings and not defined solely by their deficits
- an understanding and inclusion of issues of equality and difference
- an understanding of the importance of living in and contributing to sustainable communities.

The work of the Well-being department is delivered through three interconnected units: Health, Well-being and Environment; Well-being, Learning and Education; and the Early Childhood Unit (ECU), and the department hosts a number of specialist forums and networks including the Early Childhood Forum and the Local Authority Early Years Network.

***Research, Evidence and Evaluation (REE) Department.*** NCB's REE department has a staff of 15 from a range of disciplines and professional backgrounds. The department carries out surveys, analysis of datasets,

qualitative research and research reviews funded through commissions from central or local government and grants from research councils and foundations. The research focus spans the policy and practice development work of NCB, often working closely with other departments as well as collaborating with other academics and practice specialists and research teams. The department's unique offer lies in:

- expertise in involving children and young people in research and evaluation
- extensive experience of evaluating children's services across all sectors
- working from the perspective of the 'whole child' across policy and practice
- proximity to an unrivalled range of experts in policy and practice
- access, through NCB's membership and networks, to tens of thousands of people who work with children and young people or impact on their lives.

***Social Inclusion Department.*** The Social Inclusion department aims to enhance the inclusion and life chances of potentially marginalised/excluded children and young people who, with their families, are likely to be users of child welfare agencies. The department's work to improve practice and policy is primarily focused on the needs of children in public care, children living with HIV, children experiencing significant difficulties in their families, with their education or in their communities, those children and young people who are in contact with justice, as well as welfare agencies, children with challenging behaviour, disabled children and those with special educational needs.

***Policy Unit.*** The policy experts at NCB engage in a range of activities including briefing MPs and Peers; working with civil servants, ministers and advisers to assess the impact of national policy on children's lives; and working in partnership across NCB. The unit keeps NCB and its members up to date on all new legislation, identifies policy areas of interest to children and young people and presents complex policy information in a straightforward and engaging way to ensure that the current policy climate and developments for children and young people is understood. NCB also clerks the All Party-Parliamentary Group for Children.

***Strategy, Resources and Communications Division (SRCD).*** SRCD provides support services including finance and administration, human resources, fundraising, business development, communications and information dissemination, website and third sector support programmes. In line with NCB's mission, the communications team is responsible for disseminating information to all those working with children and young people, and to children and young people themselves. With an event and conference team as well as publishing, NCB's current catalogue has over 80 titles related to services for children and young people.

## Key achievements and activities

Given the diversity and scope of NCB's work, we focus below on some of our most significant recent achievements and those relevant to the proposed study.

- Since the development of its Learning to Listen principles and the implementation of the Every Child Matters and the Children's Plan, the government has driven forward the policy and law that now underpins participation in this country. During this time NCB has been critical to these developments including:
  - NCB seconding staff to the cross-government Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU) to generate the original thinking and policy development on participation within government
  - NCB's REE department undertaking the evaluation of CYPU's youth advisory group
  - NCB's regular involvement in commissions to build the evidence to support the participation of children and young people in policy and service development
  - NCB undertaking bespoke consultations for a number of government departments including the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the Department of Health (DH), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR).
- NCB was selected by DH to be its strategic partner across the children and young people sector, ensuring NCB is able to improve the well-being of children across the country. Within this role, NCB will:
  - provide specialist cross-cutting policy advice and stakeholder engagement on existing and emerging policy priorities
  - strengthen capacity and partnership working within the third sector through specialist information, training, and support networks
  - enhance participation of children and young people including a partner programme of intergenerational work.
- NCB is the consortium lead and accountable body for the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services (C4EO), which was set up by DCSF to identify and disseminate knowledge about 'what works' in children's services and to build the capacity of local authorities to deliver it. In addition to managing the programme, NCB's REE department is leading the monitoring and evaluation strand of the work and will write one of the core knowledge reviews.
- One of key successes for the Well-being department was their work to promote and support Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) in schools in the context of the five Every Child Matters outcomes. After

exploring with five local authorities the conditions that enable PSHE to thrive, the report *'Why PSHE thrives: Condition, provision and practice'*, along with a groundbreaking *'Learning for well-being charter'* was produced in partnership with Young NCB. The government recently announced that PSHE is to be a statutory part of the curriculum in English schools.

- ECU delivered the government-funded Early Learning Partnership Project (ELPP), leading the workforce development strand of this project. This worked included a national roll-out of our Parents Early Years and Learning (PEAL) Training for early years providers on supporting parental involvement in children's learning. All the targets for this complex piece of work were successfully met and 7,000 trainees were involved in this strand of ELPP.
- The ECU was contracted by NCMA to carry out a study of the effectiveness of childminding networks which was funded by the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation in 2004-2005. This study produced clear recommendations on those aspects of network organisation that childminders find to be most helpful in terms of their own development and improved childcare practice. It showed, for instance, that there is a huge difference between the qualification rates for networked and non-networked childminders and this finding has been influential in the development of central and local government policy on the feasibility of qualification requirements for childminders. It acts as a useful foundation for the proposed study which is designed to further our knowledge of the effectiveness of childminding practice and support systems by looking at more categories of childminders and also by observing practice with children.
- The Research Department has successfully attracted major funding from The Wellcome Trust, The Gatsby Charitable Foundation and Paul Hamlyn Foundation and delivers on high impacting projects for many other well respected funders every year. It has also been commissioned for projects by the Department of Health and the Department of Children Schools and Families.



## 2. Introduction to the proposed study

The proposed study focuses on childminding in England, linking in to our expertise on the children's workforce, young children's well-being, provider support and development, policy development and research and evaluation. Before reviewing the existing research evidence on childminders and their practice, we briefly describe the current policy environment for childcare providers, which was a driving force in the development of the proposed research.

Childminders provide care to children and young people in a home environment, caring for one or more children (at least one child for more than 2 hours in any day) to whom they are not related. 'Early years' childminders, caring for children from birth to age 5, must register on the Early Years Register and deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

All registered childcare provision, including childminders, is inspected by Ofsted against the EYFS framework which includes 'welfare requirements' to ensure the health and safety of young children, and 'learning and development' requirements. Inspections occur within 7 months of registration and again at least once every 3-4 years depending on the standard assessed.

Rolled out in September 2008, the EYFS is the new statutory framework to help young children achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes including staying safe, being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well-being.

As stated above, delivering the EYFS mandates that childminders meet the welfare and learning and development requirements. The former covers:

- safeguarding and promoting children's welfare
- suitable people
- suitable premises, environment and equipment
- documents and procedures required for the safe and efficient management of settings.

The latter sets out providers' duties under each of six areas of learning and development:

- personal, social and emotional development
- communication, language and literacy
- problem solving, reasoning and numeracy
- knowledge and understanding of the world
- physical development
- creative development.

All early years providers, including childminders, are expected to assess children's development at age 5 using the EYFS Profile, a summary assessment tool comprising 13 scales covering the six areas of learning and development.

The EYFS Profile is linked to two national indicators:

- *NI 72*. Achievement of at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage with at least 6 in each of the scales in Personal Social and Emotional Development and Communication, Language and Literacy
- *NI 92*. Narrowing the gap between the lowest achieving 20% in the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile and the rest.

Thus, childminders are included within the government's current childcare and education strategy, which is focused on childcare and learning as the first stage of the education system with potential to 'narrow the gap' in attainment for the lowest achieving children.

Childminding is currently in a period of transition: the number of childminders registered in England has dropped in the past several years, possibly in reaction to the new regulatory requirements. Childminding, viewed as a child-centred form of childcare that takes place within a home environment, has become more formalised and potentially less viable in today's early years policy context where the focus is increasingly on early *education* rather than care. The key aim of the proposed study is to better understand the core features of traditional childminding practice in order to support childminders who care for young children within the new EYFS framework.

## **Research on childminding**

In the following section, we set the context for the proposed study. We review existing evidence and research on childminding – or family childcare providers as they are often referred to outside of the UK. We focus primarily on studies based in England, drawing on work in other countries when relevant. First, we summarise the rise and (potential) fall of childminding in Britain using existing statistics. Second, we briefly describe what we know about the role of childminders from an international perspective. Finally, we summarise some of the older and newer childminding studies to highlight where some of the gaps in the research are.

### ***Childminding in Britain – statistics***

Childminding in Britain has grown dramatically since the collection of statistics on registered childminders began in 1949, following the 1948 Day Nurseries and Childminders Regulation Act, which required local authorities to register certain categories of childminder for the first time.

Childminding figures show a gradual and steady rise from 271 in 1949 to just under 100,000 in 1997 with the exception of two predictable discontinuities. First, there was a dramatic rise in numbers caused by the inclusion of many new categories of childminders in the amendments to the above Regulation Act in 1968. Second, numbers fell between 1992 and 1993 when the re-registration of childminders for the 1989 Children Act showed that a large number had stopped childminding.

In 1997, however, the figures showed a drop in numbers that could not be attributable to a single external event. Interestingly, during that time the number of private day nurseries more than doubled from 1,700 in 1989 to 5,500 in 1997, and the number of places leaped from 45,000 to 172,000 (Department for Education and Employment, 1999). In addition to the possible competition provided by the rise of day nurseries, the decline of childminders may also have been related to the higher expectations being placed on childcare providers in general, including tighter links with state funded nursery education. Even with the increase in day nurseries, childminders remained the largest source of full day childcare for children under the age of 8 years with more than 350,000 places in 1997 (Department for Education and Employment, 1999).

As part of its National Childcare Strategy, the government announced an initiative in 2000 that provided start-up grants for all newly registered childminders in an attempt to encourage more people to take up the occupation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this had the desired effect of increasing numbers again in some areas. However, numbers continued to fall when the responsibility for registration and inspection passed from local authorities to the national Ofsted in 2000. Ofsted had a reputation for providing tough and critical feedback to schools, and again, there is some anecdotal evidence that childminders were concerned that standards would rise and the inspection process would become more formal.

Up to this point, childminding had always been the largest provider of full day childcare outside the home for young children. However, the government's National Childcare Strategy, in its various manifestations from 1998 onwards, has supported the provision of large numbers of new centre-based places together with subsidies through the tax and benefits system for parents to take them up. Although childminding has also been supported, its pre-eminent position has been lost.

Indeed, recent survey evidence looking at childcare and early years provision reported that there are nearly three times as many children in centre-based care relative to childminding (i.e., 820,100 vs. 278,500, respectively) (Nicholson, Jordan, Cooper, *et al*, 2008). Further, when looking at the age breakdown of children in these settings, 95 percent of children in centre-based childcare are under 5 years of age relative to 55 percent of children in

childminders' care.<sup>1</sup> This stands in contrast to the data from the 1990s summarised above where twice as many children were in childminders' relative to nursery care (Department for Education and Employment, 1999).

Even today, the most recent Ofsted figures from December show that there were just under 62,000 registered childminders, a 3 percent decline from the previous quarter's figures and a 14 percent decline since December 2003.

Today, childminders host just under 300,000 places and have 70 percent occupancy. The table below displays the fourth quarter figures over the past 6 years.<sup>2</sup>

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
<b>Providers</b>	72,000	71,000	71,500	71,500	65,776	61,929	60,915
<b>Places</b>	317,200	318,100	321,200	323,600	302,300	299,569	333,590*

\*Ofsted note that: "There is a strong possibility that this figure may be higher than the true overall maximum number of places due to duplication of places on both registers by some providers".

The National Childminding Association (NCMA) has attributed most recent declines to the economic recession.

In general, information on childminding in England was extremely limited until the National Childcare Strategy was launched, which mandated annual surveys of provision to underpin local development plans (Department for Education and Employment, 1998). Local authorities are now required to plan in a far more detailed way to meet the targets of the strategy and most have a far clearer idea of the structure of childminding in their areas and how it can address the childcare needs of their populations. Other recent developments, such as the creation of a nationwide system of Children's Information Services and the fact that regulation and inspection is now operated nationally, mean that there is today a much more robust and systematic collection of statistics on childminding than in the past.

Another source of information and statistics is via NCMA, the professional membership organisation for childminders (and our partners in this study),

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<sup>1</sup> The majority of children 5 years of age and older attend after-school or holiday clubs **Bryson, C., Kazimirski, A. & Southwood, H. (2006)** Childcare and early years provision: A study of parents' use, views and experience. London: DfES, **Nicholson, S., Jordan, E., Cooper, J., et al (2008)** Childcare and early years providers survey 2007. London: DCSF..

<sup>2</sup> These statistics are available on Ofsted's website: <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Pre-school-learning/Registered-childcare-providers-and-places-in-England-September-2006-to-August-2008>.

established in 1977. In 1984, NCMA conducted its first comprehensive survey of members, sending a questionnaire to all individual members and to a sample of childminders who joined via local support groups. This was also done in the 2 following years and then at biennial intervals until 1990 when the practice stopped. Now information on the characteristics of members is gathered routinely on the NCMA membership form which means that, although the information is less detailed, the coverage is greater.

One obvious limitation of the NCMA data is in its representativeness as NCMA members comprise a self-selected group of childminders who have opted to join national, and in many cases local, support organisations.

Childminding has thus played a significant role in British childcare over the past 60 years. Although numbers have declined over the past decade – particularly in the past 2 years – nearly 300,000 British children are in childminders' care today.

### ***Childminding in other countries***

Early childhood education and care for children before they attend compulsory schooling is organised very differently in different parts of the world, although there are recognisable dimensions along which it is organised, often relating to the political and cultural nature of the country concerned (Statham & Mooney, 2003). However, family childcare is a widespread form of provision in Western Europe as well as the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. Indeed, the current model of accredited networks used in Britain is based in part on the system of licensed providers which exists in Australia. Childminding is not found in any organised form in some of the Southern European nations such as Spain, Italy and Greece, although this is not consistent as it has a strong presence in Portugal (Karlsson, 1995).

A series of reports published in 2003 from the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) at the Institute of Education examined the international evidence on early childhood education and care. In the report on service provision, the authors noted that family childcare was one of the four main types of provision across the various countries (with the exception of Italy and Spain as noted above) (Petrie, Moss, Cameron, *et al*, 2003).

The report also highlighted that childminding, while widespread in many first world countries, appeared in many different forms. In the UK – and other English-speaking countries – childminders are considered self-employed workers. Increasingly in the UK, however, childminders are seen as independent workers who are members of and supported by networks. In the Netherlands, childminders work with an agency that acts as an intermediary between providers and parents. Finally, in Scandinavia, Belgium and France, family childcare providers are employees of the local authority or other agencies (Petrie, Moss, Cameron, *et al*, 2003).

The report noted little decline in family childcare provision across the countries, with the exception of the UK and Sweden, the latter of which witnessed a 40 percent decline in childminders in the second half of the 1990s. One hypothesised reason for this drop was that childcare subsidies in Sweden have been concentrated onto group provision, which has made it very difficult for parents to select childminding as a form of provision (Karlsson, personal correspondence).

Childminding is seen in most developed parts of the world, although job titles and the way workers are organised vary quite significantly between countries. *Babies and bosses*, the OECD's treatise on early education and care mentions the importance of family childcare within the childcare market as it provides an alternative choice for working families often at a lower cost (OECD, 2007).

### ***Childminding research studies***

Today, research on childminders in England and beyond is relatively scant compared with studies on centre-based childcare. We scanned evidence since 2005 in several key online search databases including:

- PsycInfo
- Social Work Abstracts
- Social Sciences Full Text
- International Bibliography of the Social Sciences.

Our searches revealed that childminding (and its synonyms) was a keyword in about a third fewer studies than centre-based childcare. For example, a keyword search in PsycInfo on 'childcare' from 2005 revealed 335 references; 'family childcare', 'childminding' and related keywords elicited only 43 hits. Further examination of these 43 studies indicated that only 14 examined some aspect of family childcare specifically and few included English samples. Of the potentially relevant studies, the majority were comparative such that they examined childminding quality relative to other forms of childcare (i.e., centre-based childcare, relative care) rather than in its own terms.

We also searched for grey and non-academic research via NCB's ChildData database and found that, once again, many of the recent studies examining childminding were more general summaries of childcare statistics as a whole or examinations of parents' beliefs about childcare.

Further, to date no published studies of childminding have focused on the introduction of the EYFS in England. This lack of focus on child care homes is surprising as nearly 300,000 children in England were in childminders' care in 2008.

In 1987, Moss suggested that the gaps in childminding research in Britain were due to under-resourcing of research on early years education generally;

uncoordinated research strategies; and ambiguity around government's policy and attitude toward childminding (Moss, 1987). There has been only a handful of specific studies of childminding practice in the 20 years since Moss's review, and some experts have suggested that the relative neglect of childminding arises in part from the difficulty which traditional researchers have had in conceptualising it as an activity and in understanding what 'quality' might look like in home-based as opposed to centre-based settings (Statham & Mooney, 2003). Childminders in some studies have reported being deeply frustrated by a feeling that their work is considered 'invisible' and is not understood or valued by other early years professionals, policy-makers or parents (Kontos, 1992; Taylor, Dunster & and Pollard, 1999; Tuominen, 2003; Uttal, 2002).

In the huge expansion of early years services under the current Sure Start programme, the British government has consistently cited the findings of the longitudinal research programme Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE), and its related follow-up studies, which it funds (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, *et al*, 2004). EPPE's findings point to the effectiveness of a number of specific features of preschool practice. Unfortunately, EPPE did not cover childminding except as part of a related study on effective pedagogy (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, *et al*, 2002), which looked only at a sample of 'highly effective' childminders who had been recommended by local authorities. Even within this small study, the researchers noted the need for further research to understand childminders' pedagogy – whether implicit or explicit – when working with young children.

Research on childminders in Britain first appeared in the late 1960s. These early studies were often small-scale focused on one or two localities. Reviews of this research suggest that the findings were not very consistent, although the general tone was that childminding offered a low level of quality, a perception which has persisted over time (Bryant, Harris & Newton, 1980; Jackson & Jackson, 1979; Mayall & Petrie, 1977; Mayall & Petrie, 1983; Moss, 1987).

At that time some of the essential factors about childminding were seen to be the following:

- childminders catered for large numbers of children
- the children tended to be quite young
- the provision was often in economically disadvantaged areas
- childminders were isolated within their own homes
- childminders' practice was not wholly visible
- the sector was largely unregulated
- childminders often lacked formal childcare training and qualifications
- childminders reported few resources for support.

The research does seem to point to the fact that 30-40 years ago, childminders were characterised as offering inexpensive, low quality care for children from disadvantaged families. Some of these unfavourable notions remain today.

In their 2003 introduction to an edited volume on family childcare, Statham and Mooney (2003) note that childminding is still often viewed as little more than substitute mothering, and that it plays a rather ambiguous role in debates focusing on whether mothers should care for children full-time and whether group care should be made universal. The final chapter in the volume written by Moss questions the future direction of childminding, reinforcing its precarious state as a profession (Moss, 2003).

Other early work has argued that researchers have often failed to understand the unique place of childminding within early years services. Indeed, in her 1992 review of the US evidence on family childcare, Kontos (1992) questions the utility of strictly comparative studies that point family childcare providers against centre-based staff, and acknowledges that further work is needed to overcome some of the barriers to research on family childcare providers including providers' discomfort with researchers in their homes and lack of funding for robust studies. Further, some of the TCRU research from the 1970s, although largely negative in tone, may have brought to light the unique role childminders play in providing structured learning activities within a home setting, negotiating close relationships with parents and bringing non-familial children into their family environments.

In the 1980s and 1990s, quality came to the forefront of childcare research (Mooney, Munton, Rowland, *et al*, 1997; Owen, 2000). The development of the Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS) (Harms & Clifford, 1989) and its successor the Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale – Revised (FCCERS-R) (Harms, Cryer & Clifford, 2007) has provided a tool through which researchers and regulators can evaluate the quality of family childcare environments, including some relational aspects of the provision.

The various subscales are often aggregated to create a 'global' assessment of quality in childcare homes. In the US, it is the usual tool of researchers to link aspects of family childcare practice with child outcomes. The FDCRS has been used with English childminders and was found to be reliable, with the exception of a few items related to space and cleanliness, for which there are different standards in the UK and US (Rowland & Munton, 1996).

Mooney and Munton's (1998) project to develop self-assessment materials and procedures for monitoring and improving quality in day care settings, including childminding, set up consultations with parents, providers, local authority officers and representatives of national organisations.

They identified the nine most frequently mentioned views on what matters in childcare homes:

- affordability and accessibility
- continuity
- adaptation (settling children in)

- training and qualifications of providers
- working conditions for providers
- social status of child care
- education and curriculum
- partnership between parents and providers
- assessing and enhancing quality.

As can be seen above, the views present a very mixed bag: some themes are structural indicators or inputs (e.g., training and qualifications), some are process indicators (e.g., partnership with parents and adaptation) and some relate to adult needs (e.g., affordability and working conditions). Perhaps more importantly, not all of the elements were given equal importance by the different groups. For instance, training was seen as less important and more problematic by childminders and the parents who used them than by the 'officer' group. This was also found by Britner and Phillips (1995) in a study comparing predictors of satisfaction for providers and parents in both group care and childminding. They found that parent satisfaction with childminding was more likely to be predicted by 'functional' factors such as compatibility on childrearing practice than by 'structural' factors such as training and experience, which were more influential for group settings.

While the FCCERS-R and similar assessments provide useful information regarding quality standards for a childcare home, they tell us little about the key elements of childminding practice. Further, there is no recent research that juxtaposes childminders' and parents' views of quality childminding practice with traditional assessments of global quality.

The more recent wave of British research on childminding has generally focused on:

1. presenting a demographic profile of childminding in Britain
2. understanding childminders' career paths and motivation.
3. parents' views of childcare and childcare needs.

Quality still remains an important topic, but most recent studies looking at childminding quality are from the US and Canada, although comparative evidence is beginning to emerge from the Families, Children and Child Care (FCCC) study (Leach, Barnes, Malmberg, *et al*, 2008). We briefly review some of the key research below.

Recent surveys have revealed that childminders were more likely to look after very young children under the age of 2 years than other age groups. Further, children aged 3-4 years were more likely to attend other types of formal care including nursery schools, nursery classes, reception classes, day nurseries or playgroups than childminders (Bryson, Kazimirski & Southwood, 2006; Nicholson, Jordan, Cooper, *et al*, 2008). The surveys also suggested that childminders tended to care for the children of higher-income, professional or

managerial parents and that these parents were more likely to use childminders than informal childcare (Bryson, Kazimirski & Southwood, 2006; Mooney, Knight, Moss, *et al*, 2001).

In 1999, researchers from TCRU conducted a study looking at the place of childminding within childcare provision, childminders' education and employment histories and their working conditions (Mooney, Knight, Moss, *et al*, 2001). Using a mix of surveys, case studies and secondary data analysis, the findings revealed that two-thirds of providers reported that they chose childminding as a means of earning money while being home with their own children. Even so, more than half viewed childminding as a long-term career. Regardless of their motivation, most childminders viewed themselves as professional childcare workers, even if they did not attend training courses or obtain specialist qualifications.

Further, although working conditions were poor in terms of pay and benefits as well as societal value placed on childminding as a profession, childminders felt quite satisfied with their work. Relative to some of the older studies, this study dug more deeply into the motivations and perceptions of being a childminder and revealed a fairly positive picture in light of low pay and low value.

Interestingly, a recent study consulted with different members of the children's workforce – residential social workers, family support workers, foster carers and community childminders – to better understand the career choices of each in light of the government's aim to develop better integration and greater flexibility among these workers (Statham, Brannen & Mooney, 2008). The findings revealed that while these workers share a common commitment to children and there are some elements of their work that would be amenable to common core training, their decisions to specialise in various professions is related to their lifecourse stage, preferred age of children, career ambitions and other factors. This study confirms the notion that childminders make a conscious choice of their profession.

The TCRU study and others have examined reasons for the decline in childminding in the late 1990s and 2000s (Kinnaird & Jones, 2007; Mooney, Knight, Moss, *et al*, 2001). Some of the reasons put forth included:

- lack of support
- delaying childbirth and tax credits may make potential childminders in a better position to work outside of the home and pay for childcare
- low pay and low status do not make it an attractive career choice
- lack of children to look after.

Support is a common topic vis-à-vis childminding given their status as self-employed – and often solitary – workers. Several recent studies have examined the issue of formal support for childminders and have reported favourable findings. An evaluation of a peer mentoring system for childminders found that

the supportive role was particularly important during the first year of registration when childminders need assistance with filing contracts, establishing fees, marketing, interviewing parents and inspections. It also helped childminders prepare for and work through the isolation they often experienced (Rolfe, 2005). Further, the presence of a support childminder led to increased recruitment and retention, take-up of training and participation in childminder groups.

- Another study (funded by The Esmee Fairbairn Foundation) of childminders and childminding workers reported agreement among childminders that network organisation made a difference to their childcare practice, made their work more professional and aided in retention and sustainability (Owen, 2005). In particular, respondents noted the following elements were particularly useful:
  - training and qualifications<sup>3</sup>
  - the network co-ordinator
  - meeting other childminders
  - toy and equipment loans schemes and resource libraries
  - regular support meetings/evenings
  - good links with other agencies and departments in the community to help with inspections, to become more involved in local planning and to access funding
  - availability of information for parents.
- These studies seem to point to the benefits of supports and networks in helping to raise the status of childminders, increase training and reduce isolation, each of which is important to their continued role.

The relationship between childminders and parents and parents' decision-making processes surrounding childcare have also been a focus of recent studies. The TCRU study reported that relationships between childminders and parents tended to be personal, although this proved difficult at times as childminders felt they had to balance both the 'social' aspects of this relationship with the 'business' side (Mooney, Knight, Moss, *et al*, 2001). In particular, tensions tended to arise around time-keeping, payment and caring for sick children.

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<sup>3</sup> Although availability of training was mentioned as important, childminders identified several factors that impacted on the likelihood they would take-up training or qualifications including funding; accessibility in terms of the days and hours on which it is offered; appropriateness of the training (i.e., having it run by people who understand childminding practice); having customising training packages for individual needs (e.g., for the nursery education accreditation grant); and access to peer support.

Focusing on parents' perspectives, one study reported that parents overwhelmingly cited 'trust' as the main pull factor in choosing childminders, whereas parents whose children were in nursery schools or classes were more likely to mention the combination of education and care that their children would receive (Bryson, Kazimirski & Southwood, 2006). Findings from other studies looking at parents' choices around particular childminders highlighted the following as the key criteria:

- personal qualities of the childminder
- location
- cost
- availability
- provision of learning/social experiences.

By and large, these studies highlighted the importance for parents of caregiver attributes and parent-caregiver relationships in choosing childminding generally (over other types of childcare) or choosing a particular childminder compared to reasons of convenience or cost (Leach, Barnes, Malmberg, *et al*, 2008; Mooney, Knight, Moss, *et al*, 2001).

Finally, few recent British studies have explored in any detail childminding practice or quality of care. Childcare quality typically comprises two elements:

1. *structural quality*: the aspects of the environment that are regulated by the government, such as child-to-adult ratios, group size and educational requirements of providers
2. *process quality*: children's experiences with caregivers and peers as well as the activities and language stimulation provided in the child care environment.

Our reading of the research suggests that childminding may be superior to centre-based care when it comes to the more relational and affective aspects of care. For example, early evidence from the FCCC study showed that childminders were more emotionally responsive than nursery workers when children were 10 and 18 months (Leach, Barnes, Malmberg, *et al*, 2008). Further, when children were 10 months, assessments revealed that they had more positive relationships and experienced less provider detachment than infants in nurseries.

A review study of international evidence examining the quality of children's attachments with non-parental care providers supports these findings. Across 40 studies involving nearly 3,000 children, the authors reported that 42 percent of children were securely attached to their care providers, and that secure attachments were more common in home-based than centre-based care (Ahnert, Pinquart & Lamb, 2006). This link was driven by childminder sensitivity.

The quality of care provided by childminders may be driven by the level of commitment they have to their professions and the support they receive. A Canadian study reported links between global quality of childcare homes and family childcare providers' perceptions of their work including their 'intentionality' which focuses on their motivation to be childminders, as well as the availability of informal supports (Doherty, Forer, Lero, *et al*, 2006).

While these studies seem to paint a favourable picture of childminding relative to some of the older studies, the research is not entirely consistent. Longitudinal evidence from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development in the US, suggested a somewhat mixed picture of childcare quality across the different types of care (Dowsett, Huston, Elmes, *et al*, 2007). In terms of structural quality, family childcare tended to fall between centre-based and relative care. For the more process-focused constructs, the picture is fairly favourable for children in family childcare, but seemed to depend somewhat on the age of children being studied. In terms of cognitive stimulation and learning activities, children in family childcare or relative care have the edge over children in centre-based care when they are 2 years of age, but this reverses by the time children are 3 years when children in centre-based care experience superior cognitive stimulation.

No differences between children in family vs. centre-based childcare emerged in terms of interactions with adults and peers, and when children in family childcare were 4 years of age, they spent more time in peer play than children in centre-based care. Another US-based study in mixed-age family childcare settings compared the quality of care for toddlers relative to preschoolers. Contrary to expectations, the findings revealed that younger children tended to receive less sensitive and supportive care than preschoolers (Kryzer, Kovan, Phillips, *et al*, 2007).

While these comparative studies on childcare quality are informative, they tell us very little about childminders' specific practice. We know very little about what it is they do to promote children's well-being and development.

### 3. The proposed study

Based on our understanding of the extant literature, a number of gaps in the research emerged as detailed below.

- Very little evidence is available on childminding *practice* in England, particularly using detailed qualitative and/or mixed methods approaches, detailing how childminders articulate the key elements of their practice. While comparative studies have contrasted global quality in different types of settings, the proposed study will allow us to juxtapose 'traditional' quality assessments with childminders', parents' and inspectors' own views on quality practice.
- Although surveys have explored parents' reasons for choosing their care providers, little is known about parents' views of childminding practice and how important this is when making childcare decisions, particularly in the new childcare 'climate' post 1997. The similarities and differences in childminders' and parents' view of practice is not established.
- Moving on to children's development and well-being, little is known about childminders' views on childrearing and important outcomes for children and how their practice links to these outcomes. Indeed, research suggests that childminders are not often asked to explicitly articulate their practice (Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, *et al*, 2002). Given the outcomes focus of the EYFS (and its use in assessing several key national indicators), the extent to which childminders are thinking about children's development and how this links into their practice is increasingly important.
- Childminders' views of whether and how they are supported in their practice and what other supports they feel they need – generally and to meet the demands of the EYFS – are not widely known or understood. It is not clear whether the EYFS is flexible enough to allow childminders to maintain the key elements of their practice while also adhering to the new national quality framework, or what may need to change about their practice as a result of EYFS. Further, greater understanding is needed of the potential impacts of EYFS on childminders' career trajectories.
- We also need further information on what Ofsted inspectors see as the main impacts of the imposed structure of the EYFS on childminding practice as well as what supports they believe childminders need to succeed in this new climate and, indeed, how their own practices may need to change in order to do justice to the specific nature of childminding within an EYFS-focussed inspection process.

Based on the above, we propose an independent study focusing on the following:

1. What are the core features of childminding practice for young children and how do these align with what we know about childcare quality?
2. What are parents' views of childminding practice and to what extent is childminding practice a core reason for parents choosing childminders over other types of childcare?
3. What are childminders' perceptions of the key outcomes for young children and how do these relate to the EYFS learning goals for children?
4. What support do childminders need in the context of EYFS?
5. How can any specific childminding practices (revealed by the above) be accommodated within the EYFS and the new Ofsted inspection framework?

Therefore, the key aim of the proposed study is to better understand the core features of childminding practice for young children and how they are defined and described by childminders themselves and the parents who use childminders. We want to examine the alignment between what childminders and parents articulate as the key features of childminding practice and what we know about childcare quality using structured observations of childminding settings. We also wish to examine the range of childminding practice in England and what might account for any variability. Related to EYFS, we want to compare childminders' perceptions of what is important for young children's development with the EYFS learning goals, and whether childminding practice as it currently stands can be accommodated within EYFS and the Ofsted inspection framework. Finally, we want to understand what supports childminders have and need in this time of curricular and economic change.



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